The Almost Christian Discovered

or The False Professor Tried and Cast

Being the Substance of Seven Sermons Preached at St. Sepulchre's in London, 1661.

by

Matthew Mead

1629-1699, English Puritan

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Matthew Mead
1629-1699**,** English Puritan Preacher

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PREFACE

to the Protestant Reprint of

"The Almost Christian Discovered or the False Professor Tried and Cast," by Matthew Mead

by Hail & Fire

PROTESTANT SERMONS & EXHORTATIONS

In this age of ecumenism, when the lines have been blurred between the two major denominations and the world itself speaks of the Pope as head of all Christians, we join with so many to call to remembrance the truth of the Gospel and of those who, in times past, both well-known and unknown, answered a good answer for a pure and Gospel faith against the traditions of men. The intention of Hail & Fire is to make available Gospel and Reformed Theology in the works, sermons, exhortations, prayers, and apologetics of those who have maintained the Gospel and expounded upon the Scripture as the Eternal Word of God and the sole authority in Christian doctrine.

THE

ALMOST CHRISTIAN

DISCOVERED;

OR THE

FALSE PROFESSOR

TRIED AND CAST.

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF SEVEN SERMONS,
PREACHED AT ST. SEPULCHRE'S,
IN LONDON, 1661.

BY MATTHEW MEAD.

"And the Pharisees, who were covetous, heard all these things, and they derided him.

"And Jesus said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: For that which is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God."—*Luke* xvi. 14, 15.

MIDDLETOWN, (CONN.)

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY CLARK & LYMAN.

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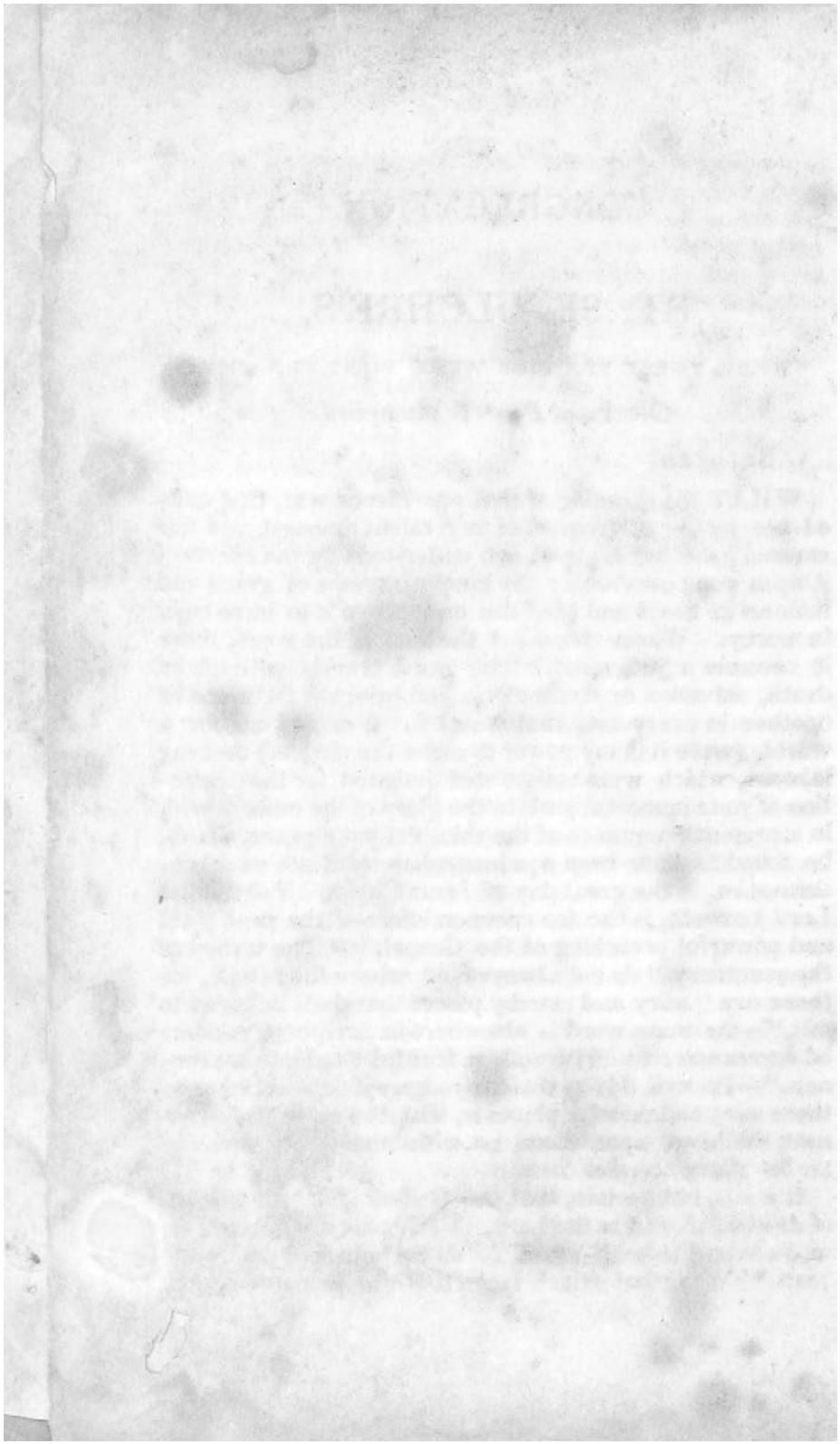

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TO THE

CONGREGATION

AT

ST. SEPULCHRE'S,

WHERE THESE SERMONS WERE FIRST PREACHED.

Grace and Peace be multiplied.

BELOVED,

WHAT the meaning of that providence was, that called me to the occupation of my talent amongst you this summer, will be best read and understood by the effects of it upon your own souls: the kindly increase of grace and holiness in heart and life, can only prove it to have been in mercy. Where this is not the fruit of the word, there it becomes a judgment. The word travels with life or death, salvation or damnation; and bringeth forth one or another in every soul that hears it. I would not for a world, (were it in my power to make the choice,) that my labours, which were meant and designed for the promotion of your immortal souls to the glory of the other world, in a present pursuance of the things of your peace, should be found to have been a *ministration of death and condemnation*, in the great day of Jesus Christ. Yet this the Lord knoweth, is the too common effect of the most plain and powerful preaching of the Gospel. "The waters of the sanctuary," do not always heal where they come, for there are "miry and marshy places that shall be given to salt,"—the same word is elsewhere in Scripture rendered *barrenness;* he "turneth a fruitful land into barrenness,"—Ps. cvii. 34: so that the judgment denounced upon these miry and marshy places is, that the *curse of barrenness*, shall rest upon them, notwithstanding the *waters of the sanctuary overflow them.*

It is sad, but certain, that the Gospel inflicteth a death of its own, as well as the Law, or else how are those trees in Jude said to be "twice dead, and plucked up by the roots." Yea, that which in itself is the greatest mercy,

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through the interposition of men's lusts, and the efficacy of this cursed sin of unbelief, turneth to the greatest judgment, as the richest and most generous wine makes the sharpest vinegar. Our Lord himself, the choicest mercy that the bowels of a God could bless a perishing world with; whose coming, himself bearing witness, was no less an errand than that of eternal life and blessedness to the lost and cursed sons of Adam; yet to how many was he a "stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence;" yea, "a gin, and a snare;" and that to both the houses of Israel, the only professing people of God at that day in the world? And is he not a stone of stumbling in the ministry of the Gospel to many professors to this very day, upon which they fall and are broken? When he saith, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me:" he doth therein plainly suppose, that both in his person and doctrine the generality of men would be offended in him.

Not that this is the design of Christ and the Gospel, but it so comes to pass through the corruptions of the hearts of men, whereby they make light of Christ, and stand out against that life and grace which the Lord Jesus by his blood so dearly purchased, and is by the preaching of the Gospel so freely tendered; the wilful refusal whereof will as surely double our damnation, as the acceptance thereof will secure our eternal salvation.

O! consider, it is a thing of the most serious concernment in the world, how we carry ourselves under the Gospel, and with what dispositions and affections of heart, soul-seasons of grace are entertained: this being taken into the consideration to give it weight, that we are the nearer to heaven or to hell, to salvation or damnation, by every ordinance we sit under: Boast not therefore, of privileges enjoyed, with neglect of the important duties thereby required. Remember Capernaum's case, and tremble: As many go to heaven by the very gates of hell, so more go to hell by the gates of heaven; in that the number of them that profess Christ, is greater than the number of them that truly close with Christ. Beloved, I know the preaching of the Gospel hath proselyted many of you into a profession; yet I fear that but few of you are brought by it to a true faith in the Lord Jesus for salvation. (I be-

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seech you bear with my jealousy, for it is the fruit of a tender love for your precious souls.) Most men are good Christians in the verdict of their own opinion; but you know the law alloweth no man to be a witness in his own case, because their affection usually outruns conscience, and self-love mars truth for its own interest.

The heart of man is the greatest impostor and cheat in the world; God himself declares it, *Jer.* xvii. 9. "The heart is deceitful above all things." Some of the deceits thereof you will find discovered in this *Treatise*, which sheweth you, that every grace hath its counterfeit, and that the highest profession may be, where true conversion is not.

The design hereof is not to "break the bruised reed, nor to quench the smoking flax." Not to discourage the weakest believer, but to awaken formal professors. I would not sadden the hearts of any "whom God would not have made sad;" though I know it is hard to rip up the dangerous state and condition of a professing hypocrite, so but that the weak Christian will think himself concerned in the discovery. And therefore, as I preached a sermon on *sincerity* among you, for the support and encouragement of such, at the end of these; so I did purpose to have printed it with these. But who can be master of his own purposes: that is, as I am under such daily variety of providences! your kindly acceptance of this, will make me a debtor for that.

The *dedication* hereof belongs to you on a double account; for as it had not been preached, but that love to your souls caused it; so it had much less been printed, but that your importunate desire procured it: and therefore, what reception soever it meets with in the world, yet I hope I may expect you will welcome it, especially considering it was born under your roof, and therefore hopes to find favour in your eyes, and room in your hearts.

Accept it, I beseech you, as a public acknowledgment of the engagements which your great, and, I think I may say, unparalleled expressions of regard have laid me under, which I can no way compensate but by my prayers; and if you will take them for satisfaction, I do promise to be your remembrancer at the throne of grace, whilst I am

MATTHEW MEAD.

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TO THE

READER.

READER,

I KNOW how customary it is for men to ascend the public stage, with premised apologies for the weakness and unworthiness of their labours, which is an argument that their desires, (either for the sake of others profit, or their own credit, or both,) are stretched beyond the bounds of their abilities; and that they covet to commend themselves to the world's censure, in a better dress than common infirmity will allow: For my own part, I may truly say with Gideon, "Behold, my thousand is the meanest," my talent is the smallest, "and I am the least in my Father's house;" and therefore this appearance in public is not the fruit of my own choice, which would rather have been on some other subject, wherein I stand in some sense indebted to the world; or else in somewhat more digested, and possibly better fitted for common acceptation; but this is but to consult the interest of a man's own name, which in matters of this concern, is no better than a "sowing to the flesh," and the harvest of such a seed's-time will be "in corruption."—(*Gal.* vi. 8.)

Thou hast here one of the saddest considerations imaginable presented to thee, and that is, "How far it is possible a man may go in a profession of religion, and yet after all, fall short of salvation; how far he may run, and yet not *so run as to obtain.*" This, I say, is sad, but not so sad as true; for our Lord doth plainly attest it: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

My design herein is, that the formal, sleepy professor may be awakened, and the *close* hypocrite discovered; but my fear is, that weak believers may be hereby discouraged; for as it is hard to shew how low a child of God may fall into sin, and yet have true grace, but that the sinner will be apt thereupon to presume; so it is as hard to shew

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how high an hypocrite may rise in a profession, and yet have no grace, but that the believer will be apt thereupon to despond. The prevention whereof I have carefully endeavoured, by shewing, that though a man may go thus far, and yet be but *almost a Christian;* yet a man may fall short of this, and be a true *Christian* notwithstanding. Judge not, therefore, thy state by any one *character* thou findest laid down of a false professor; but read the whole and then make a judgment: For I have cared, as not to "give children's bread to dogs," so not to use the *dog's whip* to scare the *children;* yet this book would not have been composed, but with a view to such only as it chiefly concerns, those who "have a name to live, and yet are dead;" being busy with the *form of godliness*, but strangers to the *power of it.* These are the proper subjects of this treatise: And the Lord follow it with his blessing wherever it comes, that it may be an awakening word to all such, and especially to that generation of profligate professors with which this age abounds; who if they keep to their church, bow the knee, talk out a few prayers, and at a good time receive the sacrament, think they do enough for heaven, and hereupon judge their condition safe, and their salvation sure; though there be a hell of sin in their hearts, "and the poison of asps is under their lips:" their minds being as yet carnal and unconverted, and their conversations filthy and unsanctified. If eternal life be of so easy attainment, and to be had at so cheap a rate, why did our Lord tell us, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it?" And why should the apostle perplex us with such a needless injunction, "To give diligence to make our calling and election sure?" Certainly therefore, it is no such easy thing to be saved, as many make it; and that thou wilt see plainly in the following discourse: I have been somewhat short in the application of it; and therefore let me here be thy remembrancer in five important duties.

First, "Take heed of resting in a form of godliness;" as if a round of duties could confer grace; a lifeless formality is advanced to a very high esteem in the world, as a *kab of dove's dung* was sold in the famine of Samaria at a very dear rate.—(2 *Kings* vi. 25.) Alas! the profession

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of godliness is but a sandy foundation to build the hope of an immortal soul upon for eternity; remember, the Lord Jesus Christ called him a foolish builder, "that founded his house upon the sand," and the sad event proved him so, "for it fell, and great was the fall of it." O! therefore, lay thy foundation by faith upon the rock Christ Jesus; look to Christ through all, and rest upon Christ in all.

Secondly, "Labour to see an excellency in the power of godliness," a beauty in the life of Christ: If the means of grace have a loveliness in them, surely grace itself hath much more; for, "the goodness of the means lies in its suitableness and serviceableness to the end;" the *form* of godliness hath no goodness in it, any farther than it aids and becomes useful to the soul in the power and practice of godliness. The life of holiness is the only excellent life, it is the life of saints and angels in heaven; yea, it is the life of God in himself. As it is a great proof of the baseness and filthiness of sin, that sinners seek to cover it; so it is a great proof of the excellency of godliness, that so many pretend to it: The very hypocrite's fair profession pleads the cause of religion, although the hypocrite is then really worst, when he is seemingly best.

Thirdly, "Look upon things to come as the greatest realities;" for things that are not believed, work no more upon the affections than if they had no being; and this is the grand reason why the generality of men suffer their affections to go after the world, setting the creature in the place of God in their hearts.

Most men judge of the reality of things by their visibility and proximity to sense; and therefore the choice of that wretched cardinal becomes their option, who would not leave his part in Paris, for his part in Paradise: Sure, whatever his interest might be in the former, he had little enough in the latter: well may covetousness be called idolatry, when it thus chooses the world for its God.

O! consider, eternity is no dream! Hell and the worm that never dies, is no melancholy conceit! Heaven is no feigned *elysium:* there is the greatest reality imaginable in these things; though they are spiritual, and out of the ken of sense, yet they are real, and within the view of faith! "Look not therefore, at the things which are seen, but look at the things which are not seen; for the things

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that are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen, are eternal."

Fourthly, "Set a high rate upon thy soul;" what we lightly prize, we easily part with: many men sell their souls as profane Esau did his birth-right, "for a morsel of bread;" nay, "for that which," in the sense of the Holy Ghost, "is not bread." O! consider thy soul as the most precious and invaluable jewel in the world, it is the most beautiful piece of God's workmanship in the whole creation, it is that which bears the image of God, and which was bought with the blood of the Son of God; and shall we not set a value upon it, and count it precious?

The apostle Peter speaks of three very precious things.

1. A precious Christ.
2. Precious Promises.
3. Precious Faith.

Now the preciousness of all these lies in their usefulness to the soul. Christ is *precious*, as being the Redeemer of precious souls; the *promises* are *precious*, as making over this precious Christ to precious souls. *Faith* is *precious*, as bringing a precious soul to close with a precious Christ, as he is held forth in the precious promises. O! take heed that thou art not found over-valuing other things, and under-valuing thy soul. Shall thy flesh, nay, thy beast be loved, and shall thy soul be slighted? Wilt thou clothe and pamper thy body, and take no care of thy soul? This is as if a man should feed his dog, and starve his child. "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats; but God shall destroy both it and them." O! let not a tottering, perishing carcass have all your time and care, as if the life and salvation of thy soul were not worth attending to!

Lastly, "Meditate much on the strictness and suddenness of the Judgment-day, which thou and I must pass through into an everlasting state;" wherein God, the impartial judge, will require an account at our hands of all our talents and advantages; we must then account for time, how we have spent that; for estate, how we have employed that; for strength, how we have laid out that; for afflictions and mercies, how they have been improved; for the relations we stood in here, how they have been discharged; and for seasons and means of grace, how they

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have been husbanded; and remember, as "we have sowed here, we shall reap hereafter."

Reader, these are things that of all others deserve most of, and call loudest for our utmost care and endeavours, though by the most least minded: to consider what a spirit of atheism, (if we may judge the tree by the fruits, and the principle by the practice,) the hearts of most men are filled with, who live, as if God were not to be served, nor Christ to be sought, nor lust to be mortified, nor self to be denied, nor the Scripture to be believed, nor the judgment day to be minded, nor hell to be feared, nor heaven to be desired, nor the soul to be valued; but give up themselves to a worse than brutish sensuality, "to work all uncleanness with greediness," living without God in the world: this is a meditation fit enough to break our hearts, if at least we were of holy David's temper, who "beheld the transgressors and was grieved," and from whose eyes, "rivers of water ran down, because men kept not God's laws."

The prevention and correction of this soul-destroying distemper, is not the least design of this treatise now put into thy hand: though it is particularly adapted to the discovery and correction of hypocrisy, yet it may serve also, with God's blessing, as a check to profaneness, if seconded by serious meditation and constant prayer.

READER, expect nothing of curiosity or quaintness, for then I shall deceive thee; but if thou wouldst have a *touch-stone* for the trial of thy state, possibly this may serve thee. If thou art either a stranger to a profession, or an hypocrite under a profession, then read and tremble, for thou art the man here pointed at.

But if the kingdom of God be come with power into thy soul; if Christ be formed in thee; if thy heart be upright and sincere with God, then read and rejoice.

I fear I have transgressed the bounds of an epistle: the mighty God, whose prerogative it is to teach to profit, whether by the tongue or the pen, by speaking or writing, bless this tract, that it may be to thee as a cloud of rain to the dry ground, that so being watered with the "dew of heaven," thou mayst "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." In whom I am thy Friend and Servant,

London, 22d October, 1661. MATT. MEAD.

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THE

ALMOST CHRISTIAN, &c.

Acts xxvi. 28.

—*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

In this chapter you have the apostle Paul's apology and defensive plea, which he makes for himself against those blind Jews which did so maliciously prosecute him before Agrippa, Festus, Bernice, and the council.

In which plea he doth chiefly insist upon three things:

1. The manner of his life before conversion.
2. The manner of his conversion.
3. The manner of his life after conversion.

How he lived before conversion, he tells you from verse 4 to 13.

How God wrought on him to conversion, he tells you from verse 13 to 18.

How he lived after conversion, he tells you from verse 19 to 23.

Before conversion he was very pharasaical.

The manner of his conversion was very wonderful.

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The fruit of his conversion was very remarkable.

Before conversion he persecuted the Gospel which others preached: after conversion he preached the Gospel which himself had persecuted.

While he was a persecutor of the Gospel, the Jews loved him; but now that, by the grace of God, he was become a preacher of the Gospel, now the Jews hate him, and sought to kill him.

He was once against Christ, and then many were for him; but now that he was for Christ, all were against him; his being an enemy to Jesus, made others his friends; but when he came to own Jesus, then they became his enemies.

And this was the great charge they had against him, that from a great opposer he was become a great professor.

Because God had changed him, therefore this enraged them: as if they would be the worse, because God had made him better. God had wrought on him by grace and they seem to envy him the grace of God.

He preached no treason, nor sowed any sedition; only he preached repentance, and faith in Christ, and the resurrection, and for this he was "called in question."

This is the substance of Paul's defence and plea for himself, which you find in the sequel

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of the chapter had a different effect upon his judges.

Festus seems to censure him, verse 24.

Agrippa seems to be convinced by him, verse 28.

The whole bench seem to acquit him, verse 30, 31.

Festus thinks Paul was beside himself.

Agrippa is almost persuaded to be such a one as himself.

Festus, not understanding the doctrine of Christ, and the resurrection, thinks him mad: "much learning hath made thee mad."

Agrippa is so affected with his plea, that he is almost wrought into his principles: Paul pleads so effectually for his religion, that Agrippa seems to be upon the turning point to his profession.

"Then Agrippa said to Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

Almost]—the words make some debate among the learned. I shall not trouble you with the various hints upon them by Valla, Simplicius, Beza, Erasmus and others. I take the words as we read them, and they shew what an efficacy Paul's doctrine had upon Agrippa's conscience. Though he would not be converted, yet he could not but be convinced; his conscience was touched, though his heart was not renewed.

Observation. "There is that in religion

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which carries its own evidence along with it even to the conscience of ungodly men."

Thou persuadest me]—the word is from the Hebrew, and it signifies either to use arguments to prevail, or to prevail by the arguments used.

Now it is to be taken in the latter sense here, to shew the influence of Paul's argument upon Agrippa, which had almost proselyted him to the profession of Christianity. "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

A Christian]—I hope I need not tell you what a Christian is, though I am persuaded many that are called Christians do not know what a Christian is, or if they do, yet they do not know what it is to be a Christian.

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ, one that believes in, and follows Christ. As one that embraces the doctrine of Arminius, is called an Arminian, and as he that owns the doctrine and way of Luther, is called a Lutheran; so he that embraces, and owns, and follows, the doctrine of Jesus Christ, he is called a Christian.

The word is taken more largely, and more strictly; more largely, and so all that profess Christ come in the flesh, are called Christians, in opposition to heathens that do not know Christ, and to the poor blind Jews, that will not own Christ, and to the Mahometan, that prefers Mahomet above Christ.

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But now in Scripture, the word is of a more strict and narrow signification, it is used only to denominate the true disciples and followers of Christ; "the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch; if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed;" that is, as a member and disciple of Christ; and so in the text, "almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

The word is used but in these three places, as I find, in all the New Testament, and in each of them it signifies in the sense aforementioned.

The Italians make the name to be a name of reproach among them, and do usually abuse the word Christian to signify a fool.

But if, as the apostle saith, "the preaching of Christ is to the world foolishness," then it is no wonder that the disciples of Christ are to the world fools.

Yet it is true, in a sound sense, that so they are. For the whole of godliness is a mystery.

A man must die, that would live; he must be empty, that would be full; he must be lost, that would be found; he must have nothing, that would have all things; he must be blind, that would have illumination; he must be condemned, that would have redemption; so he must be a fool, that would be a Christian. "If any man among you seems to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

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He is the true Christian that is the world's fool, but wise to salvation.

Thus you have the sense and meaning of the words briefly explained.

The text needs no division, and yet it is pity the *almost* should not be divided from the *Christian.*

Though it is of little avail to divide them as they are linked in the text, unless I could divide them as they are united in your hearts; this would be a blessed division, if the *almost* might be taken from the *Christian;* that so you may not be only *almost* but *altogether* Christians.

This is God's work to effect it, but it is our duty to persuade to it; and O! that God would help me to manage this subject so, that you may say in the conclusion, "Thou persuadest me, not *almost*, but *altogether* to be a Christian."

The observation that I shall propound to handle is this:

Doctrine. "There are very many in the world that are *almost* and yet *but almost* Christians; many that are near heaven, and yet are never the nearer; many that are within a little of salvation, and yet shall never enjoy the least salvation; they are within sight of heaven, and yet shall never have a sight of God."

There are two sad expressions in Scrip-

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ture, which I cannot but take notice of in this place.

The one is concerning the truly righteous: The other is concerning the seemingly righteous.

It is said of the truly righteous, he shall *scarcely be saved:* and it is said of the seemingly righteous, he shall be *almost saved:* "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

The righteous shall be saved with a *scarcely*, that is, through much difficulty; he shall go to heaven through many sad fears of hell.

The hypocrite shall be saved with an *almost*, that is, he shall go to hell through many fair hopes of heaven.

Two things arise from hence, which deserve very serious meditation.

The one is, how often a believer may miscarry, how *low* he may fall, and yet have true grace.

The other is, how far an hypocrite may go in the way to heaven, how *high* he may attain, and yet have no grace.

The saint may be cast down very near to hell, and yet shall never come there; and the hypocrite may be lifted up very near to heaven, and yet never come there.

The saint may *almost* perish, and yet be saved eternally; the hypocrite may *almost* be saved, and yet perish finally.

For the saint at worst is really a believer,

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and the hypocrite at best is really a sinner.

Before I handle the doctrine, I must premise three things, which are of great use for the establishing of weak believers, that they may not be shaken and discouraged by this doctrine.

First, There is nothing in the doctrine that should be matter of stumbling or discouragement to weak Christians.

The Gospel doth not speak these things to wound believers, but to awaken sinners and formal professors.

As there are none more averse than weak believers, to apply the promises and comforts of the Gospel to themselves, for whom they are properly designed; so there are none more ready than they to apply the threats and severest things of the world to themselves, for whom they were never intended. As the disciples, when Christ told them, "One of you shall betray me;" they that were innocent suspected themselves most, and therefore cry out, "Master, is it I."

So weak Christians, when they hear sinners reproved, or the hypocrite laid open, in the ministry of the word, they presently cry out, *Is it I?*

It is the hypocrite's fault to sit under the trials and discoveries of the word, and yet not to mind them: and it is the weak Christian's

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fault to draw sad conclusions of their own state from premises which nothing concern them.

There is indeed great use of such doctrine as this is to all believers:

1. To make them look to their standing, upon what bottom they are, and to see that the foundation of their hope be well laid, that they build not upon the sand, but upon a rock.

2. It helps to raise our admiration of the distinguishing love of God, in bringing us into the way everlasting, when so many perish from the way, and in overpowering our souls into a true conversion, when so many take up with a graceless profession.

3. It incites to that excellent duty of heart-searching, that so we may approve ourselves to God in sincerity.

4. It engages the soul in double diligence, that it may be found not only believing, but persevering in faith to the end.

These duties, and such as these are, make this doctrine of use to all believers; but they ought not to make use of it as a stumbling-block in the way of their peace and comfort.

My design in preaching on this subject, is not to make sad the souls of those whom Christ will not have made sad; I would bring water not to "quench the flax that is smoking," but to put out that false fire that is of the sinner's own kindling, lest walking all his days by the light thereof, he shall at last "lie down in sorrow."

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My aim is to level the mountain of the sinner's confidence, not to weaken the hand of the believer's faith and dependence, to awaken and bring in secure formal sinners, not to discourage weak believers.

Secondly, I would premise this; though many may go far, very far, in the way to heaven, and yet fall short, yet that soul that hath the least true grace shall never fall short; "the righteous shall hold on his way."

Though some may do very much in a way of duty, as I shall shew hereafter, and yet miscarry; yet that soul that doth duty with the least sincerity, shall never miscarry, "for he saveth the upright in heart."

The least measure of true grace is as saving as the greatest; it saves as surely, though not so comfortably. The least grace gives a full interest in the blood of Christ, whereby we are thoroughly purged, and it gives a full interest in the strength and power of Christ, whereby we shall be certainly preserved.

Christ keeps faith in the soul, and faith keeps the soul in Christ, and so "we are kept by the power of God, through faith to salvation."

Thirdly, I would premise this; they that can hear such truths as this, without serious reflection and self-examination, I must suspect the goodness of their condition.

You will suspect that man to be next door

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to a bankrupt, that never takes his inventory, nor looks over his books; and I as verily think that man an hypocrite, that never searches nor deals with his own heart.

He that goes on in a road of duties without any rub or doubting of his state, I doubt no man's state more than his.

When we see a man sick, and yet not sensible, we conclude the tokens of death are upon him.

So when sinners have no sense of their spiritual condition, it is plain that they are dead in sin; the tokens of eternal death are upon them.

These things being premised, which I desire you would carry along in your mind while we travel through this subject, I come to speak to the proposition more distinctly and closely.

Doctrine. "That there are very many in the world that are *almost*, and yet *but almost* Christians."

I shall demonstrate the truth of the proposition, and then proceed to a more distinct consideration of it.

1. I shall demonstrate the truth of the proposition; and I shall do it by scripture-evidence, which speaks plainly and fully to the case.

1st, The young man in the Gospel is an eminent proof of this truth; there you read of one that came to Christ to learn of him the way to heaven; "Good master, what good

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thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Our Lord tells him, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;" and when Christ tells him which, he answers, "Lord, all these have I kept from my youth up; what lack I yet?"

Now do but see how far this man went.

1. *He obeyed*]—he did not only hear the commands of God, but he kept them; now the Scripture saith, "Blessed is he that hears the word of God, and keeps it."

2. *He obeyed universally*]—not this or that command, but both this and that; he did not halve it with God, or pick and choose which were easiest to be done, and leave the rest; no, but he obeys all; "All these things have I kept."

3. *He obeyed constantly*]—not in a fit of zeal only, but in a continual series of duty; his goodness was not, as Ephraim's, "like the morning-dew that passes away;" no, "All these things have I kept from my youth up."

4. *He professeth his desire to know and do more*]—to perfect that which was lacking of his obedience; and therefore he goes to Christ to instruct him in his duty; "Master, what lack I yet?" Now would you not think this a good man? Alas! how few go thus far! And yet as far as he went, he went not far enough; "he was *almost*, and yet *but almost* a Christian!" for he was an unsound hypocrite; he forsakes Christ at last, and cleaves to his lust.

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This then is a full proof of the truth of the doctrine.

A second proof of it is that of the parable of the virgins in St. Matthew: see what a progress they make, how far they go in a profession of Christ.—(Matt. xxv. 1.)

1. *They are called virgins*]—Now this is a name given in the Scripture, both in the Old Testament and the New, to the saints of Christ; the virgins love thee:—(*Cant.* i. 3.) so in the Revelation, the "one hundred forty and four thousand" that stood with the Lamb on mount Sion, are called *virgins*. They are called *virgins*, because they are not defiled with the "corruptions that are in the world through lust." Now these seem to be of that sort, for they are called virgins.

2. *They take their lamps*]—that is, they make a profession of Christ.

3. *They had some kind of oil in their lamps*]—as appears ver. 8th; they had some convictions and some faith, though not the faith of God's elect, to keep their profession alive, to keep the lamp burning.

4. *They went*]—their profession was not an idle profession; they did perform duties, frequent ordinances, and do many things commanded; they made a progress, *they went*.

5. *They went forth*]—they went and outwent, they left many behind them; this speaks their separation from the world.

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6. *They went with the wise virgins*]—they joined themselves to those who had joined themselves to the Lord, and were companions of them that were companions of Christ.

7. *They go forth to meet the bridegroom*]—this speaks their owning and seeking after Christ.

8. When they heard the cry of the bridegroom coming, "They arose and trimmed their lamps;" they profess Christ more highly, hoping now to go in with the bridegroom.

9. *They sought the true grace*]—Now do not we say, the desires of grace are grace? and so they are, if true and timely, if sound and seasonable.

Why, lo, here a desire of grace in these virgins, "Give us of your oil."

It was a desire of true grace, but it was not a true desire of grace; it was not true, because not timely; unsound, as being unseasonable; it was too late.

Their folly was in not taking oil when they took their lamps; their time of seeking grace was when they came to Christ, it was too late to seek it when Christ came to them. They should have sought for that when they took up their profession; it was too late to seek it at the coming of the bridegroom. And therefore, "they were shut out;" and though they cry for entrance, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" yet Christ tells them, "I know you not."

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You see how far these virgins go in a profession of Jesus Christ, and how long they continue in it, even till the bridegroom came; they go to the very doors of heaven, and there, like the Sodomites, perish with their hands upon the very threshold of glory. They were *almost* Christians, and yet *but almost;* almost saved, and yet perish.

You that are professors of the Gospel of Christ, stand and tremble; if they that have gone beyond us fall short of heaven, what shall become of us that fall short of them?

If they that are virgins, that profess Christ, that have some faith in their profession, such as it is, that have some fruit in their faith that outstrip others that seek Christ, that improve their profession, and suit themselves to their profession, nay, that seek grace; if such as these be *but almost* Christians, Lord, what are we?

If these two witnesses be not sufficient to prove the truth, and confirm the credit of the proposition, take a third; and that shall be from the Old Testament, Isaiah lviii. 2. See what God saith of that people; he gives them a very high character for a choice people, one would think: "They seek me daily, they delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God; they ask of me ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God."

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See how far these went; if God had not said they were rotten and unsound, we should have took them for the he-goats before the flock," (Jer. i. 8.) and ranked them among the worthies. Pray observe,

1. *They seek God*]—Now this is the proper character of a true saint, to seek God. True saints are called seekers of God: "This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob," or O God of Jacob.

Lo, here a generation of them that seek God, and are not these the saints of God? Nay, farther.

2. *They seek him daily*]—Here is diligence backed with continuance *day by day;* that is, every day, from day to day. They did not seek him by fits and starts, nor in a time of trouble and affliction only, as many do. "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them." Many when God visits them, then they visit him, but not till then; when God poureth out his afflictions, then they pour out their supplications. This is seamen's devotion; when the storms have brought them to "their wit's end, then they cry to the Lord in their trouble." Many never cry to God till they are at their wit's end; they never come to God for help, so long as they can help themselves.

But now these, whom God speaks of, are more zealous in their devotion: the others

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make a virtue of necessity, but these seem to make conscience of duty; for, saith God, "they seek me daily." Sure this is, one would think, a note of sincerity.

Job saith of the hypocrite, "Will he always call upon God?" surely no; but now this people call upon God always, "they seek him daily:" certainly these are no hypocrites.

3. Saith God, "they delight to know my ways." Sure this frees them from the suspicion of hypocrisy: for, "they say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy way."—(Job. xxi. 14.)

4. They are *as a nation that did righteousness*]—Not only as a nation that spake righteousness, or knew righteousness, or professed righteousness, but as a nation that did righteousness, that practised nothing but what was just and right. They appeared to the judgment of the world as good as the best.

5. *They forsook not the ordinances of their God*]—They seem true to their principles, constant to their profession, better than many among us, that cast off duties, and forsake the ordinances of God: but these hold out in their profession; "they forsook not the ordinances of God."

6. *They ask of me*, saith God, *the ordinances of justice*]—They will not make their own will the rule of right and wrong, but the law and will of God: and therefore in all their

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dealings with men, they desire to be guided and counselled by God: "they ask of me the ordinances of justice."

7. *They take delight in approaching to God*] —Sure this cannot be the guise of an hypocrite; "will he delight himself in the almighty?" saith Job: no, he will not.

Though God is the chief delight of man, (having every thing in him to render him lovely, as was said of Titus Vespasian,) yet the hypocrite will not delight in God.

Till the affections are made spiritual, there is no affection to things that are spiritual. God is a spiritual good, and therefore hypocrites cannot delight in God. But these are a people that delight in approaching to God.

8. They were a people that were much in fasting, as you may see, ver. 3. "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not?" Now this is a duty that doth not suppose and require truth of grace only in the heart, but strength of grace.

"No man, said our Lord, puts new wine into old bottles, lest the bottles break and the wine run out." New wine is strong, and old bottles weak; and the strong wine breaks the weak vessel: this is a reason Christ gives, why his disciples, who were newly converted, and but weak as yet, were not exercised with this austere discipline.

But this people here mentioned, were a

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people that fasted often, afflicted their souls much, wore themselves out by frequent practices of humiliation.

Sure therefore, this was "new wine in new bottles;" this must needs be a people strong in grace; there seems to be grace not only in truth, but also in growth. And yet for all this they were no better than a generation of hypocrites; they made a goodly progress, and went far, but yet they went not far enough; they were cast off by God after all.

I hope by this time the truth of the point is sufficiently avouched and confirmed, "that a man may be, yea, very many are, *almost* and yet no more than *almost* Christians."

Now for the more distinct prosecution of the point,

1. "I shall shew you, step by step, how far he may go, what attainments he may reach unto, how specious and singular a progress he may make in religion, and yet be but *almost* a Christian when all is done."

2. "I will shew you whence it is, that many men go so far as that they are *almost* Christians."

3. "Why they are but *almost* Christians when they have gone thus far."

4. "What the reason is, why men that go thus far as to be *almost* Christians, yet go no farther than to be *almost* Christians."

Question 1. "How far may a man go in the

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way to heaven, and yet be but *almost* a Christian."

Answer. This I shall shew you in twenty several steps.

1. "A man may have much knowledge, much light; he may know much of God and his will, much of Christ and his ways, and yet be but *almost* a Christian."

For though there can be no grace without knowledge, yet there may be much knowledge where there is no grace; illumination often goes before, when conversion never follows after. The subject of knowledge is the understanding, the subject of holiness is the will. Now a man may have his understanding enlightened, and yet his will not at all sanctified. He may have an understanding to know God, and yet want a will to obey God. The apostle tells us of some, that "when they knew God they glorified him not as God."

To make a man altogether a Christian, there must be light in the head, and heat in the heart; knowledge in the understanding, and zeal in the affections.

Some have zeal and no knowledge; that is blind devotion: some have knowledge and no zeal; that is fruitless speculation: but where knowledge is joined with zeal, that makes a true Christian.

Objection. But is it not said, "this is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent?"

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Answer. It is not every knowledge of God and Christ that interests the soul in life eternal. For why then do the devils perish, they have more knowledge of God than all the men in the world; for though by their fall they lost their holiness, yet they lost not their knowledge.

They are called *daimones* from their knowledge, and yet they are *diaboloi* from their malice, devils still.

Knowledge may fill the head, but it will never better the heart, if there be not somewhat else. The Pharisees had much knowledge; "behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, &c." and yet they were a generation of hypocrites.

Alas! how many have gone loaded with knowledge to hell.

Though it is true, that it is life eternal to know God and Jesus Christ; yet it is as true that many do know God and Jesus Christ, that shall never see life eternal.

There is, you must know, a two-fold knowledge; the one is common, but not saving; the other is not common, but saving; common knowledge is that which floats in the head, but doth not influence the heart. This knowledge reprobates may have: "Balaam saw Christ from the top of the rocks, and from the hills."

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And then there is a saving knowledge of God and Christ which doth include the assent of the mind, and the consent of the will; this is a knowledge that implies faith; "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many."

And this is that knowledge which leads to life eternal; now whatever that measure of knowledge is, which a man may have of God, and of Jesus Christ, yet if it be not this saving knowledge, knowledge joined with affection and application, he is but *almost* a Christian.

He only knows God aright, who knows how to obey him, and obeys according to his knowledge of him; "a good understanding have all they that do his commandments."

All knowledge without this makes a man but like Nebuchadnezzar's image, with "a head of gold, and feet of clay."

Some know, but to know.

Some know, to be known.

Some know, to practice what they know.

Now to know, but to know, that is curiosity.

To know, to be known, that is vain-glory.

But to know, to practise what we know, that is Gospel duty.

This makes a man a complete Christian; the other, without this, makes a man *almost* and yet *but almost* a Christian.

2. "A man may have great and eminent

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gifts, yea, spiritual gifts, and yet be but *almost* a Christian." The gift of prayer is a spiritual gift; now this a man may have, and yet be *but almost* a Christian, for the gift of prayer is one thing, the grace of prayer is another.

The gift of preaching and prophesying is a spiritual gift; now this a man may have, and yet be *but almost* a Christian. Judas was a great preacher, so were they that came to Christ and said, "Lord, Lord, we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils," &c.

You must know that it is not gifts, but grace, which makes a Christian: For,

1. Gifts are from a common work of the spirit—a man may partake of all the common gifts of the spirit, and yet be a reprobate, for therefore they are called common, because they are indifferently dispensed by the spirit to good and bad; to them that are believers, and to them that are not.

They that have grace, have gifts, and they that have no grace, may have the same gifts; for the spirit works in both; nay, in this sense, he that hath no grace, may be under a greater work of the spirit in this respect, than he that hath most grace; a graceless professor may have greater gifts than the most holy believer: he may out-pray, and out-preach, and out-do them; but they in sincerity and integrity out-go him.

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2. Gifts are for the use and good of others, they are given *in ordine ad alium*, as the schoolmen speak, for the profiting and edifying of others; so says the apostle, "they are given to profit withal."

Now a man may edify another by his gifts, and yet be unedified himself; he may be profitable to another, and yet unprofitable to himself.

The raven was an unclean bird: God makes use of her to feed Elijah; though she was not good meat, yet it was good meat she brought.

A lame man may with his crutch point to thee the right way, and yet not be able to walk in it himself.

A crooked taylor may make a suit to fit a strait body, though it fit not him that made it, because of his crookedness.

The church, (Christ's garden enclosed) may be watered through a wooden gutter: the sun may give light through a dusky window; and the field may be well sowed with a dirty hand.

The efficacy of the word doth not depend upon the authority of him that speaks it, but upon the authority of the God that blesses it. So that another may be converted by my preaching, and yet I may be a cast-away notwithstanding. Balaam makes a clear and rare prophesy of Christ, and yet he hath no benefit by Christ; "There shall come a star

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out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel;" but yet Balaam shall have no benefit by it; "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh."—(*Numb.* iv. 17.)

God may use a man's gifts to bring another unto Christ, when he himself, whose gifts God uses, may be a stranger unto Christ; one man may confirm another in the faith, and yet himself may be a stranger unto the faith. Pendleton strengthens and confirms Sanders, in Queen Mary's days, to stand in the truth he had preached, and to seal it with his blood, and yet afterwards plays the apostate himself.

Scultetus tells us of one Johannes Speiserus, a famous preacher of Augsburgh in Germany, in the year 1523, who preached the Gospel so powerfully that divers common harlots were converted, and became good Christians; and yet himself afterwards turned papist and came to a miserable end.

Thus the candle may burn bright to light others in their work, and yet afterwards go out in a stink.

3. It is beyond the power of the greatest gifts to change the heart; a man may preach like an apostle, pray like an angel, and yet may have the heart of a devil. It is grace only that can change the heart; the greatest gifts cannot change it, but the least grace can; gifts may make a man a scholar, but grace makes a man a believer.

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Now if gifts cannot change the heart, then a man may have the greatest gifts, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

4. Many have gone laden with gifts to hell; no doubt Judas had great gifts, for he was a preacher of the Gospel; and our Lord Jesus Christ would not set him to the work, and not fit him for the work; yet "Judas is gone to his own place;" the Scribes and Pharisees were men of great gifts, and yet, "where is the wise? where is the scribe?"

"The preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness." Them that perish, who are they? Who? the wise and the learned, but among Jews and Greeks; these are called "them that perish." A great bishop said, when he saw a poor shepherd weeping over a toad: "The poor illiterate world attain to heaven, while we with all our learning fall into hell."

There are three things must be done for us, if ever we would avoid perishing.

We must be thoroughly convinced of sin.

We must be really united to Christ.

We must be instated in the covenant of grace.

Now the greatest gifts cannot serve us in any one of these.

They cannot work thorough convictions.

They cannot effect our union.

They cannot bring us into covenant-relation.

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And consequently they cannot preserve from eternal perishing; and if so, then a man may have the greatest gifts, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

5. Gifts may decay and perish: they do not lie beyond the reach of corruption; indeed grace shall never perish, but gifts will; grace is incorruptible, though gifts are not; grace is "a spring, whose waters fail not," but the streams of gifts may be dried up. If grace be corruptible in its own nature, as being but a creature; yet it is incorruptible in regard of its preserver, as being the *new* creature; he that did create it in us, will preserve it in us; he that did begin it, will also finish it.—(*Heb.* xii. 2.)

Gifts have their root in nature, but grace hath its root in Christ; and therefore though gifts may die and wither, yet grace shall abide for ever.

Now if gifts are perishing, then, though he that hath the *least* grace is a Christian, he that hath the greatest gifts may be *but almost* a Christian.

Objection. But doth not the apostle bid us "covet earnestly the best gifts?" Why must we covet them, and covet them earnestly, if they avail not to salvation?

Answer. Gifts are good, though they are not the best good; they are excellent, but there is somewhat more excellent; so it fol-

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lows in the same verse; "yet I shew unto you a more excellent way," and that is the way of grace; one dram of grace is more worth than a talent of gifts: gifts may make us rich towards men, but it is grace that makes us "rich towards God."

Our gifts profit others, but grace profits ourselves; that whereby I profit another is good, but that whereby I am profited myself is better.

Now because gifts are good, therefore we ought to covet them; but because they are not the best good, therefore we ought not to rest in them; we must covet gifts for the good of others, that they may be edified; and we must covet grace for the good of our own souls, that they may be saved; for whosoever be bettered by our gifts, yet we shall miscarry without grace.

3. "A man may have a high profession of religion, be much in external duties of godliness, and yet be *but almost* a Christian." Mark what our lord tells them, "not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;" that is, not every one that makes a profession of Christ, shall therefore be owned for a true disciple of Christ. "All are not Israel that are of Israel;" nor are all Christians that make a profession of religion.

What a goodly profession had Judas! he

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followed Christ, left all for Christ, he preached the Gospel of Christ, he cast out devils in the name of Christ, he ate and drank at the table of Christ; and yet Judas was but an hypocrite.

Most professors are like lilies, fair in shew, but foul in scent; or like pepper, hot in the mouth, but cold in the stomach. The finest lace may be upon the coarsest cloth.

It is a great deceit to measure the substance of our religion by the bulk of our profession, and to judge of the strength of our graces by the length of our duties. Scripture speaks of some who having "a form of godliness, yet deny the power thereof." Deny the power; that is, they do not live in the practice of those graces which they pretend to in their duties: he that pretends to godliness by a specious profession, and yet doth not practise godliness by a holy conversation, "he hath a form, but denies the power."

Grotius compares such to the ostrich, which hath great wings, but yet flies not; many have the wings of a fair profession, but yet use them not to mount upward in spiritual affections, and a heavenly conversation.

But to clear the truth of this, that a man may make a high profession of religion, and yet be *but almost* a Christian; take a fourfold evidence.

1. If a man may profess religion, and yet

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never have his heart changed, nor his state bettered, then he may be a great professor, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

But a man may profess religion, and yet never have his heart changed, nor his state renewed. He may be a constant hearer of the word, and yet be a sinner still; he may come often to the Lord's table, and yet go away a sinner as he came; we must not think that duties can confer grace.

Many a soul hath been converted by Christ in an ordinance, but never was any soul converted by an ordinance without Christ.

And doth Christ convert all that sit under the ordinances? surely no, for to some, "the word is a savour of death unto death." And if so, then it is plain, that a man may profess religion, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

2. A man may profess religion, and live in a form of godliness in hypocrisy. "Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness." What do ye think of these? "They make mention of the name of the Lord, there is their profession, but not in truth, nor in righteousness," there is their dissimulation; and indeed there could be no hypocrisy, in a religious sense, were it not for a profession of re-

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ligion; for he that is wicked and carnal, and vile inwardly, and appears to be so outwardly, he is no hypocrite, but is what he appears, and appears what he is. But he that is one thing really, and another thing seemingly, is carnal and unholy, and yet seems to be good and holy, he is an hypocrite.

Thus the Casuists define hypocrisy to be a counterfeiting of holiness; and this fits exactly with the Greek word which is to counterfeit.

And to this purpose; the Hebrews have two words for hypocrites, *panim*, which signifies *facies;* and *chanepim*, which signifies *counterfeits*, from *chanaph*, to dissemble; so that he is an hypocrite that dissembles religion, and weareth the face of holiness, and yet is without the grace of holiness; he appears to be in semblance what he is not in substance, he wears a form of godliness without, only as a cover of a profane heart within.

He hath a profession that he may not be thought wicked; but it is but a profession, and therefore he is wicked.

He is the religious hypocrite; religious, because he pretends to it; and yet an hypocrite, because he doth but pretend to it; he is like many men in consumption, that have fresh looks, and yet rotten lungs: or like an apple that hath a skin fair, but a rotten core; many appear righteous, who are only righteous in appearance.

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And if so, then a man may profess religion, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

3. Custom and fashion may make a man a professor; as you have many that wear this or that garb, not because it keeps them warmer, or hath any excellency in it more than another, but merely for fashion.

Many must have powdered hair, spotted faces, feathers in their caps, &c. for no other end, but because they would be fools in fashion.

So, many profess christianity, not because the means of grace warm the heart, or that they see any excellency in the ways of God above the world, but merely to follow the fashion; I wish I might not say, it hath been true of our days, because religion hath been uppermost, therefore many have professed; it hath been the gaining trade, and then most will be of that trade.

Religion in credit makes many professors, but few proselytes; but when religion suffers, then its confessors are no more than its converts, for custom makes the former, but conscience the latter.

He that is a professor of religion merely for custom-sake, when it prospers, will never be a martyr, for Christ's sake, when religion suffers.

He that owns the truth, to live upon that, will disown it, when it comes to live upon him.

They say, that when a house is decaying

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and falling, all the rats and mice will forsake it: while the house is firm, and they may shelter in the roof, they will stay, but no longer; lest in the decay, the fall should be upon them, and they that lived at top should die at bottom.

My brethren, may I not say, we have many that are the vermin, the rats and mice of religion, that would live under the roof of it, while they might have shelter in it: but when it suffers, forsake it, lest it should fall, and the fall should be upon them; I am persuaded this is not the least reason why God hath brought the wheel upon the profession of religion, namely to rid it of the vermin.

He shakes the foundation of the house, that these rats and mice may quit the roof; not to overturn it, but to rid them out of it, as the husbandman fans the wheat, that he may get rid of the chaff. The halcyon days of the Gospel provoke hypocrisy, but the sufferings for religion prove sincerity.

Now then if custom and fashion make many men professors, then a man may profess religion, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

4. If many may perish under a profession of godliness, then a man may profess religion, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

Now the Scripture is clear, that a man may perish under the highest profession of religion. Christ cursed the fig-tree, that had

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leaves and no fruit. It is said, *Matt.* viii. 12, "that the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness." Who were these, but they that were then the only people of God in the world by profession, that had made a covenant with him by sacrifice? and yet these were cast out.

In St. Matthew you read of some that came and made boast of their profession to Christ, hoping that might save them; Lord, say they "have we not prophesied in thy name, cast out devils in thy name, done many wonderful works in thy name?"

Now what saith our Lord to this? "Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me."

Mark, here are they that prophesy in his name, and yet perish in his wrath; in his name cast out devils, and then are cast out themselves; in his name do many wonderful works, and yet perish for wicked workers.

The profession of religion will no more keep a man from perishing, than calling a ship the *safeguard*, or the *goodspeed*, will keep her from foundering.

As many go to heaven with the fear of hell in their hearts, so many go to hell with the name of Christ in their mouths. Now then, if many may perish under a profession of godliness, then may a man be a high professor of religion, and yet be but *almost a Christian*.

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Objection. But is it not said by Christ himself, "he that confesses me before men, him will I confess before my father in heaven?"

Now for Christ to say, he will confess us before the father, is equivalent to a promise of eternal life; for if Jesus Christ confess us, God the father will never disown us.

True, they that confess Christ, shall be confessed by him; and it is as true, that this confession is equivalent to a promise of salvation. But now you must know, that professing Christ, is not confessing him; for to *profess* Christ is one thing, to *confess* Christ is another: confession is a living testimony for Christ in a time when religion suffers; profession may be only a lifeless formality in a time when religion prospers. To confess Christ, is to choose his ways, and own them. To profess Christ, is to plead for his ways, and yet live besides them. Profession may be from a feigned love to the ways of Christ, but confession is from a rooted love to the person of Christ.

To profess Christ, is to own him when none deny him; to confess Christ, is to plead for him, and suffer for him, when others oppose him; hypocrites may be professors, but the martyrs are the true confessors: profession is a *swimming* down the stream, confession is a swimming against the stream. Now many may swim with the stream, like the dead fish, that cannot swim against the stream with the

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living fish ; many may profess Christ, that cannot confess Christ ; and so notwithstanding their profession are *but almost* Christians.

4. To come yet nearer ; " A man may go far in opposing his sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian." How far a man may go in this work, I shall shew you in seven progressive instances.

1. A man " may be convinced of sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian :" For,

1. Conviction may be rational, as well as spiritual ; it may be from a natural conscience enlightened by the word, without the effectual work of the spirit, applying sin to the heart.

2. Convictions may be worn out ; they many times go off, and end not in sound conversion ; saith the church, " We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have brought forth wind."—(*Isa.* xxvi. 18.) This is the complaint of the church in reference to the unprofitableness of their afflictions ; and it may be the complaint of most in reference to the unprofitableness of their convictions.

3. Many take convictions of sin to be conversion from sin, and so sit down, and rest in their convictions. That is a sad complaint God makes of Ephraim : *Ephraim is an unwise son, for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children.* Now then, if convictions may be only from natural conscience, if they may be worn out, or may be mistaken,

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and rested in for conversion, then a man may have convictions, and be *but almost* a Christian.

Secondly, "A man may mourn for sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian;" so did Saul, so did Esau, for the loss of his birth-right, which was his sin, and therefore he is called by the spirit of God, *profane Esau;* yet, *he sought it again carefully with tears.*

Objection. But doth not Christ pronounce them blessed that mourn? *Blessed are they that mourn.*

Sure then, if a man mourn for sin, he is in a good condition: you see, saith Nazianzen, that salvation is joined with sorrow.

Solution. I answer, it is true, that they who mourn for sin in the sense Christ there speaks of, are blessed; but all mourning for sin, doth not therefore render us blessed.

1. True mourning for sin must flow from spiritual convictions of the evil and vileness, and damnable nature of sin.

Now all that mourn for sin, do not do it from a thorough work of spiritual conviction upon the soul; they have not a right sense of the evil and vileness of sin.

2. True mourning for sin, is more for the evil that is in sin, than the evil that comes by sin; more because it dishonours God, and wounds Christ, and grieves the Spirit, and makes the soul unlike God, than because it damns the soul.

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Now there are many that mourn for sin, not so much for the evil that is in it, as for the evil that it brings with it; there is mourning for sin in hell; you read of *weeping and wailing there.* The damned are weeping and mourning to eternity; there is all sorrow, and no comfort; as in heaven there is peace without trouble, joy without mourning, so in hell there is trouble without peace, mourning without joy, weeping and wailing incessantly; but it is for the evil they feel by sin, and not for the evil that is in sin: so that a man may mourn for sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian: it may grieve him to think of perishing for sin, when it does not grieve him that he is defiled and polluted by sin.

Thirdly, "A man may make large confession of sin, to God, to others, and yet be *but almost* a Christian."

How ingenuously doth Saul confess his sin to David? *I have sinned,* saith he, *thou art more righteous than I! behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly.*

So Judas makes a full confession; "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."

Yet Saul and Judas were both rejected of God; so that a man may confess sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

Objection. But is not confession of sin, a character of a child of God? doth not the apostle say, "If we confess our sins, God is

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just and faithful to forgive them :" no man was ever kept out of heaven for his confessed badness, though many are kept out of heaven for their supposed goodness.

Judah, in Hebrew, signifies *confession ;* now Judah got the kingdom from Reuben ; confession of sin is the way to the kingdom of heaven.

There are some that confess sin, and are saved ; there are others that confess sin, and perish.

1. Many confess sin merely out of custom, and not out of conscience : you shall have many that will never pray, but they will make a long confession of sin, and yet never feel the weight or burden of it upon their consciences.

2. Many will confess lesser sins, and yet conceal greater ; like the patient in Plutarch, that complained to his physician of his finger, when his liver was rotten.

3. Many will confess sin in the general, or confess themselves sinners ; and yet see little, and say less of their particular sins ; an implicit confession, as one saith, is almost as bad as an implicit faith.

Where confession is right, it will be distinct, especially of those sins that were our chief sins.

So David confesses his *blood-guiltiness* and adultery : so Paul his *blasphemy*, *persecution*, and injury against the saints. It is bad to

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hear men confess they are great sinners, and yet cannot confess their sins.

Though the least sin be too bad to be committed, yet there is no sin too bad to be confessed.

4. Many will confess sin, but it is only under extremity, that is, not free and voluntary. Pharaoh confesses his sin, but it was when judgment compelled him. "I have sinned against the Lord," saith he; but it was when he had eight plagues upon him.

Many do by their sins as mariners do by their goods, cast them out in a storm, wishing for them again in a calm. Confession should come like water out of a spring, which runs freely; not like water out of a still, which is forced by fire.

5. Many confess their sins, but with no intent to forsake sin; they confess the sins they have committed, but do not leave the sins they have confessed.

Many men use confession as Lewis the eleventh of France did his crucifix; he would swear an oath, and then kiss it; and swear again, and then kiss it again. So many sin, and then confess they do not well, but yet never strive to do better.

Mr. Torshel tells a story of a minister he knew that would be often drunk, and when he came into the pulpit, would confess it very lamentingly; and yet no sooner was he out of

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the pulpit, but he would be drunk again; and this would he do as constantly as men follow their trades.

Now then, if a man may confess sin merely out of custom; if he may confess lesser sins, and yet conceal greater; if he may confess sin only in the general, or only under extremity, or if he may confess sin without any intent to forsake sin, then surely a man may confess sin and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

Fourthly, "A man may forsake sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian;" he may leave his lust, and his wicked ways, which he sometimes lived in, and in the judgment of the world become a new man, and yet not be a new creature. Simon Magus, when he hears Philip preaching concerning the kingdom of God, leaves his sorcery and witchcraft, and believes.—(*Acts* viii. 13.)

Objection. But you will say, this seems contrary to Scripture; for that says, "He that confesseth, and forsaketh sin, shall have mercy;" but I confess sin, yea, not only so, but also I forsake sin; sure therefore this mercy is my portion, it belongs to me.

Answer. It is true, that where the soul forsakes sin from a right principle, after a right manner, to a right end; where he forsakes sin as sin, as being contrary to God, and the purity of his nature;—this declares that soul to be right with God, and the promise shall be made good to it, "He shall find mercy."

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But now pray mind, there is a forsaking sin that is not right, but unsound.

1. Open sins may be deserted, and yet secret sins may be retained; now this is not a right forsaking; such a soul shall never find mercy. A man may be cured of a wound in his flesh, and yet may die of an impostume in his bowels.

2. A man may forsake sin, but not as sin; for he that forsakes sin as sin, forsakes all sin. It is impossible for a man to forsake sin as sin, unless he forsakes all that he knows to be sin.

3. A man may let one sin go, to hold another the faster; as a man that goes to sea, would willingly save all his goods, but if the storm arises that he cannot, then he throws some over-board to lighten the vessel, and save the rest. So did they, Acts xxvii. 38.

So the sinner chooses to keep all his sin; but if a storm arises in his conscience, why then he will heave one lust over-board to save the life of another.

4. A man may let all sin go, and yet be a sinner still; for there is the root of all sin in the heart, though the fruit be not seen in the life; the tree lives, though the boughs be lopped off.

As a man is a sinner before ever he acts sin, so (till grace renew him,) he is a sinner, though he leaves sin; for there is original sin in him enough to damn and destroy him.

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5. Sin may be left, and yet be loved; a man may forsake the life of sin, and yet retain the love of sin; now though leaving sin makes him *almost* a Christian, yet loving sin shews he is *but almost* a Christian.

It is a less evil to do sin, and not love it, than to love sin and not do it; for to do sin may argue only weakness of grace, but to love sin argues strength of lust. "What I hate, that do I."

Sin is bad in any part of man, but sin in the affection is worse than sin in the conversation; for sin in the conversation may be only from infirmity, but sin in the affection is the fruit of choice and unregeneracy.

6. All sin may be chained, and yet the heart not changed, and so the nature of the sinner is the same as ever. A dog chained up, is a dog still, as much as if he was let loose to devour.

There may be a cessation of arms between enemies, and yet the quarrel may remain on foot still; there may be a making truce, where there is no making peace.

A sinner may lay the weapons of sin out of his hand, and yet the enmity against God still remain in his heart.

There may be a truce, he may not sin against him; but there can be no peace till he be united unto him.

Restraining grace holds in the sinner, but

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it is renewing grace that changes the nature. Now many are held in by grace from being open sinners, that are not renewed by grace, and made true believers.

Now then if a man may forsake open sins, and retain secret sins; if he may forsake sin, but not as sin; if he may let one sin go, to hold another the faster; if a man may let all sin go, and yet be a sinner still; if sin may be left, and yet be loved: finally, if all sin may be chained, and yet the heart not changed; then a man may forsake sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

Fifthly, "A man may hate sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian." Absalom hated Amnon's uncleanness with his sister Tamar; yea, his hatred was so great, as that he slew him for it; and yet Absalom was but a wicked man.

Objection. But the Scripture makes it a sign of a gracious heart to hate sin; yea, though a man do through infirmities fall into sin, yet if he hates it, this is a proof of grace. Paul proves the sincerity of his heart, and the truth of his grace, by this hatred of sin, though he committed it; "What I hate, that I do."

Nay, what is grace, but *conformities cum Archetypo*, a conformity of the soul to God; to love as God loves, to hate as God hates: now God hates sin, it is one part of his holiness to hate all sin.

And if I hate sin, then am I conformed to

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God; and if I am conformed to God, then am I *altogether* a Christian.

Answer. It is true that there is a hatred of sin, which is a sign of grace, and which flows from a principle of grace, and is grace: as for instance;

To hate sin, as it is an offence to God, a wrong to his majesty; to hate sin, as it is a breach of the command, and so a wicked violation of God's will, which is the only rule of goodness; to hate sin, as being a disingenuous transgression of that law of love established in the blood and death of Christ, and so in a degree a *crucifying of* Christ *afresh.*

To hate sin as being a grieving and quenching the Spirit of God, as all sin in its nature is.

Thus to hate sin is grace, and thus every true Christian hates sin.

But though every man that hath grace, hates sin, yet every man that hates sin, hath not grace; For,

A man may hate sin from other principles, not as it is wronging God, or wounding Christ, or grieving the Spirit, for then he would hate all sin; for there is no sin but hath this in the nature of it. But,

1. A man may hate sin for the shame that attends it, more than for the evil that is in it. Some sinners there are "who *declare their sin as* Sodom, *and hide it not.* They are set down in the *seat of the scornful;*" "*they glory in*

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their shame." But now others there are who are ashamed of sin, and therefore hate it, not for the sin's sake, but the shame's sake. This made Absalom hate Amnon's uncleanness, because it brought shame upon him and his sister.

2. A man may hate sin more in others than in himself: so doth the drunkard, he hates drunkenness in another, and yet practises it himself: the liar hates falsehood in another, but likes it in himself. Now he that hates sin from a principle of grace, hates sin most in himself; he hates sin in others, but he loaths most the sins of his own heart.

3. A man may hate one sin as being contrary to another. There is a great contrariety between sin and sin, between lust and lust; it is the excellency of the life of grace, that it is a uniform life; there is no one grace contrary to another; the graces of God's Spirit are different, but not differing; faith, and love, and holiness, are all one: they consist together at the same time, in the same subject; nay, they cannot be parted; there can be no faith without love, no love without holiness: and so on the other hand, no holiness without love, no love without faith. So that this makes the life of grace an easy and excellent life, but now the life of sin is a distracting self-opposing life, wherein a man is a servant to contrary lusts: the lust of pride and prodigality, is contrary to the lust of covetousness, &c.

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Now when one lust gets to be the ruling lust in the soul, then that works a hatred of its contrary; where covetousness gets the heart, there the heart hates pride; and where pride gets uppermost in the heart, there the heart hates covetousness. Thus a man may hate sin, not from a principle of grace, but from the contrariety of lust.

He does not hate any sin as it is sin; but he hates it, as being contrary to his beloved sin.

Now then, if a man may hate sin for the shame that attends it; if he may hate sin more in others than in himself; and if he may hate one sin as being contrary to another; then he may hate sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

Sixthly, "A man may make great vows and promises, he may have strong purposes and resolutions against sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian."

Thus did Saul, he promises and resolves against his sin; "return my son David, saith he, for I will no more do thee harm." What promises and resolves did Pharaoh make against that sin of detaining God's people? saith he, "I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice to the Lord:" and again, "I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer." And yet Saul and Pharaoh both perished in their sins: the greatest purposes and promises

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against sin, will not make a man a Christian; For,

1. "Purposes and promises against sin, never hurt sin: we say *threatened folks live long;*" and truly so do threatened sins. It is not new purposes, but a new nature, that must help us against sin; purposes may bring to the birth, but without a new nature, *there is no strength to bring forth.* The new nature is the best soil for holy purposes to grow in; otherwise they wither and die, like plants in an improper soil.

2. "Troubles and afflictions may provoke us to large purposes and promises against sin for the future:" what more common than to vow, and not to pay? to make vows in the day of trouble, which we make no conscience to pay in the day of peace? many covenant against sin, when trouble is upon them; and then sin against their covenant, when it is removed from them.

It was a brave rule that Pliny in one of his epistles, gave his friend to live by, "That we should continue to be such when we are well, as we promise to be when we are sick."

Many are our sick-bed promises, but we are no sooner well, but we grow sick of our promises.

3. "Purposes and resolves against sin for the future, may be only a temptation to put off repentance for the present;" Satan may

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put a man upon good purposes, to keep him from present attempts.

He knows, whatever we purpose, yet the strength of performance is not in ourselves.

He knows, that purposes for the future, are a putting God off for the present; they are a secret *will not*, to a present opportunity. That is a notable passage, *Follow me*, saith Christ to the two men: now see what answers they gave to Christ; *suffer me first to go and bury my father*, says one: this man purposes to follow Christ, only he would stay to bury his father: says the other, *Lord I will follow thee, but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at my house;* I will follow thee, but only I would first go and take leave of my friends, or set my house in order: and yet we do not find that ever they followed Christ, notwithstanding their fair purposes.

4. "Nature unsanctified may be so far wrought on, as to make great promises and purposes against sin."

1. A natural man may have great convictions of sin from the workings of an enlightened conscience.

2. He may approve of the law of God.

3. He may have a desire to be saved.

Now these three together, the workings of conscience; the sight of the goodness of the law; a desire to be saved; may bring forth in a man great purposes against sin, and yet he

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may have no heart to perform his own purposes. This was much like the case of those who said to Moses, "Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and tell thou it to us, and we will hear it, and do it."

This is a fair promise, and so God takes it; "I have heard the words of this people, they have well said all that they have spoken." So said, and so done, had been well, but it was better said than done; for though they had a tongue to promise, yet they had no heart to perform, and this God saw; therefore said he, "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them.—(*Deut.* v. 29.)

They promised to fear God and keep his commandments, but they wanted a new heart to perform what an unsanctified heart had promised; it fares with men in this case, as it did with that Son in the Gospel, that said, "He would go into the vineyard, but went not."

Now then if purposes and promises against sin never hurt sin; if present afflictions may draw out large promises, if they may be the fruit of a temptation, or if from nature unsanctified; surely then a man may promise and purpose much against sin, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

Seventhly, "A man may maintain a strife and combat against sin in himself, and yet be

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but almost a Christian." So did Balaam, when he went to curse the people of God, he had a great strife within himself; "How shall I curse, saith he, where God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied."

And did not Pilate strive against his sin, when he said to the Jews, "Shall I crucify your king; what evil hath he done?—I am innocent of the blood of this just man."

Objection. But you will say, "Is not this an argument of grace, when there is a striving in the soul against sin? for what should oppose sin in the heart, but grace?" The apostle makes "the lusting of the flesh against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh," to be an argument of grace in the heart. Now I find this strife in my heart, though the remainders of corruption sometimes break out into actual sins, yet I find a striving in my soul against sin.

Answer. It is true, there is a striving against sin which is only from grace, and is proper to believers; and there is a striving against sin which is not from grace, and therefore may be in them that are not believers.

There is a strife against sin in one and the same faculty; the will against the will, the affection against the affection; and this is that which the apostle calls "the lusting of the flesh against the spirit;" that is, the striving of the unregenerate part against the regenerate; and

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this is ever in the same faculty, and is proper to believers only.

An unbeliever never finds this strife in himself; this strife cannot be in him, it is impossible, as such, that is, while he is on this side a state of grace.

But then there is striving against sin in diverse faculties, and this is the strife that is in them that are not believers; there the strife is between the will and the conscience: conscience enlightened and terrified with the fear of hell and damnation, that is against sin; the will and affection not being renewed, they are for sin. And this causes great struggling and strong combats many times in the sinner's heart.

Thus it was with the Scribes and Pharisees: conscience convinced them of the divinity of Christ, and of the truth of his being the Son of God; and yet a perverse will, and carnal affections, cry out *crucify him, crucify him.* Conscience pleaded for him, he had a witness in their bosoms, and yet their wills were bent against him; and therefore they are said "to have resisted the Spirit," namely, the workings and convictions of the spirit in their consciences. And this is the case of many sinners; when the will and affections are for sin, and plead for it, conscience is against it, and many times frights the soul from the doing of it.

And hence men take that which opposes sin

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in them, to be grace, when it is only the work of a natural conscience; they conclude the strife is between grace and sin, the regenerate and unregenerate part; when, alas! it is no other than the contention of a natural conscience against a corrupt will and affections. And if so, then a man may have great strifes and combats against sin in him, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

5. "A man may desire grace, and yet be *but almost* a Christian;" so did "the five foolish virgins; they said, give us of your oil;" what was that but true grace? it was that oil that lighted the wise virgins into the bridegroom's chamber.

They do not only desire to enter in, but they desire oil to light them in; wicked men may desire heaven, desire a Christ to save them; there is none so wicked upon earth, but desire to be happy in heaven.

But now here are they that desire grace as well as glory, and yet these are *but almost* Christians.

Objection. But is it not commonly taught, "that desires of grace are grace?" nay, doth not our Lord himself make it so? "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

Answer. It is true, that there are some desires of grace which are grace: As,

1. When a man desires grace from a right

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sense of his natural state; when he sees the vileness of sin, and the woeful, defiled, and loathsome condition he is in by reason of sin; and therefore desires the grace of Christ to renew and change him; this is grace. This some make to be the lowest degree of saving faith.

2. When a man joins proportionable endeavours to his desires; doth not only wish for grace, but work for grace; such desires are grace.

3. When a man's desires are constant and incessant, that cease not but in the attainment of their object; such desires are true grace. They are a part of the especial work of the Spirit. They do really partake of the nature of grace; now it is a known maxim, "that which partakes of the nature of the whole, is a part of the whole;" the filings of gold are gold. The sea is not more really water, than the least drop; the flame is not more really fire than the least spark.

But though all true desires of grace, are grace; yet all desires of grace are not true: For,

1. A man may desire grace, but not for itself, but for somewhat else: not grace for grace's sake, but for heaven's sake; he doth not desire grace, that his nature may be changed, his heart renewed, the image of God stampt upon him, and his lusts subdued in him.

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These are blessed desires, found only in true believers. The true Christian only can desire grace for grace's sake; but the *almost* Christian may desire grace for heaven's sake.

2. A man may desire grace without proportionable endeavours after grace; many are good at wishing, but bad at working; like him that lay in the grass on a summer's day, crying out, "O that this were to work!"

Solomon saith, "The desire of the slothful kills him:" How so? "For his hands refuse to labour; he perisheth in his desires."

The believer joins desires and endeavours together; "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after."

3. A man's desires of grace may be unseasonable; thus the foolish virgins desired oil when it was too late.

The believer's desires are seasonable; he desires grace in the season of grace, and seeks in a time when it may be found. "The wise man's heart knows both time and judgment." He knows his season, and hath wisdom to improve it.

The silly sinner doth all his works out of season; he sins away the seasons of grace, and then desires grace when the season is over. The sinner doth all too late, as Esau desired the blessing when it was too late, and therefore he lost it; whereas had he come sooner, he had obtained it.

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Most men are like Epimetheus, wise too late; when the bridegroom is coming, then they have their oil to get.

When they lie upon their death-beds, then they desire holy hearts.

4. Desires of grace in many are very inconstant and fleeting, like the "morning dew that quickly passes away: or, like Jonah's *gourd*," that springs up in a night, and withers in a night; they have no root in the heart, and therefore quickly perish: Now, if a man may desire grace, but not for its own sake; if desires may be without endeavours: if a man may desire grace when it is too late; if these desires may be but fleeting and inconstant; then may a man desire grace, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

6. "A man may tremble at the word of God and yet be *but almost* a Christian," as Belshazzar did at the hand writing upon the wall.

Objection. But is not that a note of sincerity and truth of grace, to tremble at the word? Doth not God say, "To him will I look, that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembles at my word?"

Answer. There is a two-fold trembling.—1. One is, when the word discovers the guilt of sin, and the wrath of God that belongs to that guilt; this, where conscience is awake, causes trembling and amazement; thus when "Paul preached of righteousness and judgment, it is said, Felix trembled."

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2. There is a trembling which arises from a holy dread and reverence of the majesty of God, speaking in his word; this is only found in the true believers, and is that which keeps the soul low in its own eyes. Therefore mark how the words run; "To him will I look, that is of a poor and contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

God does not make the promise to him that trembles at the word; for *the devils believe and tremble;* the word of God can make the proudest, stoutest sinner in the world, to shake and tremble; but it is "to the poor and contrite spirit that trembles." Where trembling is the fruit of a spirit broken for sin, and low in its own eyes, there will God look.

Now many tremble at the word, but not from poverty of spirit, not from a heart broken for sin, and low in its own eyes; not from a sense of the majesty and holiness of God; and therefore notwithstanding they tremble at the word, yet they are *but almost* Christians.

7. "A man may delight in the word and ordinances of God, and yet be *but almost* a Christian:" "they take delight in approaching to God."—(*Isa.* lviii. 2.)

And it is said of that ground, that it "received the word with joy," and yet it was but "stony ground."

Objection. But is it not made a character of a godly man, to delight in the word of God?

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doth not David say, "He is a blessed man that delights in the law of the Lord?"

Answer. There is a delighting in the word, which flows from grace, and is a proof of blessedness.

1. He that delights in the word because of its spirituality, he is a Christian *indeed:* the more spiritual the ordinances are, the more doth a gracious heart delight in them.

2. When the word comes close to the conscience, rips up the heart, and discovers sin, and yet the soul delights in it notwithstanding; this is a sign of grace.

3. When delight arises from that communion that is to be had with God there; this is from a principle of grace in the soul.

But there may be a delight in the word, because of the eloquence of the preacher: they delight not so much in the truths delivered, as in the dress they are delivered in. Thus it is said of the prophet Ezekiel, that he was to them "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice."

2. There are very many delight to hear the word, that yet take no delight to do it; so saith God of them, "They delight to hear my words, but they do them not."

Now then if a man may delight in the word, more because of the eloquence of the preacher, than because of the spirituality of the matter; if he may delight to hear the

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word, and yet not delight to do it; then he may delight in the word, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

8. "A man may be a member of the church of Christ, he may join himself to the people of God, partake with them in all ordinances, and share of all church privileges, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

So the five foolish virgins joined themselves to the wise, and walked together.

Many may be members of the church of Christ, and yet not members of Christ, the head of the Church.

There was a mixed multitude came up with the church of Israel out of Egypt; they joined themselves to the Israelites, owned their God, left their own country, and yet were in heart Egyptians notwithstanding.—"All are not Israel, that are of Israel."

The church in all ages hath had unsound members: Cain had communion with Abel; Ishmael dwelt in the same house with Isaac; Judas was in fellowship with the Apostles; and so was Demas with the rest of the disciples.

There will be some bran in the finest meal; the drag-net of the Gospel catches bad fish as well as good; the tares and the wheat grow together, and it will be so till the harvest.

God hath a church where there are no members but such as are true members of

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Christ, but it is in heaven, it is the "church of the first-born;" there are no hypocrites, nor rotten, unsound professors, none but the "Spirits of just men made perfect;" all is pure wheat that God layeth up in that garner; there the chaff is separated to unquenchable fire.

But in the church on earth the wheat and the chaff lie in the same heap together, the Samaritans will be near of kin to the Jews when they are in prosperity; so while the church of God flourisheth in the world, many will join to it; they will seem Jews, though they are Samaritans, and seem saints, though they are no better than *almost* Christians.

9. "A man may have great hopes of heaven, great hopes of being saved, and yet be *but almost* a Christian."

Indeed there is a hope of heaven which is "the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast," it never miscarries, and it is known by four properties.

First, It is a hope which purifies the heart, purges out sin; "He that hath this hope, purifies himself even as God is pure." That soul that truly hopes to enjoy God, truly endeavours to be like God.

Secondly, It is a hope which fills the heart with gladness: "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Thirdly, It is a hope that is founded upon

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the promise: as there can be no true faith without a promise, so, not any true hope: Faith applies the promise, and hope expects the fulfilling the promise: Faith relies upon the truth of it, and hope waits for the good of it; Faith gives interest, hope expects investiture.

Fourthly, It is a hope that is wrought by God himself in the soul; who is therefore called, "The God of hope," as being the author as well as the object of hope. Now he that hath this hope shall never miscarry: This is a right hope; the hope of the true believer: "Christ in you the hope of glory."

But then, as there is a true and sound hope, so there is a false and rotten hope; and this is much more common, as bastard pearls are more frequently worn than true pearls.

There is nothing more common, than to see men big with groundless hopes of heaven; As,

1. A man may have great hope that hath no grace; you read of the "hope of hypocrites."—(*Job* viii. 13, 14.)

The performance of duties is a proof of their hope; the foolish virgins would never have done what they did, had they thought they should have been shut out after all.

Many professors would not be at such pains in duties as they are, if they did not hope for heaven. Hope is the great motive to action;

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despair cuts the sinews of all endeavours; that is one reason why the damned in hell cease acting toward an alteration of their state, because despair hath taken hold of them; if there were any hope in hell, they would up and be doing there. So that there may be great hope where there is no grace; experience proves this, formal professors are men of no grace, but yet men of great hopes; nay, many times you shall find that none fear more about their eternal condition, than they that have most cause of hope; and none hope more than they that have most cause of fear. As interest in God may sometimes be without hope, so hope in God may be without interest.

2. A man may hope in the mercy, and goodness, and power of God, without eyeing the promise; and this is the hope of most: God is full of mercy and goodness, and therefore willing to save; and he is infinite in power, and therefore able to save; why therefore should I not rest on him?

Now it is presumption, and therefore sin, to hope in the mercy of God, otherwise than by eyeing the promise; for the promise is the channel of mercy, the pipe through which it is conveyed; all the blessedness the saints enjoy in heaven, is no other than what is the fruit of the promise relied on, and hoped for here on earth. A man hath no warrant to hope in God, but by virtue of the promise.

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3. A man may hope for heaven, and yet not cleanse his heart, nor depart from his secret sins; that hope of salvation that is not accompanied with heart-purification, that is a vain hope.

4. A man may hope for heaven, and yet be doing the work of hell; he may hope for salvation, and yet be working out his own damnation, and so perish in his confidences: this is the case of many, *Male agendo sperant, et sperando pereunt:* like the water-man that looks one way, and rows another; many have their eyes on heaven whose hearts are in the earth; they hope in God, but choose him not for a portion; they hope in God, but do not love him as the best good, and therefore are like to have no portion in him, nor good by him; but are like to perish without him, notwithstanding all their hopes: "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God takes away his soul?"

Now then, if a man may have great hope of heaven, that hath no grace; if he may hope in mercy, without eyeing the promise; if he may hope without heart-purifying; if he may hope for heaven, and yet do the work of hell; surely then a man may have great hopes of heaven, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

10. "A man may be under great and visible changes, and these wrought by the ministry of the word, and yet be *but almost* a Chris-

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tian, as Herod was." It is said, "when he heard John the Baptist, he did many things and heard him gladly." Saul was under a great change when he met the Lord's prophets, he turned prophet too.

Nay, it is said, verse 9, of that chapter, that "God gave him another heart."—(1 *Sam.* x.)

Now was not this a work of grace? and was not Saul here truly converted? one would think he was, but yet indeed he was not. For though it is said, God *gave him another heart;* yet it is not said, that God gave him a *new* heart.

There is a great difference between another heart, and a new heart; God gave him *another* heart, to fit him for a ruler, but gave him not a *new* heart, to make him a believer; *another* heart may make another man, but it is a *new* heart that makes a new man.

Again, Simon Magus is a great proof of this truth: he was under a great and visible change: of a Sorcerer he was turned to be a Believer, he left his witchcrafts and sorceries, and embraced the Gospel; was not this a great change?

If the drunkard doth but leave his drunkenness, the swearer his oaths, the profane person his profaneness, they think this is a gracious change, and their state is now good: alas! Simon Magus did not only leave his sins, but had a kind of conversion; for "he believed, and was baptized."

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Objection. " But is not that man that is changed, a true Christian ?"

Answer. Not every change makes a man a Christian ; indeed there is a change, that whoever is under it, he is a true Christian.

When a man's heart is so changed, as that it is renewed : when old things " are done away, and all is become new ;" when the *new creature* is wrought in the soul, when a man is " turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God ;" when the mind is enlightened, the will renewed, the affections made heavenly ; then a man is a Christian indeed.

But now you must know that every change is not this change ; For,

1. There is a civil change, a moral change, as well as a spiritual and supernatural change.

Many men are changed in a moral sense, and one may say, they are become *new* men ; but they are in heart and nature the same men still ; they are not changed in a spiritual and supernatural sense, and therefore it cannot be said of them, they are become *new* creatures.

Restraining grace may cause a moral change ; but it is renewing grace that must cause a saving change. Many are under restraining grace, and so changed morally, that are not under the power of renewing grace, and so changed savingly.

2. There is an outward change, as well as

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an inward change; the outward change is often without the inward, though the inward change is never without the outward. A man's heart cannot be sanctified, but it will influence the life; but a man's life may be reformed, and yet never affect or influence the heart.

3. A man may be converted from a course of profaneness to a form of godliness; from a filthy conversation to a fair profession; and yet the heart the same in one and the other. A rotten post may be gilt without and yet unsound within.

It is common to have the *outside of the cup and platter* made clean, and yet the inside foul and filthy.

Now then, if a man may be changed morally, and yet not spiritually, outwardly, and yet not inwardly, from a course of profaneness, to a lifeless form of godliness; then a man may be under great and visible changes, and yet be no more than *almost* a Christian.

I do not speak this to discountenance any change, short of that that is spiritual; but to awaken you to seek after that change which is more than moral. It is good to be outwardly reformed, but it is better to be savingly renewed.

I know how natural it is for men to take up with any thing like a work of conversion, though it be not conversion: and resting in that, they eternally perish.

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Beloved, let me tell you, there is no change, no conversion can deliver your souls in the day of judgment, on this side that saving work, which is wrought on the soul by the Spirit of God, renewing you throughout; the sober man without this change, shall as surely go to hell, as the foolish drunkard.

Morality and civility may commend us to men, but not to God. They are of no value in the procurement of an eternal salvation.

A man may go far in an outward change, and yet not be one step nearer heaven, than he that never was under any change; nay, he may be, in some sense, further off; as Christ saith, the Scribes and Pharisees "were farther from heaven," with all their shew of godliness, than publicans and harlots in all their sin and uncleanness. Because resting in a false work, a partial change, we neglect to seek after a true and saving change. There is nothing more common, than to mistake our state, and by overweening thoughts misjudge our condition, and so perish in our own delusions.

The world is full of these *foolish builders*, that lay the *foundation* of their hopes of eternal salvation *upon the sand.*

Now, my brethren, would you not mistake the way to heaven, and perish in a delusion? would you not be found fools at last? for none are such fools as the spiritual fool, who

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is a fool in the great business of salvation. Would you not be fools for your souls, and for eternity? O then labour after, and pray for, a thorough work of conversion; beg of God that he would make a saving change in your souls, that you may be *altogether* Christians; all other changes below this saving change, this heart-change, make us *but almost* Christians.

11. "A man may be very zealous in the matters of religion, and yet be *but almost* a Christian:" Jehu did not only serve God, and do what he commanded him, but was very zealous in his service. "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord of hosts;" and yet in all this Jehu was a very hypocrite. Joash was a great reformer in Jehoiada's time: it is said, "He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, all the days of Jehoiada the priest." But when Jehoiada died, Joash's zeal for God died with him, and he becomes a very wretch.—(2 *Chron.* xxix.)

Objection. But the apostle makes zeal to be a note of sound Christianity; "It is good to be zealously affected in good things;" nay, it seems to be the especial qualification for obtaining eternal life; "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."—(*Matt.* xi. 12.)

Answer. It is true, there is a zeal which is good, and which renders the soul highly ac-

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ceptable to God, a zeal that never misses of heaven and salvation.

Now this is a zeal which is a celestial fire, the true temper and heat of all the affections to God and Christ; it is a zeal wrought and kindled in the soul by the Spirit of God; who first works it, and then sets it on work. It is a zeal that hath the word of God for its guide, directing it in working, both in regard of its object and end, manner and measure. It is a zeal that checks sin, and forwards the heavenly life. It is a zeal that makes the glory of God its chief end, which swallows up all by-ends! "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up," saith the Psalmist.

But all zeal is not this kind of zeal: there is a false zeal as well as a true; every grace hath its counterfeit; as there is fire, which is true heavenly fire on the altar, so there is strange fire: "Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire upon God's altar."

There are several kinds of zeal, none of which are true and sound, but false and counterfeit.

I shall instance in eight particulars:

First, "There is a blind zeal," a zeal *without knowledge;* "They have a zeal, saith the apostle, but not according to knowledge." Now as knowledge without zeal is fruitless, so zeal without knowledge is dangerous, it is like wild-fire in the hand of a fool, or like the

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devil in the man possessed, that threw him "sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water."

The eye is the light of the body, and the understanding is the light of the soul; as the body, without the light of the eye, cannot go without stumbling; so the soul without the light of the mind, cannot act without erring.

Zeal without knowledge, is like an *ignis fatuus* in a dark night, that leads a traveller out of his way, into the bogs and mire. This was the zeal of Paul, while he was a Pharisee; "I was zealous towards God, as ye all are this day; and I persecuted this way unto the death." And again, "I verily thought with myself, I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth:" and "concerning zeal, persecuting the church."

Such a zeal was that in John. "They shall put you out of the synagogue," silence you, you shall not be suffered to preach; "yea, the time comes, that whoever kills you, will think that he doth God service."—(*John* xvi. 2.) This is great zeal, but yet it is blind zeal; and that God abhors.

Secondly, "There is a partial zeal;" in one thing hot, in another cold; zealous in this thing, and yet careless in another; many are first-table Christians, zealous in the duties of the first-table, and yet neglect the second: thus the Pharisees were zealous in their Cor-

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ban—(*Matt.* xxii. 23,) and yet unnatural to their parents, suffering them to starve and perish. Others are second-table Christians, zealous in the duties of the second-table, but neglect the first; more for righteousness among men, than for holiness towards God. But he whose religion ends with the first-table, or begins with the second, he is a fool in his profession; for he is *but almost* a Christian.

The woman that was for the *dividing* the child, was not the true mother; and he that is for dividing the commands, is not a true believer.

Jehu was zealous against Ahab's house; but not so against Jeroboam's calves; many are zealous against sin of opinion, that yet use no zeal against the sins of their conversation.

Now we know that the sweat of the whole body is a sign of health, but the sweat of some one part only shews a distemper, and therefore physicians do recken such a heat to be symptomatical.

So where zeal reaches to every command of God alike, that is a sign of a sound constitution of soul; but where it is partial, where a man is hot in one part, and cold in another; that is symptomatical of some inward spiritual distemper.

Thirdly, "There is a misplaced zeal;" fixed upon unsuitable and disproportionable objects; many are very zealous in trifling things

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that are not worth it, and trifle in the things that most require it; like the Pharisees that were diligent tythers of "Mint, Annise, and Cummin," but neglected the "weightier matters of the law; Judgment, Mercy, and Faith." They had no zeal for these, though very hot for the other; many are more zealous for a ceremony, than for the substance of religion; more zealous for bowing at the name of Jesus, than for conformity to the life of Jesus; more zealous for a holy vestment, than for a holy life; more zealous for the inventions of men, than for the institutions of Christ.

This is a superstitious zeal, and usually found in men unconverted, whom grace never was wrought in: when was it that Paul was so "exceeding zealous of the traditions of his Fathers," as he saith, but only when he was in his wretched and unconverted state? as you may see in the next verses; "but when it pleased God to call me by his grace, then I conferred not with flesh and blood:" Paul had another kind of zeal then, acted by other kind of principles.

Fourthly, "There is a selfish zeal," that hath a man's own ends for its motive; Jehu was very zealous, but it was not so much for God, as for the kingdom; not so much in obedience to the command, as in design to step into the throne; and therefore God threatens to punish him for that very thing he commands

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him to do; "I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu:" because he shed that blood to gratify his lust, not to obey God. So Simeon and Levi pretend great zeal for circumcision, seem very zealous for the honour of God's ordinances, when in truth their zeal was covetousness, and revenge upon the Shechemites.

Fifthly, "There is an outside zeal;" such was that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they would not eat with unwashed hands, but yet woul live in unseen sins; they would wash the cup often, but the heart seldom; paint the outside, but neglect the inside: Jehu was a mighty outside reformer, but he reformed nothing within, for he had a base heart under all, "Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord with all his heart." Though the fleece was fair, the liver was rotten.

Our Lord observes of the Pharisees, "They pray to be seen of men;" and fast so, "that they may appear to men to fast."

Sixthly, "There is a forensic zeal;" that runs out upon others, like the candle in the lanthorn, that sends all the heat out at the top; or as the lewd woman, Solomon mentions, whose "feet abides not in her own house."

Many are hot and high against the sins of others, and yet cannot see the same in themselves; like the Lamiæ, that put on their spectacles when they went abroad, but pulled them off within doors.

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It is easy to see faults in others, and as hard to see them in ourselves. Jehu was zealous against Baal and his priests, because that was Ahab's sin; but not against the calves of Bethel, because that was his own sin. This zeal is the true character of an hypocrite; his own garden is overrun with weeds, while he is busy in looking over his neighbour's pale.

Seventhly, "There is a sinful zeal;" all the former may be called sinful from some defect; but this I call sinful in a more special notion, because against the life and essence of religion; it is a zeal, against zeal, that flies not at profaneness, but at the very power of godliness; not at error, but at truth; and is most hot against the most spiritual and important truths of the times. Whence else are the sufferings of men for the truth, but from the spirit of zeal against the truth? This may be called a devilish zeal; for as there is the faith of devils, so there is the zeal of devils; "therefore his rage is great, because he knows his time is short."—(*James* ii. 10.)

Eighthly, "There is a zeal that is not regulated by the word, but by some base and low end:" such was Saul's zeal, when God bids him destroy Amalek, "and spare neither man nor beast;" then contrary to God's command, he spares the best of the sheep and oxen, under pretence of zeal for God's sacrifice.

Another time, when he had no such com-

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mand, then he slew the "Gibeonites in zeal to the children of Israel and Judah."

Many a man's zeal is greatest where he hath the least warrant from God.

The true spirit of zeal is bounded by Scripture; for it is for God, and the concernment of his glory; God hath no glory from that zeal that hath no Scripture warrant.

Now then, if the zeal of a man in the things of God may be only a blind zeal, or a partial zeal, or a misplaced zeal, or a selfish zeal, or an outside zeal, or a forensic zeal, or a sinful zeal, or a zeal for things uncommanded; then it is evident that a man may be very zealous in the matters of religion, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

12. "A man may be much in prayer, he may pray often, and pray much, and yet be *but almost* a Christian."

So did the Pharisees, whom yet our Lord rejects as hypocrites.—(*Matt.* xii. 13.)

Objection. But is not a praying frame an argument of a sincere heart? are not the saints of God called, The generation of them that seek the face of God?—(*Ps.* xxiv. 6.)

Answer. A man is not therefore a Christian, because he is much in prayer. I grant,

That those prayers that are from the workings and sighings of God's spirit in us; from sincere hearts lifted up to God; from a sense of our own emptiness, and God's infinite ful-

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ness; that are suited to God's will, the great rule of prayer; that are for spiritual things, more than temporal; that are accompanied with faith and dependence; such prayers speak a man *altogether* a Christian. But now a man may be much in prayer, and yet be a stranger to such prayer; as,

1. Nature may put a man upon prayer, for it is a part of natural worship; it may put a child of God upon prayer; so did Christ; "He went and fell on his face and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." This was a prayer of Christ, which flowed from the sinless strugglings of nature, seeking its own preservation.

2. A man may pray in pretence, for a covering to some sin; so did those devout Pharisees; "Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye devour widows houses, and for a pretence make long prayers, therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." So the Papists seem very devout to pray a rich man's soul out of purgatory, but it is to cheat the heir of much of his estate under pretence of praying for his father's soul.

3. A man may pray, and yet love sin; as Austin before *conversion* prayed against his *sin*, but was afraid God should hear him, and take him at his word. God hears not such prayers; "If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear my prayer," saith David.

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4. A man may pray much for temporal things, and little for spiritual things; and such are the prayers of most men; crying out most for temporal things: more for, "Who will shew us any good? than for Lord lift upon us the light of thy countenance."

5. A man may pray, and yet be far from God in prayer. "This people draw nigh to me with their mouths, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.—(*Isa.* xxix. 13.) A man may pray, and yet have no heart in prayer, and that God chiefly looks at; for it is said, "My son give me thy heart."

The Jews have this sentence written upon the walls of their synagogues; "prayer, without the intention of the mind, is but a body without a soul."

It is not enough to be conscientious about praying, but we must be conscientious in prayer. Many are so conscientious, that they dare not but pray; and yet so irreligious, that they have no heart in prayer; a common work of God may make a man conscientious as to duties, but nothing less than saving grace in the heart will make a man conscientious in the doing of them.

6. A man's prayer may be a lie; as a profession without sanctity is a lie to the world; so prayer without sincerity, is a lie to God. It is said of Israel, that they "sought God, and inquired early after him:" they were much

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in prayer, and God calls all but a lie. "Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied to him with their tongues, for their heart was not with him. (*Ps.* lxxviii. 34, 36, 37.) Hearken to my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips," saith David.

7. Affliction, and the pressures of outward evils, will make a man pray, and pray much: "When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned, and enquired early after God." The heathen mariners called every man upon his God, when in a storm: when they fear drowning then they fall to praying. *Jonah* i. 5. Mariners are for the most part none of the devoutest, nor much addicted to prayer: they will swear twice, where they pray once, and yet it is said, "They cry to the Lord in their trouble:" and hence you have a proverb, "He that cannot pray, let him go to sea."

"They poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them," saith Isaiah.

Now then, if nature may put a man upon prayer, if a man may pray in pretence, and design, if a man may pray, and yet love sin, if a man may pray mostly for temporal things, if a man may pray, and yet be far from God in prayer, if prayer may be a lie, or it may be only the cry of the soul under affliction; sure then, a man may be much in prayer, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

Objection. But suppose a man pray, and

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prevail with God in prayer, surely that is a witness from heaven of a man's sincerity in prayer: now I pray, and prevail, I ask, and am answered.

Answer. A man may pray, and be answered, for God many times answers prayers in judgment: as God is sometimes silent in mercy, so he speaks in wrath; and as he sometimes denies prayer in mercy, so he sometimes answers in judgment, when men are over importunate in something their lusts are upon, and will take no denial, then God answers in judgment, "He gave them their own desire." The Israelites had desired quails, and God sends them: but now mark the judgment, "While the meat was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew them."

Objection. But suppose a man's affections are much stirred in prayer, how then? is not that a true note of Christianity? now my affections are much stirred in prayer.

Answer. So was Esau's when he sought the blessing; "He sought it carefully with tears." A man may be affected with his own parts in a duty, while good notions pass through his head, and good words through his lips, some good motions also may stir in his heart, but they are but sparks which fly out at the tunnel of the chimney, which suddenly vanish; so that it is possible a man may pray and pre-

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vail in prayer; pray, and be affected in prayer, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

13. "A man may suffer for Christ in his goods, in his name, in his person, and yet be *but almost* a Christian."

Every man that bears Christ's cross on his shoulders, doth not therefore bear Christ's image in his soul.

Objection. But doth not our Lord make great promises to them that suffer, or lose any thing for him? Doth he not say, "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life?" Surely they are true Christians whom Christ makes this promise to.

Ans. There is a suffering for Christ, that is a mark of sincerity, and shall have its reward. That is, when a man suffers for a good cause, upon a good call, and with a good conscience, for Christ's sake, and in Christ's *strength;* when his sufferings are a filling up "that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ;—(*Col.* i. 24,) when a man suffers as a Christian, as the apostle hath it, "If a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed;" when a man thrusts not himself into sufferings, but stays God's call, such suffering is a proof of integrity.

But every suffering for Christ is not suffering as a Christian: For,

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1. A man may suffer for Christ, for that profession of religion that is upon him; the world hates the shew of religion; times may come, that it may cost a man as dear to wear the livery of Christ, as to wear Christ himself. Alexander had like to have lost his life for the Gospel's sake, (*Acts* xix. 33,) yet he was that Alexander, as is generally judged, that afterward made shipwreck of *faith*, and greatly opposed Paul's ministry.

2. A man may suffer for Christ and yet have no true love to Christ. "Though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profits nothing."—(1 *Cor.* xiii. 3.)

Love to Christ is the only noble ground of suffering; but a man may suffer much upon other ends.

1. Out of opinion of meriting by our suffering, as the Papists: Or,

2. Out of vain-glory, or for applause among professors; some have died that their names might live: Or,

3. Out of a Roman resolution, or stoutness of spirit.

4. Out of a design for profit, as Judas forsook all for Christ, hoping to mend his market by closing with him: Or,

5. Rather to maintain an opinion, than for truth's propagation. Socrates died for maintaining that there was but one God; but whether he died rather for his own opinion, than for

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God's sake, I think it is no hard matter to determine. Thus a man may suffer for professing Christ, and yet suffer upon wrong principles.

If then, a man may suffer for Christ, from the profession that is upon him, or suffer for Christ, and yet not truly love him; then a man may suffer for Christ, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

14. "A man may be called of God, and embrace this call, and yet be *but almost* a Christian." Judas is a famous instance of this truth; he was called by Christ himself, and came at the call of Christ, and yet Judas was *but almost* a Christian.

Objection. But is not the being under the call of God, a proof of our interest in the predestinating love of God? Doth not the apostle say, "Whom he predestinated, them he called?" Nay, doth he not say in the next verse, "whom he called them he justified?" —(*Rom.* viii. 30, 31.) Nay, doth not call all whom he intends to save?

Answer. Though God calleth all those that shall be saved, yet all shall not be saved whom God calleth: every man under the Gospel is called of God in one sense or other, but yet every man under the Gospel shall not therefore be saved. "For many are called, but few chosen."—(*Matt.* xx. 16.)

There is a two-fold call of God, internal and external.

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1. There is an *internal* call of God; this call is a special work of the Spirit by the ministry of the word, whereby a man is brought out of a state of nature, into a state of grace, "out of darkness into light, from being vessels of wrath, to be made heirs of life."—(*Acts* xxvi. 18.)

I grant that whoever is under this call of God, is called effectually, and savingly, called to be a Christian indeed. "Every man that hath heard and learned of the Father, comes to me."—(*John* vi. 45.)

2. There is a call of God which a man may have, and yet not be this call; there is an external call of God, which is by the ministry of the word.

Every man that lives under the preaching of the Gospel, is thus called; God calls every soul of you to repent, and lay a sure foundation for heaven and salvation, by the word you hear this day.—(See *Matt.* xxii. 9.)

But every man that is thus called, is not therefore a Christian: For,

1. Many under the call of God, come to Christ, but are not converted to Christ, have nothing of the grace and life of Christ; such as he, who when Christ sent out his servants to bid guests unto the marriage, came in at the call of Christ, but yet "had not on the wedding garment," that is, had none of the grace and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

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2. Many that are under the call of the Gospel, come to Christ, and yet afterwards fall away from Christ, as Judas and Demas did; it is said when Christ preached a doctrine that his disciples did not like, that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."—(*John* vi. 66.)

Now then, if many are under this external call of God only, if many that come to Christ, are not converted to Christ, but fall away from Christ; then a man may be called of God, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

15. "A man may have the Spirit of God, and yet be *but almost* a Christian." Balaam had the Spirit of God given him when he blessed Israel; "Balaam saw Israel abiding in tents, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him."—(*Numb.* xxiv. 2.) Judas had; for by the Spirit he cast out devils, he was one of them that came to Christ, and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us;" Saul had, "Behold a company of prophets met him; and the spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them."—(1 *Sam.* x. 10.)

Objection. But you will say, "Can a man have the spirit of God, and yet not be a Christian?" Indeed the Scripture saith, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" but surely if any man have the spirit of Christ, he is his.

Answer. There is a having the Spirit, which

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is a sure mark of saintship. Where the spirit is an effectual prevailing principle of grace and sanctification, renewing and regenerating the heart: where the spirit is as a powerful worker, "helping the soul's infirmities:" where the spirit is so as to "abide for ever." But every man that hath the spirit, hath not the spirit in this manner: For,

1. A man may have the Spirit only transiently, not abidingly; the Spirit may be in a man, and yet not dwell in a man; the Spirit is wherever he dwells; but he does not dwell wherever he is; he is in all, but dwells in saints only. The hypocrite may have the Spirit for a season, but not to abide in him for ever.

2. A man may have the Spirit, and yet not be born of the Spirit. Every true Christian is born of the Spirit; an hypocrite may have the gifts of the Spirit, but not the graces; the Spirit may be in him by *illumination*, but not by *sanctification*; by way of *conviction*, but not by way of *conversion*: though he may have much common grace for the good of others, yet he may have no special grace for the good of himself; though his profession be spiritual, yet his state and condition may be carnal.

3. A man may have the Spirit only as a spirit of bondage. Thus many have the Spirit working only to bondage; "*The spirit of bondage* is an operation of the Holy Ghost by the law, convincing the conscience of sin, and

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of the curse of the law, and working in the soul such an apprehension of the wrath of God, as makes the thoughts of God a terror to him."

This spirit may be, and often is, without saving grace; this operation of the spirit was in Cain and Judas.

There are none that receive the Spirit of *adoption*, but they first receive the Spirit of *bondage;* yet many receive the Spirit of *bondage*, that never receive the Spirit of *adoption.*

4. A man may have the Spirit of God working in him, and yet it may be resisted by him. It is said of the Jews, "They rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit;" and the same sin is charged upon their children; "Ye stiff necked,and uncircumcised in heart, ye have always resisted the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye."—(*Acts* vii. 51.) The hypocrite retains not the Spirit so long as to come up to regeneration and adoption, but quenches the motions of it, and thereby miscarries eternally.

5. A man may have the Spirit, and yet sin that unpardonable sin: he may have the Holy Ghost, and yet sin against the Holy Ghost; nay, no man can sin this sin against it, but he that hath some degree of it.

The true believer hath so much of the Spirit, such a work of it in him, that he cannot sin that sin: "He that is born of God sins not;" (1 *John* v. 16—18,) to wit, "that sin unto death," for that is meant. The carnal profess-

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ing sinner, he cannot sin that sin, because he is carnal and sensual, having not the Spirit. A man must have some measure of the Spirit that sins this sin; so hath the hypocrite; he is said to be "partaker of the Holy Ghost," (*Heb.* vi. 4,) and he only is capable of sinning the sin against the Holy Ghost.

If then, a man may have the Spirit transiently only, not abidingly; if a man may have the Spirit, and yet not be born of the Spirit; if he may have the Spirit only as a Spirit of bondage; if a man may have the Spirit working in him, and yet it may be resisted by him; if a man may have the Spirit, and yet sin that unpardonable sin against it; then surely a man may have the Spirit of God, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

16. "A man may have faith, and yet be *but almost* a Christian; the stony-ground," that is, those hearers set out by the stony-ground, "for a while believed." It is said, "That many believed in the name of Christ, yet Christ durst not commit himself to them." (*John* ii. 23.) Though they trusted in Christ, yet Christ would not trust them; and why? "because he knew all men," verse 24. He knew they were rotten at root, notwithstanding their faith; a man may have all faith, to the removing of mountains, and yet be nothing.

Objection. But how can this be, that a man may have faith, and yet be *but almost* a Chris-

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tian? Doth not our Lord promise life eternal and salvation to all that believe? Is not this the Gospel that is to be preached to every creature, "He that believes shall be saved?"—(*Mark* xvi. 16.)

Answer. Though it is true what our Lord saith, that "he that believes shall be saved;" yet it is as true, that many believe that shall never be saved; for Simon Magus believed; yea, James saith, "The devils believe and tremble:" but none will say, these shall be saved.

As it is true, what the apostle saith, "All men have not faith;" so it is as true, that some men have faith, who are no way the better for their faith.

You must know therefore there is a twofold faith,

1. Special and saving:
2. Common and not saving.

1. There is a saving Faith.

This is called *Faith of the operation of God.*—(*Col.* ii. 10.) It is a work of God's own Spirit in the soul.

It is such a faith as rests and casts the soul wholly upon Christ for grace and glory, pardon and peace, sanctification and salvation.

It is an united act of the whole soul, understanding, will, and affections, all concurring to unite the soul to an all-sufficient Redeemer.

It is such a faith: as "purifies the heart,"

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and makes it clean; it influences and gives strength and life to all other graces.

Whoever hath this faith, is a Christian indeed; this is the "faith of God's elect."—(*Tit.* i. 1.) But then,

2. There is a common faith, not saving, a fading and temporary faith; there is the faith of Simon Magus, as well as the faith of Simon Peter; Simon Magus believed, and yet was in the "gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Simon Magus hath more followers than Simon Peter; the faith of most men will at last be found to be no better than the faith of Simon Magus: For,

First, The faith of most is but a temporary faith, it endures for a while, and then dies and perisheth; true and saving faith, such as is the faith of God's elect, cannot die; it may fail in the act, but not in the habit; the sap may not be in the branch, but it is always in the root.

That faith that perisheth, that faith a man may have and perish.

Secondly, There is a faith that lies only in generals, not in particulars; as there is a general and particular object of faith, so there is a general and particular faith. The general object of faith is the whole Scripture; the particular object of faith is Christ in the promise.

Many have a general faith to believe all the Scripture, and yet have no faith to make

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a particular application of Jesus Christ in the promise.

Devils and reprobates may believe the truth of the Scripture, and what is written of the dying and suffering of Christ for sinners; but there are but few that can close up themselves in the wounds of Christ, and by his stripes fetch in healing to their own souls.

Thirdly, There is a faith that is seated in the understanding, but not in the will: this is a very common faith; many assent to the truth.

They believe all the attributes of God, that he is just, holy, wise, faithful, good, merciful, &c. But yet they rest not on him notwithstanding.

They believe the commands are true, but yet do not obey them: they believe the promises are true, but yet do not embrace and apply them: they believe the threatenings are true, but yet do not flee from them.

Thus their faith lies in assent, but not consent; they have faith to confess a judgment, but none to take out execution; by assent they lay a foundation, but never build upon it by application.

They believe that Christ died to save them that believe, and yet they believe not in Christ that they may be saved.

O my brethren, it is not a believing head, but a believing heart that makes a Christian; "with the heart man believes unto right-

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eousness;" without his our "faith is vain, we are yet in our sins."

Fourthly, There is a faith without experience; many believe the word upon hearsay, to be the word of God, but they never felt the power and virtue of it upon their hearts and consciences. Now what benefit is it to believe the truth of the word, if a man's conscience never felt the power of the word? what is it to believe the truth of the promise, if we never tasted the sweetness of the promise?

We are in this case like a man that believes the description others make of strange countries, but never travelled them to know the truth: or as a patient that believes all the physician says, but yet tries none of his potions. We believe the word, because we cannot gain-say it; but yet we have no experience of any saving good wrought by the word, and so are *but almost* Christians.

Fifthly, There is a faith that is without brokenness of heart, that does not avail to melt or soften the heart, and therefore is not true faith; for the least true faith is ever joined with a bending will, and broken heart.

Sixthly, There is a faith that transforms not the heart; faith without fruit, that doth not bring forth the new creature in the soul, but leaves it in a state of sin and death.

This is a faith that makes a man a sound professor, but not a sound believer; he be-

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lieves the truth, but not as it is in Jesus; for then it would change and transform him into "the likeness of Jesus." He believes that a man must be changed that would be saved, but yet is not savingly changed by believing. Thus while others believe to salvation, he believes to damnation; for "his web shall not become a garment, neither shall he cover himself with his work."—(*Isa.* lvi. 9.)

If then, a man's faith may be but temporary, or may lie only in generals, or may be seated in the understanding only, or may be without experience, or may be without a broken heart, or without a new heart; surely then, a man may have faith, he may "taste of this heavenly gift," and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

17. "A man may go further yet: he may possibly have a love to the people of God, and yet be *but almost* a Christian." Every kind of love to those who are saints, is not a proof of our saintship: Pharaoh loved Joseph, and advanced him to the second place in the kingdom, and yet Pharaoh was but a wicked man: Ahab loved Jehoshaphat, and made a league with him, and married his daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son, and yet Ahab was a wicked wretch.

But you will say this seems to contradict the testimony of the Scriptures; for that makes love to the saints and people of God, a sure proof of our regeneration, and interest in life

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eternal; "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren." (1 *John* iii. 14.) Nay, the Spirit of God putteth this as a characteristical distinction between saints and sinners, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." (1 *John* iii. 10.) By brethren we do not understand *Brethren by place*, those who are of the same country or nation, such as are called brethren in *Rom.* ix. 3. *Acts* vii. 23, 25. Nor do we understand *Brethren by race*, those who are descended of the same parents, such are called brethren in *James* i. 2. But by brethren, we understand *Brethren by grace*, and supernatural regeneration, such as are the children of God; and these are the brethren whom to love is a sure sign that we are the children of God.—(See *Phil.* i. 6.)

Answer. To this I answer, that there is a love to the children of God which is a proof of our being the children of God.

As for instance, when we love them as such, for that very reason, as being the saints of God, when we love them for the image of God, which appeareth in them, because of that grace and holiness which shineth forth in the conversations; this is truly commendable, to love the godly for godliness' sake, this is a sure testimony of our christianity. The love of grace

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in another, is a good proof of the life of grace in ourselves. There can be no better evidence of the spirit of Christ in us, than to love the image of Christ in others. For this is a certain truth, that a sinner cannot love a saint as such; "an Israelite is an abomination to an Egyptian." (*Gen.* iii. 15.)

There is a contrariety and natural enmity between the two seeds; between the children of the world, and those whom the father in his eternal love hath "chosen out of the world."

It is likeness which is the great ground of love: there is the highest dissimilitude and unlikeness between an unregenerate sinner, and a child of God, and therefore a child of God cannot love a sinner as a sinner; "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned." (*Ps.* xv. 4.) He may love him as a creature; he may love his soul, or he may love him under some relation that he stands in to him. Thus God loves the damned spirits, as they are his creatures, but as fallen angels he hateth them with an infinite hatred. So to love a sinner *quatenus* a sinner, this a child of God cannot do; so neither can a sinner love a child of God as a child of God. That he may love a child of God, that I grant, but it is upon some other consideration; he may love a person that is holy, not the person for his holiness, but for some other respect. As,

1. A man may love a child of God for his

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loving, peaceable, courteous deportment to all with whom he converseth. Religion beautifies the conversation of a man, and sets him off to the eye of the world. The grace of God is no friend to morose, churlish, unmannerly behaviour among men; it produces an affable demeanour and sweetness towards all; and where this is found, it winneth respect and love from all.

2. A man may love a saint for his outward greatness and splendour in the world; men are very apt to honour worldly greatness, and therefore the "rich saint shall be loved and honoured, whilst the poor saint is hated and despised." (*James* ii. 2, 3.) This is as if a man should value the goodness of his sword by the embroidery of his belt; or his horse for the beauty of his trappings, rather than for his strength and swiftness.

True love to the children of God, reaches to all the children of God, poor as well as rich, bound as well as free, ignoble as well as noble, for the image of Christ is alike amiable and lovely in all.

3. A man may love a child of God for his fidelity and usefulness in his place; where religion in the power of it taketh hold of a man's heart, it makes him true to all his trusts, diligent in his business, faithful in all his relations; and this procures respect. A carnal master may prize a godly apprentice or ser-

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vant that makes conscience of pleasing his master, and is diligent in promoting his interest.

I might instance in many things of the like nature, as charity, beauty, wit, learning, parts, &c. which may procure love to the people of God from the men of the world. But this love is no proof of charity: For,

First, It is but a natural love, arising from some carnal respect, or self-ends; that love which is made by the Scripture an evidence of our regeneration, "is a spiritual love," the principle, loadstone and attractive whereof is grace and holiness; it is a love which embraceth "a righteous man in the name of a righteous man."—(*Matt.* x. 41.)

2. A carnal man's love to saints, is a limited and bounded love; it is not universal "to the seed." (*Esther* x. 3.) As in sin, he that doth not make conscience of every sin, maketh conscience of no sin as sin; so he who doth not love all in whom the image of Christ is found, loveth none for that of the image of Christ which is found in them.

If then the love we bear to the people of God may possibly arise from natural love only, or from some carnal respect; or if it be a limited love, not extended to all the people of God, then it is possible that a man may love the people of God, and yet be no better than *almost* a Christian.

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18. "A man may obey the commands of God, yea, many of the commands of God, and yet be *but almost* a Christian." Balaam seems very conscientious of steering his course by the compass of God's command: when Balak sent to him to come and curse the people of God, saith Balaam, "if Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God;"—(*Numb.* xxii. 18,) and so in the 38th verse, said he, "The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." The young man went far in obedience, "all these have I observed from my youth up." (*Mark* x. 20.) And yet he was but an hypocrite, for he forsook Christ after all.

Objection. But is it not said, "he that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my father; and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him?"—(*John* xiv. 12.) And doth not our Lord tell us expressly, "ye are my friends if ye do whatever I command you?" And can a man be a friend of Christ, and be *but almost* a Christian?

I answer; that there is an obedience to the commands of Christ, which is a sure proof of our christianity and friendship to Christ.

This obedience hath a three-fold property.

It is, 1. Evangelical. 2. Universal. 3. Continual.

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First, It is evangelical obedience, and that both in matter and manner, ground and end.

In the matter of it; and that is what God requires; "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatever I command you."—(*John* xv. 14.)

In the manner of it; and that is according as God requires; "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

In the ground of it; and that is a "pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned."

In the end of it; and that is the honour and glory of God; "Whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Secondly, It is an universal obedience, which extendeth itself to all the commands of God alike; it respects the duties of both tables; such was the obedience of Caleb, "who followed the Lord fully," and of David, who had "respect to all his commands."

Thirdly, It is a continual obedience, a putting the hand to God's plow, without looking back, "I have inclined my heart to perform thy statutes alway, even to the end." (*Psalm* cxix. 112.)

He that thus obeys the command of God, is a Christian indeed, a friend of Christ indeed; but all obedience to the commands of God, is not this obedience. For,

1. There is a partial obedience, a piece-

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meal religion; when a man obeys God in one command, and not in another; owns him in one duty, and not in another; when a man seems to make conscience of the duties of one table, and not of the duties of another. This is the religion of most.

This obedience is no obedience; for as he that doth not love God above all, doth not love God at all; so he that doth not obey all the commands universally, cannot be said to obey any command truly. It is said of those in Samaria, that they "feared the Lord, and served their own gods after their own manner."—(2. *Kings* xvii. 23.) And yet in the very next verse it is said, "They feared not the Lord;" so that their fear of the Lord was no fear: in like manner, that obedience to God is no obedience, which is but a partial and piece-meal obedience.

2. A man may obey much; and yet be in his old nature, and if so, then all his obedience in that estate is but a painted sin; "he that offereth an oblation, is as if he offered swines blood; and he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an Idol."—(*Isa.* lxvi. 3.) The nature must be renewed, before the command can be rightly obeyed, for "a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." Whatever a man's performances are, they cannot be called obedience, whilst the heart remaineth unregenerate, because the principle is false and

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unsound. Every duty done by a believer, is accepted of God as a part of his obedience to the will of God, though it be done in much weakness; because though the believer's hand is weak, yet his "heart is right;"—(*Rom.* vi. 17,) the hypocrite may have the most active hand, but the believer hath the most faithful and sincere heart.

3. A man may obey the law, and yet have no love to the lawgiver; a carnal heart may do the command of God, but he cannot love God, and therefore cannot do it aright; for love to God is the foundation and spring of all true obedience; every command of God is to be done in love: this is the "fulfilling of the law." The apostle saith, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, (these seem to be acts of the highest obedience,) yet if I have not love, it profits me nothing."

4. I might add, that a man may be much in obedience from sinister and base selfish ends; as the Pharisees prayed much, gave much alms, fasted much; but our Lord tells us, that it was, "that they might be seen of men, and have glory of men." Most of the hypocrite's piety empties itself into vain-glory; and therefore he is but an empty vine in all he does, because "he bringeth forth fruit to himself."

It is the end that justifies the action: indeed a good end cannot make a bad action

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good, but yet the want of a good end makes a good action bad.

If then, a man may obey the commands of God partially, and by halves; if he may do it, and yet be in his natural state; if he may obey the commands of God, and yet not love God; if the ends of his obedience may be sinful and unwarrantable; then a man may be much in obeying the commands of God, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

19. "A man may be sanctified, and yet be *but almost* a Christian." Every kind of sanctification doth not make a man a new creature; for many are sanctified that are never renewed. You read of them that "count the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing."

Objection. But doth not the Scripture tell us, "That both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." And can a man be one with Christ, and yet be *but almost* a Christian?

Answer. To this I answer; you must know there is a two-fold work of sanctification spoken of in Scripture.

The one common and ineffectual;

The other special and effectual.

That work of sanctification which is true and effectual, is a working of the Spirit of God in the soul, enabling it to the mortifying of all

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sin, to the obeying of every command, " to walking with God in all well-pleasing."

Now whoever is thus sanctified, is one with him that sanctifieth. Christ will not be ashamed to call such brethren, for they are " flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone."

But then there is a more common work of sanctification, which is ineffectual as to the two great works of dying to sin, and living to God. This kind of sanctification may help to restrain sin, but not to mortify sin ; it may lop off the boughs, but it layeth not the axe to the root of the tree ; it sweeps and garnishes the room with common virtues, but doth not adorn it with saving graces ; so that a man is *but almost* a Christian, notwithstanding this sanctification.

Or thus, there is an inward and outward sanctification.

Inward sanctification is that which deals with the soul and its faculties, understanding, conscience, will, memory and affections. Outward sanctification is that which deals with the life and conversation ; both these must concur to make a man a Christian indeed ; therefore the Apostle puts them together in his prayer for the Thessalonians. " The God of peace sanctify you wholly ; and, I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." A man is then sanctified

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wholly, when he is sanctified both inwardly and outwardly, both in heart and affections, and in life and conversation. Outward sanctification is not enough without inward, nor inward without outward; we must have both "clean hands, and a pure heart." The heart must be pure, that we may not incur blame from within; and the hands must be clean, that we may not incur shame from without; we must have hearts "sprinkled from an evil conscience, and bodies washed with pure water. We must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit." Inward purity is the most excellent, but without the outward it is not sufficient; the true Christian is made up of both.

Many have clean hands, but unclean hearts; they wash the outside of the cup and platter, when all is filthy within: the former without the latter profiteth a man no more than it profited Pilate, who condemned Christ, to wash his hands in the presence of the people; he washed his hands of the blood of Christ, and yet had a hand in the death of Christ. The Egyptian temples were beautiful on the outside, but within you should find nothing but some Serpent or Crocodile. "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly." Judas was a saint without, but a sinner within; openly a disciple, but secretly a devil.

Some pretend to inward sanctity without

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outward; this is the pretence of the open sinner: "though I sometimes drop an idle foolish word, saith he, or though I sometimes swear an oath, yet I think no hurt; I thank God, my heart is as good as the best:" such are like the sinner Moses mentions, that "blessed himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine own heart, to add drunkenness to thirst."

Some pretend to outward sanctity, without inward; such are like the Scribes and Pharisees, who "outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity;" fair professors, but foul sinners.

Inward sanctity without outward, is impossible, for it will reform the life; outward sanctity without inward, is unprofitable, for it will not reform the heart; a man is not a true Christian without both; the body doth not make a man without the soul, nor the soul without the body; both are essential to the being of a man; so the sanctification of both, are essential to the being of the new man. True sanctification begins at the heart, but works out into the life and conversation; and if so, then a man may attain to an outward sanctification, and yet for want of the inward, be no better than *almost* a Christian.

20. And so I shall end this long pursuit of the *almost* Christian in his progress heavenward, with this one general conclusion.

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"A man may do all, as to external duties and worship, that a *true* Christian can, and when he hath done all be *but almost* a Christian."

You must know, all the commands of God have an within and without; there is, as I may say, the body and the soul of the command.

And accordingly there is an internal and an external worship of God.

Now the internal acts of worshipping God, are to love God, to fear God, to delight in God, to trust in God, &c.

The external acts of worshipping God, are by praying, teaching, hearing, &c.

There is a vast difference between these internal and external acts of worship; and such a difference there is, that they distinguish the *altogether* from the *almost* Christian; the sincere believer from the unsound professor; and indeed in this very thing the main difference between them doth lie.

1. Internal acts of worship are good in themselves; the goodness doth adhere intrinsically to the thing done; a man cannot love God, nor fear God, but it will be imputed to him for a gracious act, and a great part of his holiness.

But external acts of worship, are not denominated good, so much from the matter done, as from the manner of doing them; a man cannot sin in loving and delighting in

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God, but he may sin in praying and hearing, &c. for want of a due manner.

2. Internal acts of worship put a goodness into external; it is our faith, our love, our fear of God, that makes our duties good.

3. They better the heart, and increase the degree of a man's holiness; external duties do not always do this; a man may pray, and yet his heart never the holier; he may hear the word, and yet his heart never the softer: but the more a man fears God, the wiser he is: the more a man loves God, the holier he is: Love is the perfection of holiness, we shall never be perfect in holiness, until we come to be perfect in love.

4. There is such an excellency in this internal worship, that he who mixes it with his external duties, is a true Christian when he doth least: but without this mixture, he is *but almost* a Christian that doth most.

Internal acts of worship, joined with outward, sanctify them, and make them accepted of God, though few; external acts of worship, without inward, make them abhorred of God, though they be never so many.

So that although the *almost* Christian may do all those duties in hypocrisy, which a true Christian doth in sincerity; nay, though in doing external duties, he may out-do the true Christian, as the comet makes a greater blaze than the true star: if Elijah fast and mourn,

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Baal's priests will cut their flesh; yet he cannot do those internal duties that the meanest *true* Christian can.

The *almost* Christian can pray, but he cannot love God; he can teach or hear, &c. but he cannot take delight in God.

Mark Job's query concerning the hypocrite: "Will he delight himself in the Almighty?"—(*Job* xxvii. 10.)

He will pray to the Almighty, but will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he take pleasure in God?

Ah no! he will not, he cannot.

"Delight in God, ariseth from a suitableness between the faculty and the object; but nothing more unsuitable than God and a carnal heart."

Delight arises from the having what we desire, and from enjoying what we have: how then can he delight in God, that neither enjoys, nor hath, nor truly desires God?

Delight in God is one of the highest exercises of grace; and therefore how can he delight in God, that hath no grace?

Why then should any saint of God be discouraged, when he hears how far the *almost* Christian may go in the way to heaven; whereas he that is the weakest true believer, that hath the least true grace, goes farther than he, for he believes in, and loves God.

Should the *almost* Christian do less, as to

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matter of external duties yet if he had but the least true faith, the least sincerity of love to Christ, he would surely be saved; and should the true Christian do ten times more duties than he doth, yet, had he not faith in Christ, and love to Christ, he would surely be rejected.

O therefore, let not any weak believer be discouraged, though hypocrites may out-do them, and go beyond them in duty; for all their duties are done in hypocrisy; but your faith and love to God in duties, is a proof of your sincerity.

1. I do not speak this to discourage any soul in the doing of duties, or to beat down outward performances, but to rectify the soul in doing them.

As the apostle saith, "Covet earnestly the best gifts; but yet I shew you a more excellent way."—(1 *Cor.* xii. 32.) So I say, covet the best gifts, covet much to be in duties, much in prayer, much in hearing, &c. "But yet I shew you a more excellent way," and that is, the way of faith and love; pray much, but then believe much too. Hear much, read much, but then love God much too. Delight in the word and ordinances of God much, but then delight in the God of ordinances more.

And when you are most in duties, as to your use of them; O then be sure to be above duties as to your resting and dependence up-

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on them. Would you be Christians indeed, altogether Christians? O then, be much in the use and exercise of ordinances, but be much more in faith and dependence upon Christ and his righteousness; when your obedience is most to the command, then let your faith be most upon the promise.

The professor rests in his duties, and so is *but almost* a Christian; but you must be sure to rest upon the Lord Christ; this is the way to be *altogether* Christians; for, if ye believe, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

And thus I have answered the first query; to wit, how far a man may go in the way to heaven, and yet be *but almost* a Christian.

1. He may have much knowledge.
2. He may have great gifts.
3. He may have a high profession.
4. He may do much against sin.
5. He may desire grace.
6. He may tremble at the word.
7. He may delight in the word.
8. He may be a member of the church of Christ.
9. He may have great hopes of heaven.
10. He may be under great and visible changes.
11. He may be very zealous in the matters of religion.
12. He may be much in prayer.

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13. He may suffer for Christ.

14. He may be called of God.

15. He may in some sense have the spirit of God.

16. He may have some kind of faith.

17. He may love the people of God.

18. He may go far in obeying the commands of God.

19. He may be in some sense sanctified.

20. He may do all, as to external duties, that a true Christian can, and yet be no better than *almost* a Christian.

The second Question.

"Why, or whence is it, that many men go so far, as that they come to be *almost* Christians?"

First, "It may be to answer the call of conscience;" though few men have grace, yet all men have conscience.

Now observe, and you shall see how far conscience may go in this work.

1. "Conscience owns a God, and that this God must be worshipped and served by the creature." Atheists in practice we have many, such as the apostle speaks of. "They profess they know God, but in works they deny him."

But Atheists in judgment none can be; Tully, a heathen, could say, *Nulla gens tam barbara*, &c.

Now there being such a light in conscience

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as to discover that there is a God, and that he must be worshipped by the help of farther light, the light of the word; a man may be enabled to do much in the ways of God, and yet his heart without a dram of grace.

2. Know this, that "natural conscience is capable of great improvements from the means of grace;" sitting under the ordinances, may exceedingly heighten the endowments of conscience, though they do not sanctify conscience; it may be much regulated, though it be not at all renewed; it may be enlightened, convinced, and yet never savingly converted and changed.

You read in *Hebrews* vi. 4, of some that were "once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost." What work shall we call this? It could not be a *saving* work, a true change and conversion of state; for notwithstanding this enlightening, and tasting, and partaking, yet they are here said to *fall away*, verse 6.

Had it been a true work of grace, they could never have fallen away from that: a believer may fall, but he cannot fall away; he may fall foully, but he cannot fall finally; for "underneath are the everlasting arms." His faith is established in the strength of that prayer of Christ, "that our faith fail not:" nay, he tells us expressly, that it is eternal

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life which he gives, from which we shall *never perish.*

The work here spoken of, cannot be any saving work, because it is not an abiding work; for they that are under it, are said to fall away from it: but though it be not a saving work, yet it is a supernatural work; it is an improvement made by the word upon the consciences of men, through the power of the Spirit: and therefore they are said to "*taste* the good word of God," and to be made "*partakers* of the Holy Ghost." They have not the Spirit abiding in them savingly, but striving with them, and working upon them convincingly, to the awakening and setting conscience on work. And conscience thus stirred, may carry a man very far in religion, and in the duties of the Gospel, and yet be but a natural conscience.

A *common* work of the Spirit, may furnish a man very much to the duties of religion, though there must be a *special* work of the Spirit to fit him for salvation: a man may have the assisting presence of the Spirit, enabling him to preach and pray, and yet he may perish for want of the renewing presence of the Spirit, enabling him to believe. Judas had the former, and yet perished for want of the latter: he had the Spirit assisting him to cast out devils, but yet he had not the Spirit renewing him, for he was cast out himself.

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Thus a man may have an improved conscience, and yet be a stranger to a renewed conscience: and conscience thus improved, may put a man very much upon duty.

I pray God that none of us mistake a conscience thus improved by the word, for a conscience renewed by the Spirit; the mistake is very easy, especially when a life of duties is the fruit of it.

3. "The conscience of a natural man is subject to distress and trouble." Though a natural conscience is not sanctified with grace, yet it is often troubled at sin: trouble of conscience is not incident to believers only, but sometimes to unbelievers also. A believer's conscience is sometimes troubled, when his sin is truly pardoned: and a natural man's conscience is troubled for sin, though it is never freed from sin. God sometimes sets the word home upon the sinner's conscience, and applies the terrors of the law to it: and this fills the soul with fear and horror of death and hell: in this case, the soul usually betakes itself to a life of duties; merely to fence trouble out of conscience.

When Absalom sets on fire Joab's cornfields, then he runs to him, though he refused before: so when God lets a spark of hell, as it were, fall upon the sinner's conscience in applying the terrors of the word; this drives the sinner to a life of duties, which he never

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minded before. The ground of many a man's engaging in religion, is the trouble of his conscience; and the end of his continuing in religion, is the quieting of conscience; if conscience would never check him, God should never hear from him.

Natural conscience hath a voice, and speaks aloud many times in the sinner's ears, and tells him, *This ought not to be done; God must not be forgotten; the commands of God ought not to be slighted; living in sin will be the ruin of the soul.* And hence it is that a natural man runs to duties, and takes up a lifeless and graceless profession, that he may thereby silence conscience. As a man sick in his stomach, whatever sweet morsel he hath eaten, he brings up all; and although it was sweet in the eating, yet it is bitter in the rising: so it fareth with the sinner when he is sermon-sick, or conscience-sick; though his sin was sweet in the practice, yet the thought of it riseth bitter upon the conscience; and then his profession of religion is the pill he rolleth about in his mouth, to take away the bitterness of sin's taste.

4. "Natural conscience enlightened by the word, may discover to a man much of the misery of a natural state:" though not effectually to bring him out of it, yet so as to make him restless and weary in it: it may shew a sinner his nakedness; and hereupon the soul runneth to a life of duties, thinking hereby to

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remedy the misery of his case, and to make a covering for his nakedness. It is said, that when Adam and Eve saw they were naked, they "sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves a covering:" so it is when once the sinner seeth his nakedness and vileness by reason of sin; whereas he should run to Christ, and close with him, and beg his righteousness for a covering, "that the shame of his nakedness may not appear." He rather runneth to a life of duties and performances, and thus maketh himself a covering with the fig-leaves of a *profession*, without Christ truly embraced, and conscience at all renewed. Natural man would fain be his own Saviour; and supposeth a change of state to be a thing within his own power; and that the true work of grace lieth in leaving off the practice of sin, and taking up a life of duties: and therefore upon this principle doth many a graceless professor outstrip a sound believer; for he resteth in his own performances, and hopeth these will commend him to God.

Question. "If a natural conscience may go thus far, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners, and a renewed conscience in believers? or, how may I know whether the working of my conscience be the working of nature only, or of grace wrought in it?"

Answer. I grant that it is difficult to distin-

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guish between the one and the other; and the difficulty hath a two-fold rise.

1. It ariseth from that hypocrisy that is in the best saints: the weakest believer is no hypocrite, but yet there is some hypocrisy in the strongest believer: where there is most grace there is some sin, and where there is most sincerity, yet there is some hypocrisy.

It is very incident to a tender conscience to misgive and mistrust its state, upon the sight of any sin: when he sees hypocrisy break out in any duty or performance, then he complains. "Surely my aims are not sincere; my conscience is not renewed; it is but natural conscience enlightened, not by grace purged and changed*."

2. It ariseth from that resemblance there is between grace and hypocrisy; for hypocrisy is a resemblance of grace, without substance; the likeness of grace without the life of grace. There is no grace but a hypocrite may have somewhat like it: and there is no duty done by a Christian, but an hypocrite may outstrip him in it. But when one that hath not true grace shall go farther than one that hath, this may well make the believer question whether his grace be true, or not; or whether the workings of his conscience be not the work-

* Pygmalion made an image so lively that he deceived himself: and taking the picture for a person, he fell in love with the picture.

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ing of nature only, rather than of grace wrought in it.

But to answer the question; You may make a judgment of this in these *seven* particulars.

1. "If a natural man's conscience putteth him upon duty, he doth usually bound himself in the work of God:" his duties are limited, his obedience is a limited obedience: he does one duty and neglects another; he picks and chooses among the commands of God; obeys one, and slights another. Thus much is enough, what need any more? If I do thus and thus, I shall go to heaven at last.

But where conscience is renewed by grace, there it is otherwise; though there may be many weaknesses which accompany its duties, yet that soul never bounds itself in working after God; it never loves God so much, but still it would love him more; nor seeks him so much but still it would seek him more: nor doth it serve God so well at any time, but it still makes conscience of serving him better. "A renewed conscience is a spring of universal obedience: for it seeth an infinite excellency, and goodness, and holiness in God; and therefore would fain have its vice rise up toward some proportionableness to the object. A God of infinite excellency and goodness, should have infinite love, saith conscience; a holy God should have service from a holy heart, saith conscience.

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If then, I set bounds to my love to God, or to my service to God; if I limit myself in my obedience to the holy God; love one command and slight another; obey in one point and yet lie cross in another; then is all I do but the working of a natural conscience. But on the other hand, if I love the Lord with my whole heart, and whole soul, and serve him with all my might and strength; if "I esteem all God's precepts concerning all things to be right, and have respect to all his commands;" then is my love and service from a renewed conscience.

2. "If a natural man's conscience check or accuse for sin, then he seeks to stop its mouth but not to satisfy it." Most of the natural man's duties are to still and stifle conscience.

But the believer chooseth rather to let conscience cry, than to stop the mouth of it, until he can do it upon good terms, and till he can fetch in satisfaction to it from the blood of Jesus Christ, by fresh acts of faith apprehended and applied.

The natural man seeketh to still the noise of conscience, rather than to remove the guilt; the believer seeketh the removal of guilt by the application of Christ's blood; and then conscience is quiet of itself. As a foolish man, having a mote fallen into his eye, and making it water, he wipeth away the water, and labours to keep it dry, but never search-

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eth his eye to get out the mote; but a wise man mindeth not so much the wiping, as the searching his eye; somewhat is got in, and that causeth the watering, and therefore the cause must be removed.

If then, when conscience accuseth for sin, I take up a life of duties, a form of godliness, to stop the mouth of conscience; and if hereupon conscience be still and quiet, then is this but a natural conscience: but if when conscience checks, it will not be satisfied with any thing but the blood of Christ, and therefore I use duties to bring me to Christ; and if I beg the sprinkling of his blood upon conscience, and labour not so much to stop the mouth of it, as to remove guilt from it, then is this a renewed conscience.

3. "There is no natural man, let him go never so far, let him do never so much in the matters of religion, but still he has his Delilah, his bosom lust." Judas went far, but he carried his covetousness along with him: Herod went far, he did *many things* under the force of John's ministry; but yet there was one thing he did not, he did not put away his brother's wife, his Herodias lay in his bosom still. Nay, commonly all the natural man's duties are to hide some sin; his profession is only made use of for a cover-shame.

But the renewed conscience hateth all sin, as David did; "I hate every false way;"

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" he regardeth no iniquity in his heart;" he useth duties, not to cover sin, but to help work down, and work out sin.

If then, I profess religion, if I make mention of the name of the Lord, " and make my boast of the law, and yet through breaking the law dishonour God;" if I live in the love of any sin, and make use of my profession to cover it, then am I an hypocrite, and my duties flow but from a natural conscience; but on the other hand, if I " name the name of the Lord Jesus, and withal depart from iniquity;" if I use duties, not to cover, but to discover and mortify sin; then am I upright before God, and my duties flow from a renewed conscience.

4. " A natural man prides himself in his duties:" if he be much in duty, then he is much lifted up under duty. So did the Pharisee; " God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are;" and why? where lay the difference? why, " I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all," &c.

But take a gracious heart, a renewed conscience, and when his duties are at highest, then is his heart at lowest. Thus it was with the apostle Paul; he was much in service, " in season, and out of season;" preaching up the Lord Jesus with all boldness and earnestness; and yet very humble in a sense of his own unworthiness under all: " I am not worthy to be called an apostle. To me, who am less

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than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ:" and again; "Of sinners, I am chief." Thus a believer, when he is highest in duties, then is he lowest in humility. Duty puffeth up the hypocrite, but a believer comes away humbled; and why? because the hypocrite hath had no visions of God; he hath seen only his own gifts and parts, and this exalteth him; but the believer hath seen God, and enjoyed communion with God, and this humbleth him. Communion with God, though it be very refreshing, yet it is also very abasing and humbling to the creature. Hierome observeth on Zeph. i. 1, where it is said, that "Cushi was the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah;" that "Amariah signifieth the *word of the Lord;* Gedaliah signifieth *the Greatness of the Lord;* and Cushi is interpreted *Humility*, or *my Ethiopian:* so that, saith he, from the *word* of the Lord, cometh a sight of the *greatness* of the Lord, and from a sight of the greatness of the Lord, cometh *humility*."

If then, I pride myself in any duty, and am puffed up under my performances, then have I not seen nor met with God in any duty. But on the other hand, if when my gifts are at highest, my heart is at lowest; if when my spirit is most raised, my heart is then most humbled; if in the midst of all my services I

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can maintain a sense of my own unworthiness; if Cushi be the son of Gedaliah, then have I seen and had communion with God in duty, and my performances are from a renewed conscience.

5. "Look what that is to which the heart doth secretly render the glory of a duty, and that is the principle of the duty." In *Hab.* i. 16, we read of them that "sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their drag;" where the glory of an action is rendered to a man's self, the principle of that action is self. All rivers run into the sea; that is an argument they came from the sea: so when all a man's duties terminate in self, then is self the principle of all.

All the natural man's duties run into himself: he was never by a thorough work of grace truly cast out of himself, and brought to deny himself; and therefore he can rise no higher than himself in all he doth. He was never brought to be poor in spirit, and so to live upon another; to be carried out of all duties to Jesus Christ.

But the believer giveth the glory of all his services to God, whatever strength or life there is in duty. God hath all the glory; for he is by grace carried out of himself, and therefore seeth no excellence or worthiness in self.

"I laboured more abundantly than they all," saith the apostle: but to whom doth he ascribe

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the glory of this? to self? No; "yet not I," saith he, "but the grace of God which was with me." Whenever the grace of Christ is wrought in the heart as a principle of duty, you shall find the soul when it is most carried out, with a *yet not I*, in the mouth of it; "I live, yet not I;" I laboured more "abundantly than all, yet not I:" self is disclaimed, and Christ most advanced, when it is from grace that the heart is quickened; "the twenty-four elders cast their crowns at Christ's feet."—(*Rev.* iv. 10.)

There are two things very hard; one is, to take the shame of our sins to ourselves; the other is, to give the glory of our services to Christ.

If then, I sacrifice to my own net, if I aim at my own credit or profit, and give the glory of all I do to self, then do I *sow to the flesh*, and was never yet cast out of self, but act only from a natural conscience; but if I give the glory of all my strength and life in duty only to God; if I magnify grace in all, and can truly say in all I do, *yet not I*, then am I truly cast out of self, and do what I do with a renewed conscience.

6. "Though a natural conscience may put a man much upon service, yet it never presses to the attainment of holiness:" so that he carrieth an unsanctified heart under all. How long was Judas a professor, and that without

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one dram of grace? The foolish virgins, you know, "took their lamps, but took no oil in their vessels;" that is, they looked more after a profession than after sanctification.

But when a renewed conscience putteth a man upon duty, it is succeeded with the growth of holiness; as grace helpeth to the doing of duty, so duty helpeth to the growing of grace: a believer is the more holy and the more heavenly, by his being much in duties.

If then, I am much in a life of duties, and yet a stranger to a life of holiness; if I maintain a high profession, and yet have not a true work of sanctification; if like children in the rickets, I grow big in the head, but weak in the feet; then have I gifts and parts, but no grace; and though I am much in service, yet have I but a natural conscience. But on the other hand, if the holiness of my conversation carrieth a proportion to my profession, if I am not "a hearer of the word only, but a doer of it;" if grace groweth in seasons of duty, then do I act in the things of God from a renewed conscience.

7. And lastly, "If a natural conscience be the spring of duty, why then this spring runs fastest at first, and so abateth, and at last drieth up." But if a renewed conscience, a sanctified heart be the spring of duty, then this spring will never dry up; it will run always, from first to last, and run quicker at last than

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first: "I know thy works, and the last to be more than the first."—(*Rev.* ii. 19.) "The righteous shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger."—(*Job* xvii. 9.)

Question. But you will say, Why doth that man abate and languish in his duties, that doth them from a natural conscience, more than he that doth them from a renewed conscience?

Answer. The reason is, because they grow upon a fallible root, a decaying root, and that is nature: nature is a fading root, and so are all its fruits fading; but the duties done by a renewed conscience, are fruits that grow upon a lasting root, and that is Christ. "Gifts have their root in nature, but grace hath its root in Christ:" and therefore the weakest grace shall outlive the greatest gifts and parts; because there is life in the root of the one, and not in that of the other. Gifts and grace differ like the leather of your shoe, and the skin of your foot: take a pair of shoes that have the thickest soles, and if you go much in them, the leather weareth out, and in a little time a man's foot cometh to the ground; but now a man that goeth barefoot all his days, the skin of his feet does not wear out: why should not the sole of his foot sooner wear out than the sole of his shoe, for the leather is much thicker than the skin? The reason is, because there is *life* in the one, and not in the other; there

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is life in the skin of the foot, and therefore that holdeth out, and groweth thicker and thicker, harder and harder; but there is no life in the sole of his shoe, and therefore that weareth out, and waxeth thinner and thinner: so it is with gifts and grace.

If then, I decay and abate, and grow weary of a profession, and fall away at last; if I begin in the spirit, and end in the flesh, then was all I did from a natural conscience; but if I grow and hold out, if I persevere to the end, and my "last works be more than my first," then I act from a renewed conscience.

And thus I have in seven things answered that question, namely, if conscience may go thus far in putting a man upon duties, then what difference is there between this natural conscience in hypocrites and sinners, and *renewed* conscience in believers?

And that is the first Answer to the main Query; namely, "whence is it that many men go so far, as that they come to be *almost* Christians?"

It is to answer the call of *conscience*.

Secondly, "It is from the power of the word under which they live." Though the word doth not work effectually upon all, yet it hath a great power upon the hearts of sinners to reform them, though not to renew them.

1. It hath a discerning, discovering power: "The word of God is quick and powerful,

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sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow; and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." This is the glass wherein every man may see what manner of man he is: as the light of the sun discovers the little motes, so the *light of the word*, shining into conscience, discovers little sins.

2. The word hath the power of a law; it gives law to the whole soul, binds conscience; it is therefore frequently called *the Law* in Scripture; "Unless thy law had been my delight, &c. To the law and to the testimony." This is spoken of the whole word of God, which is therefore called *a Law*, because of its binding power upon the conscience.

3. It hath a judging power: "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day."—(*John* xii. 48.) The sentence that God will pass upon sinners hereafter, is no other than what the word passeth upon them here. The judgment of God, is not a day wherein God will pass any new sentence, but it is such a day wherein God will make a solemn public ratification of the judgment passed by the ministry of the word upon souls here. This I gather clearly from *Matt.* xviii. 18.—"Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in

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heaven." So that by bringing a man's heart to the word, and trying it by that, he may quickly know what that sentence is that God will pass upon his soul in the last day: for as the judgment of the word is now, such will the judgment of God be concerning him in the last day.

Indeed there is a two-fold power farther than this in the word.

It hath a *begetting* and *saving power:* but this is put forth only upon some.

But the other is more extensive, and hath a great influence upon a profession of goodness, even among them that have no grace.

A man that is under this three-fold power of discerning Law and Judgment, that hath his heart ransacked and discovered, his conscience bound and awed, his state and sinful condition judged and condemned; may take up a resolution of a new life, and convert himself to a great profession of religion.

Thirdly, "A man may go far in this course of profession from affectation of applause and credit, and to get a name in the world:" as it is said of the Pharisees, they "love to pray in the market places, and in the corners of the streets, to be seen of men."

Many are of Machiavel's principle, that the appearance of virtue is to be sought; because though the use of it is a trouble, yet the credit of it is a help.

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Jerome, in his epistle to Julian, calls such "the base bond-slaves of common fame."—Many a man doth that for credit, that he will not do for conscience; and owns religion more for the sake of lust, than for the sake of Christ; thus making God's stream to turn the devil's mill.

Fourthly, "It is from a desire of salvation." There is in all men a desire of salvation; it is natural to every being to love and seek its own preservation: "Who will shew us any good?" (*Ps.* iv. 6.) This is the language of nature, seeking happiness to itself.

Many a man may be carried so far out in the desires of salvation, as to do many things to obtain it.

So did the young man; "Good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" He went far, and did much, obeying many commands, and all out of a desire of salvation: so then, put these together, and there is an answer to that question.

"The call of conscience—The power of the word—The affectation of credit—And the desire of salvation."

These may carry a man so far as to be *almost* a Christian.

The third question propounded is this:

Question. Thirdly, "Whence is it that many are *but almost* Christians when they have gone thus far? What is the cause of this?"

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Answer. I might multiply answers to this question; but I shall instance in two only, which I judge the most material.

First, "It is for want of right and sound conviction." If a man be not thoroughly convinced of sin, and his heart truly broken, whatever his profession of godliness may be, yet he will be sure to miscarry. Every work of conviction is not a thorough work; there are convictions that are only natural and rational, but not from the powerful work of the spirit of God.

Rational conviction, is "that which proceeds from the working of a natural conscience, charging guilt from the light of nature, by the help of those common principles of reason that are in all men." This is the conviction you read of *Romans* ii. 14, 15, it is said, that "the Gentiles who had not the law, yet had their consciences bearing witness and accusing or excusing one another:" though they had not the light of Scripture, yet they had convictions from the light of nature; by the help of the Gospel light these convictions may be much improved, and yet the heart not renewed.

But then there is a *spiritual* conviction; and this is that work of the spirit of God upon the sinner's heart by the word, whereby the guilt and filth of sin is fully discovered, and the woe and misery of a natural state distinctly set

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home upon the conscience, to the dread and terror of the sinner whilst he abides in that state and condition.

And this is the conviction that is a sound and thorough work. Many have their convictions, but not this *spiritual* conviction.

Query. But you will say, "suppose I am at any time under conviction, how shall I know whether my convictions be only from a natural conscience, or whether they be from the spirit of God?"

Answer. I should digress too much to draw out the solution of this question to its just length: I shall therefore in *five* things only lay down the most considerable difference between the one and the other.

1. "Natural convictions reach chiefly to open and scandalous sins;" sins against the light of nature: for natural conviction can reach no farther than natural light.

But spiritual conviction reaches to "secret, inward, and undiscerned sins; such as hypocrisy, formality, lukewarmness, deadness, and hardness of heart," &c.

Observe then, whether your trouble for sin looks *inward* as well as *outward*, and reaches not only to open sins, but to secret lusts, to inward and spiritual sins: and if so, this is a sure sign of the work of the Spirit, because the trouble occasioned by these sins, bears a more immediate relation to the holiness of

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God, who only is offended by them; they being such as none else can see or know.

2. "Natural convictions deal only with a man's conversation," not with his state and condition, with sins actual, not original: but *spiritual* convictions reach to all sins, to sins of heart, as well as sins of life; to the sin of our nature, as well as the sins of practice; to the sin that is born in us, as well as the sin that is done by us.

Where the Spirit of the Lord cometh to work effectually in any soul, he holdeth the glass of the law before the sinner's eyes, and openeth his eyes to look into the glass, and to see all that deformity and filthiness that is in his heart and nature.

The apostle Paul said, "I had not known sin but by the law." How can this be true, that he had not known sin but by the law, when the light of nature discovers sin? It is said of the Gentiles, that "having not the law, they are a law unto themselves."

This sin therefore that the apostle speaks of, is not to be understood of sin actual, but of sin original: "I had not known the pollution of nature, that fountain of sin that is within; this I had not known but by the law." And indeed, this is a discovery that natural light cannot make.

It is true, the philosopher could say, "that lust is the first and chief of all sins." But I

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cannot think he meant it of original sin, but of the inordinateness of appetite and desire, at most; for I find that the wisest of the philosophers understood nothing of original sin. Hear Seneca: "sin is not born with thee, but brought in since."

Quintilian saith, "It is more marvel that any one man sins, than that all men should live honestly; sin is so against the nature of men." How blind were they in this point! And so was Paul, till the Spirit of the Lord discovered it to him by the word. And indeed this is a discovery proper to the Spirit. It is he that makes the sinner see all the deformity and filthiness that is within; it is he that pulleth off all the sinner's rags, and makes him see his naked and wretched condition; it is he that shews us the blindness of the mind, the stubbornness of the will, the disorder of the affections, the searedness of the conscience, the plague of our hearts, and the sin of our natures, and therein the desperateness of our state.

3. "Natural convictions lead the soul to look more on the evil that comes by sin, than on the evil that is in sin:" so that the soul under this conviction is more troubled at the dread of hell, and wrath, and damnation, than at the vileness and heinous nature of sin.

But *spiritual* convictions work in the soul a greater sensibleness of the evil that is in sin, than of the evil that comes by sin: the dis-

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honour done to God by walking contrary to his will; the wounds that are made in the heart of Christ; the grief that the holy Spirit of God is put to; this wounds the soul more than a thousand hells.

4. "Natural convictions are not durable," they "are quickly worn out:" they are like a slight cut in the skin, that bleeds a little, and is sore for the present, but is soon healed again, and in a few days not so much as a scar to be seen.

But *spiritual* convictions are durable, they cannot be worn out, they abide in the soul till they have reached their end, which is, the change of the sinner.

The convictions of the Spirit, are like a deep wound in the flesh, that goes to the bone, and seems to endanger the life of the patient, and is not healed but with great skill, and when it is healed leaves a scar behind it, that when the patient is well, yet he can say, "Here is the mark of my wound, which will never wear out."

So a soul that is under *spiritual* conviction, his wound is deep, and not to be healed, but by the great skill of the heavenly physician: and when it is healed, there are the tokens of it remaining in the soul, that can never be worn out; so that the soul may say, "here are the marks and signs of my conviction still in my soul."

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5. "*Natural* convictions make the soul shy of God." Guilt works fear, and fear causes estrangement: thus it was with Adam, when he saw his *nakedness* he ran away, and hid himself from God.

Spiritual convictions drive not the soul from God, but unto God. Ephraim's conviction was spiritual, and he runs to God, "turn thou me, and I shall be turned."—(*Jer.* xxxi. 3.) So that there is, you see, a great difference between conviction and conviction; between that which is *natural*, and that which is *spiritual;* that which is common, and that which is saving.

Yea, such is the difference, that though a man hath never so much of the former, yet if he be without the latter, he is *but almost* a Christian; and therefore we have great reason to inquire more after this *spiritual* conviction. For,

1st, "Spiritual conviction is an essential part of sound conversion." Conversion begins here; true conversion begins in convictions, and true convictions end in conversion.

Till the sinner be convinced of sin, he can never be converted from sin; Christ's coming was as a Saviour to die for sinners; and the spirit's coming is to convince us as sinners, that we may close with Christ as a Saviour; till sin be thoroughly discovered to us, interest in the blood of Christ cannot rightly be claimed by us; nay, so long as sin is unseen, Christ

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will be unsought. " They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

2. " Slight and common convictions, when they are but skin-deep, are the cause of much hypocrisy ;" slight convictions may bring the soul to clasp about Christ, but not to close with Christ ; and this is the guise of an hypocrite : I know no other rise and spring of hypocrisy, like this of slight convictions : this hath filled the church of Christ with hypocrites.

Nay, it is not only the spring of hypocrisy, but it is also the spring of apostasy : what was the cause that the " seed was said to wither away ?" It was because " it had no deepness of earth." Where there is thorough conviction, there is a depth of earth in the heart, and there the *seed of the word* grows ; but where convictions are slight and common, there the seed withers for want of depth : so that you see clearly, in this one instance, whence it is that many are but *almost* Christians, when they have gone so far in religion, to wit, for want of sound convictions.

Secondly, And this hath a near relation to the former ; " It is for want of a thorough work of grace first wrought in the heart :" where this is not, all a man's following profession comes to nothing ; that scholar is never like to read well, that will needs be in his Grammar before he is out of his Primer ; cloth that is not wrought well in the loom will never wear well, nor wear long, it will do little service ;

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so that Christian that doth not come well off the loom, that hath not a thorough work of grace in his heart, will never wear well, he will shrink in the wetting, and never do much service for God. It is not the pruning of a bad tree will make it bring forth good fruit; but "the tree must be made good, before the fruit can be good."—(*Matt.* xii. 23.)

"He that takes up a profession of religion with an unbroken heart, will never serve Christ in that profession with his whole heart."

If there be not a true change in that man's heart, that yet goes far, and does much in the ways of God, to be sure he will either die an hypocrite or an apostate.

Look, as in nature, if a man be not well born, but prove crooked or misshapen in the birth, why he will be crooked as long as he lives; you may bolster or stuff out his clothes to conceal it, but the crookedness, the deformity remains still; you may hide it, but you cannot help it; it may be covered, but it cannot be cured.

So it is in this case; if a man come into a profession of religion, but be not right born; if he be not "begotten of God, and born of the Spirit;" if there be not a thorough work of grace in his heart, all his profession of religion will never mend him; he may be bolstered out by a life of duties, but he will be but an hypocrite at last, for want of a thorough work

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at first; a form of godliness may cover his crookedness, but will never cure it.

A man can never be a *true* Christian, nor accepted of God, though in the highest profession of religion, without a work of grace in the heart. For,

1. "There must be an answerableness in the frame of that man's heart that would be accepted of God, to the duties done by him;" his spirit and affections within, must carry a proportion to his profession without: prayer without faith, obedience to the law given without fear and holy reverence of the lawgiver, God abhors: acts of *internal* worship must answer the duties of *external* worship.

Where there is no grace wrought in the heart, there can never be any proportion or answerableness in the frame of that man's heart, to the duties done by him.

2. "Those duties that find acceptance with God, must be done in sincerity." God doth not take our duties by tale, nor judge of us according to the frequency of our performances, but according to the sincerity of our hearts in the performance. It is this that commends both the doer and the duty to God; with sincerity God accepts the least we do, without sincerity God rejects the most we do, or can do: this is that temper of spirit which God highly delights in, *Prov.* xi. 20, "They that are of a froward heart are an abomination to

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the Lord, but such as are upright in the way are his delight."

The apostle gives it a great *epithet;* he calls it, in 2 *Cor.* i. 12, the *sincerity of* God; that is, such a sincerity as is his special work upon the soul, setting the heart right and upright before him in all his ways.

This is the crown of all our graces, and the commendation of all our duties. Thousands perish, and go to hell in the midst of all their performances and duties, merely for want of a little sincerity of heart to God.

Where there is not a change of state, a work of grace in the heart, there can be no sincerity to Godward; for this is not an herb that grows in nature's garden: "The heart of man is naturally deceitful, and desperately wicked;" more opposite to sincerity than to any thing: as things corrupted carry a greater dissimilitude to what they were, than to any thing else which they never were.

"God made man upright;" now man voluntarily losing this, is become more unlike to himself than to any thing below himself: he is more like a lion, a wolf, a bear, a serpent, a toad, than to a man in innocency.

So that it is impossible to find sincerity in any soul, till there be a work of grace wrought there by the Spirit of God; and hence it is that a man is *but almost* a Christian when he hath done all.

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The fourth Question.

4. " What is the reason that many go no farther in the profession of religion, than to be *almost* Christians ?"

Reason 1. " It is because they deceive themselves in the truth of their own condition ;" they mistake their state, and think it good and safe, when it is bad and dangerous. A man may look upon himself as a member of Christ, and yet God may look upon him as a vessel of wrath ; as a child of God, by looking more upon his sins than his graces, more upon his failings than his faith, more upon *indwelling lusts* than *renewing grace*, may think his case very bad, when yet it is very good : " I am black," saith the spouse ; and yet, saith Christ, " O thou fairest among women."—(*Cant.* i. 5, 8.) So the sinner, by looking more upon his duties than his sins, may think he sees his " name written in the book of life," and yet be in the account of God a very reprobate.

There is nothing more common than for a man to " think himself something when he is nothing," and so he " deceives himself." Many a man blesses himself in his interest in Christ, when he is indeed a stranger to him : many a man thinks his sin pardoned, when alas ! he is still " in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity." Many a man thinks he hath grace, when he hath none. " There is," saith Solomon, " that makes himself rich, and yet

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hath nothing." This was the very temper of Laodicea: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Thou knowest not]—as bad as she was, she thought her state *good;* as poor as she was in grace, she thought she was rich; "as miserable and naked as she was, yet she thought she had need of nothing."

There are several rises or grounds of this mistake.

I will name five to you.

First, "The desperate deceitfulness of the heart of every natural man." "The heart is deceitful above all things." The Hebrew word is the same with Jacob's name. Now you know he was a supplanter of his brother Esau; "he is rightly called Jacob," saith he, "for he hath supplanted me these two times."—(*Gen.* xxvii. 36.)

So the word signifies, to be *fraudulent*, *subtile*, *deceitful*, and *supplanting*. Thus is the heart of every natural man, "deceitful above all things."

You read of the deceitfulness of the *tongue*.

And of the deceitfulness of *riches*.

And of the deceitfulness of *beauty*.

And of the deceitfulness of *friends*.

But yet the *heart* is deceitful above them all; nay, you read of the deceitfulness of Sa-

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tan, (*Rev.* xx. 3,) yet truly a man's *heart* is a greater deceiver than he; for he could never deceive a man, if his own heart did not deceive him.

It is from hence that a man presumes upon the goodness of his case, from the desperate treachery of his own heart.

How common is it for men to boast of the goodness of their hearts? "I thank God, though I do not make such a shew and pretence as some do, yet I have as good a heart as the best." O do but hear Solomon in this case, "he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Will any wise man commit his money to the cut-purse? Will he trust a cheat? It is a good rule, remember to distrust; and it was Austin's prayer, that man that trusts to his own heart, shall be sure to find himself deceived at last.

Secondly, This mistake arises from *the pride of a man's spirit;* there is a proud heart in every natural man; there was much of this pride in Adam's sin, and there is much of it in all Adam's sons. It is a radical sin, and from hence arises this overweening opinion of a man's state and condition. Solomon saith, "Be not righteous overmuch." Austin in speaking of those words, saith, it is "not meant of the righteousness of the wise man, but the *pride* of the presumptuous man." In this sense every carnal man is righteous over-

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much, though he hath none of that righteousness which commends him to God, to wit, *the righteousness of Christ;* yet he hath too much of that righteousness which commends him to himself, and that is self-righteousness.

A proud man hath an eye to see his *beauty*, but not his *deformity;* his *parts*, but not his *spots;* his *seeming* righteousness, but not his *real* wretchedness.

"It must be a work of grace that must shew a man the want of grace." The *haughty* eye looks upward, but the *humble* eye looks downward, and therefore this is the believer's motto, *The least of saints, the greatest of sinners;* but the carnal man's motto is, *I thank God I am not as other men.*

Thirdly, "Many deceive themselves with common grace instead of saving, through that resemblance that is between them." As many take counterfeit money for current coin, so do too many take common grace for true; Saul took the devil for Samuel—(1 *Sam.* xxi. 14,) so many take *common* grace for *saving*, because it is like saving grace; a man may be under a supernatural work, and yet fall short of a saving work; the first raiseth nature, the second only reneweth nature; though every saving work of the spirit be supernatural, yet every supernatural work of the spirit is not saving; and hence many deceive their own souls, by taking a supernatural work for a saving work.

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Fourthly, "Many mistake a profession of religion for a work of conversion, and outside reformation for a sure sign of inward regeneration." If the outside of the cup be washed, then they think all is clean, though it be never so foul within. This is the common rock that so many souls split upon, to their eternal hazard, taking up *a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.*

Fifthly, "Want of a home application of the Law of God to the heart and conscience, to discover to a man the true state and condition he is in."

Where this is wanting, a man will sit down short of a true *work of grace*, and will reckon his case better *than it is*. That is a notable passage which the apostle hints concerning himself; "I was alive without the Law once, but when the Commandment came, sin revived, and I died."—(*Rom.* vii. 9.)

Here you have an account of the different apprehensions Paul had of his condition *with* and *without* the word.

1. Here is his apprehension of his condition without the word; "I was alive," saith he, "without the Law;" Paul had the Law, for he was a Pharisee, and they had the "form of knowledge, and of the truth of the Law;" (*Phil.* iii. 5. 6,) therefore when he saith, he was "without the law," you must not take him literally, but spiritually: he was without

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the power and efficacy of it upon his heart and conscience, convincing and awakening, and discovering sin; and so long as this was his case, he doubted not of his state, he was confident of the goodness of his condition; this he hinted when he saith, "I was alive;" but then,

2. Here is his apprehension of his condition with the word, and that is quite contrary to what it was before; "when the commandment came," saith he, "then sin revived, and I died."

When the word of the Lord came with power upon his soul, when the Spirit of God set it home effectually upon his conscience, that is meant by the coming of the commandment, "then sin revived, and I died;" that is, I saw the desperateness of my case, and the filthiness of all my self-righteousness.

Then my hope ceased, and my confidence failed; and as before I thought myself alive, and my sin dead; so when God had awakened conscience by the word, then I saw my sin alive and powerful, and myself dead and miserable.

So that this is the first reason why men go no further in the profession of religion, than to be *almost* Christians.

It is because they mistake their state, and think it good when it is not; which mistake is five-fold.

1. A deceitful Heart.

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2. A proud Spirit.

3. Taking *common* Grace for *saving*.

4. Outward Reformation, for true regeneration.

5. Want of home application of the law of God to the heart and conscience.

Reason 2. "It is from Satan's cunning, who if he cannot keep sinners in their open profaneness, then he labours to persuade them to take up with a form of godliness." If he cannot entice them on in their lusts, with a total neglect of Heaven, then he entices them to such a profession as is sure to fall short of heaven. He will consent to the leaving some sin, so as we do but keep the rest; and to the doing of some duties, so as we neglect the rest. Nay, rather than part with his interest in the soul, he will yield far to our profession of religion, and consent to any thing but our conversion, and closing with Christ for salvation; he cares not which way we come to hell, so as he gets us but thither at last.

Reason 3. "It is from worldly and carnal policy." This is a great hindrance to many. *Policy* many times enters caveats against *piety;* Jehu will not part with his calves, lest he hazard his kingdom.

Among many men there would be more zeal and honesty, were there less design and policy. There is an honest policy that helps religion, but carnal policy hinders it.

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We are commanded "to be wise as serpents;" now "the serpent is the subtilest of creatures;" but then we must be as "innocent as doves." If piety be without policy, it wants security; if policy be without piety, it wants integrity; piety without policy is too simple to be safe, and policy without piety is too subtile to be good.

Let men be as wise, as prudent, as subtile, as watchful as they will, but then let it be in the way of God, let it be joined with holiness and integrity.

That is a cursed wisdom that forbids a man to launch any farther out in the depth of religion than he can see the land, lest he be taken in a storm before he can make safe to shore again.

Reason 4. "There are some lusts espoused in the heart, that hinder a hearty close with Christ;" though they bid fair, yet they come not to God's terms; "the young man would have eternal life;" and he bid fair for it, a willing obedience to every command but one, but only one; and will not God abate him one? is he so severe? will he not come down a little in his terms when man rises so high? must man yield all? will God yield nothing?

No, my brethren, he that under-bids for Heaven shall as surely lose it as he that will give nothing for it: he that will not give all he hath, "part with all for that pearl of

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price," shall as surely go without it, as he that never once cheapens it.

The not coming up to God's terms is the ruin of thousands of souls; nay, it is that upon which all that perish, do perish; a naked sinner to a naked Christ, a bleeding broken sinner to a bleeding broken Christ; these are God's terms.

Most professors are like iron between two equal loadstones; God draws, and they incline towards God; and the *world* draws, and they incline to the *world;* they are between both, they would not leave God for the world, if they might not be engaged to leave the world for God.

But if they must part with all, with every lust, every darling, every beloved sin, why then the spirit of Demas possesses them, and God is forsaken by them.

My brethren, this is the great reason why many that come to be *but almost* Christians go no farther; some one beloved lust or other hinders them, and after a long and high profession, parts them and Christ for ever; they did *run well*—(*Gal.* v. 8,) but here it is that they give out, and after all fall short, and perish to eternity.

Thus having answered these four questions; namely,

1. "How far a man may go in the way to Heaven, and yet be *but almost* a Christian;"

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2. " Whence it is that a man goeth so far as to be *almost* a Christian ;"

3. " Whence it is that a man is but *almost* a Christian when he hath gone thus far ;"

4. " What is the reason men go no farther in religion, than to be *almost* Christians."

I proceed now to the application.

Inference 1. " That salvation is not so easy a thing as it is imagined to be ;" this is attested by our Lord himself ; *Matt.* vi. 14, " Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it." The gate of conversion *is a very* strait gate, and yet every man that would be saved eternally, must enter in at this *strait gate*, for salvation is impossible without it. " Except a man be born again," (born from above,) " he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Not that this gate is strait simply, and in respect of itself : no ; for converting grace is free ; the " gate of mercy stands open all the day long." (*Matt.* xxii. 3, 5.) In the tenders of Gospel grace none are excluded, unless they exclude themselves ; Christ doth not say, " If such and such will come to me, I will not cast them out ;" but, " him that cometh unto me, (be he who or what he will, if he hath a heart to close with me,) I will in no wise cast him out." He saith not, " If this or that man will, here is water of life for him ;" but, " if any man will, let him take the

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water of life freely." Christ grudgeth mercy to none; though salvation was dearly purchased for us, yet it is freely proffered us.

So that the *gate which leadeth to life* is not strait on Christ's part, or in respect of itself, but it is strait in respect of us, because of our lusts and corruptions, which make the entrance difficult; a needle's eye is big enough for a *thread* to pass through, but it is a strait passage for a cable rope; either the needle's eye must be enlarged, or the cable rope must be untwisted, or the entrance is impossible. So it is in this case, the gate of conversion is a very strait passage for a carnal corrupt sinner to go in at; the soul can never pass through with any one lust beloved and espoused; and therefore the sinner must be untwisted from every lust: he must lay aside the love of every sin, or he can never enter in at this gate, for it is a strait gate. And when he is in at this strait gate, he meeteth with a narrow way to walk in; so our Lord saith, "narrow is the way that leadeth to life," and what way is this, but the way of sanctification? for "without holiness no man shall ever see the Lord."

This way of sanctification is a very narrow way, for it lies over the neck of every lust, and in the exercise of every grace, subduing the one, and improving the other; dying daily, and yet living daily; dying to sin, and living

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to God; this is the way of sanctification: and O, how few are there that walk in this way: the broad way hath many travellers in it, but this narrow way is like the ways of Canaan in the days of Shamgar: it is said, "in the days of Shamgar the son of Anah, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways:" in the Hebrew it is *through crooked ways;* the way of *holiness* is by the most an unoccupied way; so saith the Prophet—(*Isa.* xxxv. 8, 9,)—"A way shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it; no lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; but the redeemed shall walk there;" the unclean, and the lion, and the ravenous beast, they are in the crooked ways; none but the redeemed of the Lord walk in the way of the Lord.

It is no wonder then, that our Lord saith of life, that "few there be that find it," since the *gate is strait*, and the *way narrow* that leadeth to it: many pretend to walk in the narrow way, but they never entered in at the strait gate; and many pretend to have entered in at the strait gate, but they walk not in the narrow way.

It is a very common thing for a man to perish upon a mistake of his way, to go on in those paths that take hold of hell, and yet hope to find heaven at last: those twenty parts

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fore-mentioned run into destruction, and yet many choose them, and walk in them as the way of salvation. As many profane and open sinners perish by choosing the *way of death*, so many formal professors perish by "mistaking the way of life." This I gather from that our Lord saith, "few there be that find it;" which doth clearly imply what in *Luke* xiii. 24, he doth plainly express, to wit, that many seek it; "many seek to enter in, and yet are not able; many run far, and yet do not *so run as to obtain;* many bid fair for the *pearl of price*, and yet go without it; hell is had with ease, but the "kingdom of heaven suffers violence."

Inference 2. "If many go thus far in the way to heaven and yet miscarry, O then what shall be the end of them who fall short of these!" If he shall perish who is *almost* a Christian, what shall he do who is not *at all* a Christian? If he that owneth Christ, and professeth Christ, and leaveth many sins for Christ, may be damned notwithstanding; what then shall his doom be that disowneth Christ, and refuseth to part with one sin, one lust, one oath for Christ; nay, that openly blasphemeth the precious name of Christ? If he that is outwardly sanctified shall yet be eternally rejected, what will the case be of such as are openly unsanctified, that have not only the plague of an hard heart within, but also the plague-

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sore of a profane life without? If the formal professor must be shut *out*, surely then the filthy adulterer, swinish drunkard, the deep swearer, the profane sabbath-breaker, the foul-mouthed scoffer, yea, and every carnal sinner much more: if there be a woe to him that falleth short of heaven, then how sad is the woe to him who *falls short* of them that *fall short of Heaven?* Ah, that God would make this an awakening word to sinners that are asleep in sin, without the least fear of death, or dread of damnation.

Use of Examination.

Are there many in the world that are *almost*, and yet *but almost* Christians? why then "it is time for us to call our condition into question, and to make a more narrow scrutiny into the truth of our spiritual estate," what it is, whether it be right or no; whether we are sound and sincere in our profession of religion, or no. When our Lord told his disciples, "one of you shall betray me," every one began presently to reflect upon himself; "master, is it I? master, is it I? So should we do, when the Lord discovers to us from his word, how many there are under the profession of religion that are *but almost* Christians, we should straightway reflect upon our hearts, *Lord is it I?* Is my heart unsound? Am I *but almost* a Christian? Am I one of them that shall miscarry at last? Am I an hypo-

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crite under a profession of religion? Have I a form of godliness without the power?

There are two questions of very great importance, which we should every one of us often put to ourselves:

"What am I?"

"Where am I?"

1. "What am I?" Am I a child of God or not? Am I sincere in religion, or am I only an hypocrite under a profession?

2. "Where am I?" Am I yet in a natural state, or a state of grace? Am I yet in the old root, in old Adam, or am I in the root Christ Jesus? Am I in the covenant of works that ministers only wrath and death? or am I in the covenant of Grace, that ministers life and peace?

Indeed this is the first thing a man should look at; there must be a change of state, before there can be a change of heart; we must come under a change of covenant, before we can be under a change of condition, for the new heart and the new spirit is promised in the new covenant: there is nothing of that to be heard of in the old; now a man must be under the new covenant, before he can receive the blessing promised in the new covenant: he must be in a new covenant-state, before he can receive a new covenant-heart, no mercy, no pardon, no change, no conversion, no grace dispensed out of covenant; therefore

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this should be our great inquiry, for if we know not *where* we are, we cannot know what we are; and if we know not what we are, we cannot be what we should be; namely, *altogether* Christians. Let me then, I beseech you, press this duty upon you that are professors, "try your own hearts, examine yourselves whether you are in the faith, prove your ownselves." I urge this upon most cogent arguments.

1. "Because many rest in a notion of godliness and outward shews of religion, and yet remain in their natural condition." Many "are hearers of the word," but "not doers of it," and so "deceive their own souls:" some neither *hear* nor *do;* these are profane sinners: some both *hear* and *do;* these are true believers: some *hear*, but they do not *do;* these are hypocritical professors.

He that slights the ordinances cannot be a true Christian; but yet it is possible a man may own them, and profess them, and yet be no true Christian. Who would trust to a profession, that shall see Judas a disciple, an apostle, a preacher of the Gospel, one that cast out devils, to be cast out himself? "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God."

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2. " Because errors in the first foundation are very dangerous;" if we be not right in the main, in the fundamental work; if the foundation be not laid in grace in the heart, all our following profession comes to nothing: the house is built upon a sandy foundation, and though it may stand for a while, yet " when the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon it, great will be the fall of it."

3. " Because many are the deceits that our souls are liable to in this case:" there are many things like grace, that are not grace; now it is the likeness and similitude of things that deceives, and makes one thing to be taken for another.

Many take *gifts* for *grace*, *common* knowledge for *saving* knowledge; whereas a man may have great gifts, and yet no grace; great knowledge, and yet not know Jesus Christ.

Some take *common* faith for *saving*, whereas a man may believe all the truths of the Gospel, all the promises, all the threatenings, all the articles of the Creed to be true, and yet perish for want of saving faith.

Some take *morality* and *restraining grace for piety* and *renewing grace*, whereas it is common to have sin much restrained, where the heart is not renewed.

Some are deceived with a half work, taking *conviction* for *conversion*, *reformation* for *regeneration;* we have many Mermaid Christians:

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Or like Nebuchadnezzar's image, head of gold, and feet of clay: the Devil cheats most men by a synecdoche, putting a part for the whole; partial obedience to some commands, for universal obedience to all. Endless are the delusions that Satan fastens upon souls, for want of this self-search: it is necessary therefore that we try our state, lest we take the shadow for the substance.

4. "Satan will try us at one time or other:" he will winnow us, and sift us to the bottom; (*Luke* ii. 31,) and if we now rest in a groundless confidence, it will then end in a comfortless despair.

Nay, God himself will search and try us at the day of judgment especially, and who can abide that trial, that never tries his own heart?

5 "Whatsoever a man's state be, whether he be *altogether* a Christian or no, whether his principle be sound or no, yet it is good to examine his own heart:" if he find his heart good, his principles right and sound, this will be matter of rejoicing: if he find his heart rotten, his principles false and unsound, the discovery is in order to a renewing: if a man have a disease upon him, and know it, he may send to the physician in time; but what a sad vexation will it be, not to see a disease till it be past cure? So for a man to be graceless, and not see it till it be too late, to think himself a Christian when he is not, and that he is in the right

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way to heaven, when he is in the ready way to hell, and yet not know it till a death-bed or a judgment-day confute his confidence; this is the most irrecoverable misery.

These are the grounds upon which I press this duty, of examining our state: O that God would help us in the doing this necessary duty!

Question. You say, "But how shall I come to know whether I am *almost* or *altogether* a Christian?" If a man may go *so far*, and yet miscarry, how shall I know when my foundation is right, when I am a Christian *indeed?*

Answer, 1. "The *altogether* Christian closes with, and accepts of Christ upon Gospel-terms." True union makes a true Christian: many close with Christ, but it is upon their own terms; they take him, and own him, but not as God offers him. The terms upon which God in the Gospel offers Christ, are, that we shall accept of a broken Christ with a broken heart, and yet a whole Christ with a whole heart.

A broken Christ with a broken heart, as a witness of our humility; a whole Christ with a whole heart, as a witness of our sincerity. A broken Christ respects his sufferings for sin; a broken heart respects our sense of sin; a whole Christ includes all his offices; a whole heart includes all our faculties. Christ is a King, Priest and Prophet, and all as Mediator; without any one of these offices, the work of salvation could not have been completed: as

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a Priest, he *redeems us*; as a Prophet, he *instructs us*; as a King, he *sanctifies* and *saves* us; therefore the apostle says, "he is made to us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption:" righteousness and redemption flow from him as a Priest, wisdom as a Prophet, sanctification as a King.

Many embrace Christ as a Priest, but yet they own him not as a King and Prophet; "they like to share in his righteousness," but not to partake of his holiness; they would be redeemed by him, but they would not submit to him; they would be saved by his blood, but not submit to his power. Many love the privileges of the Gospel, but not the duties of the Gospel. These are *but almost* Christians, notwithstanding their close with Christ, for it is upon their own terms, but not upon God's. The offices of Christ may be distinguished, but they can never be divided.

But the true Christian owns Christ in all his offices; he doth not only close with him as Jesus, but as Lord Jesus: he says with Thomas, "My Lord, and my God." He doth not only believe in the merit of his death, but also conforms to the manner of his life; as he believes in him, so he lives to him; he takes him for his wisdom, as well as for his righteousness, for his sanctification as well as his redemption.

2. "The *altogether* Christian hath a tho-

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rough work of grace and sanctification wrought in the heart, as a spring of duties. *Regeneration* is a whole change, all old things are done away, and all things become new:" it is a perfect work as to parts, though not as to degrees. Carnal men do duties, but they are from an unsanctified heart, and that spoils all. A " new piece of cloth" never doth well " in an old garment," for the " rent is but made worse." When a man's heart is thoroughly renewed by grace, the mind savingly enlightened, the *conscience* thoroughly convinced, the will truly humbled and subdued, the affections spiritually raised and sanctified, and when the mind, and will, and conscience, and affections, all join issue to help on with the performance of the duties commanded; then is a man *altogether* a Christian.

3. " He that is *altogether* a Christian, looks to the manner as well as to the matter of his duties:" not only that they be done, but how they be done; not only that they be done, but that they be done well.

Here the *almost* Christian fails, he doth the same duties that others do for the matter, but he doth them not in the same manner; while he minds the substance, he regards not the circumstance; if he pray, he regards not *faith* and *fervency* in prayer; if he hear, he doth not mind Christ's rule, " take heed how you hear;" if he obeys, he looks not to the frame

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of his heart in obeying, and therefore miscarries in all he doth; any of these defects spoil the good of every duty.

4. "The *altogether* Christian is known by his sincerity, in all his performances." Whatever a man does in the duties of the Gospel, he cannot be a Christian without sincerity. The *almost* Christian fails in this; for though he doth much, prays much, hears much, obeys much, yet he is an hypocrite under all.

5. He that is *altogether* a Christian, hath an "answerableness within to the law without:" there is a correspondence between the word of God and the will of a Christian; his heart is, as it were, the transcript of the law; the same holiness that is commanded in the word, is implanted in his heart; the same conformity to Christ, that is enjoined by the word of God, is wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God; the same *obedience* which the word requireth of him, the Lord enableth him to perform, by his grace bestowed on him. This is that which is promised in the new covenant: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." The writing his law in us, is nothing else but his working that grace and holiness in us which the law commandeth and requireth of us.

In the old covenant administration, God wrote his laws only upon tables of *stone*, but not upon the heart; and therefore, though

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God wrote them, yet they broke them; but in the new covenant administration, God provides new tables; not tables of stone, but "the fleshly tables of the heart," and writes his laws there, that there might be a *law within*, answerable to the *law without;* and this every true Christian hath; so that he may say in his measure, as Christ did; "I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart." —(*Ps.* xl. 8.) Every believer hath a light within him, not guiding him to despise and slight, but to prize and walk by the light without him; the word commands him to walk in the light, and the light directs him to walking *according to the word.*

Moreover, from this impression of the law upon the heart, obedience and conformity to God becomes the choice and delight of the soul; for holiness is the very nature of the new creature; so that if there were no Scripture, no Bible to guide him, yet he would be holy, for he hath received "grace for grace;" there is a grace within to answer to the word of grace without.

The *almost* Christian is a stranger to this law of God within; he may have some conformity to the word in outward conversation, but he cannot have this answerableness to the word in inward constitution.

6. "The *altogether* Christian is much in duty, and yet much above duty;" much *in*

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duty, in regard to performances; much *above* duty, in regard of dependence; much *in* duty by obeying; but much *above* duty by believing: he lives in his obedience, but he doth not live upon his obedience, but upon Christ and his righteousness.

The *almost* Christian fails in this: he is much *in* duty, but not above it, but rests *in* it; he works for *rest*, and he rests in his *works*; he cannot come to believe and obey too; if he believes, then he thinks there is no need of obedience, and so casts off that; if he be much in obedience, then he casts off believing, and thinks there is no need of that: he cannot say with David, "I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments."

The more a man is *in* duty, and the more *above* it; the more in *doing*, and more in *believing*, the more a Christian.

7. "He that is *altogether* a Christian is universal in his obedience: he doth not obey one command and neglect another, do one duty and cast off another; but he hath respect to all the commands, he endeavours to leave every sin, and love every duty.

The *almost* Christian fails in this, his obedience is partial and piece-meal; if he obeys one command, he breaks another; the duties that least cross his lust, he is much in; but those that do, he lays aside.

The Pharisees "fasted, prayed, paid tithes,

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&c. but they did not lay aside their covetousness, their oppression; they "devoured widows houses," they were "unnatural to parents."—(*Matt.* iii. 14.)

8. "The *altogether* Christian makes God's glory the chief end of all his performances:" if he prays, or hears, or gives, or fasts, or repents, or obeys, &c. God's glory is the main end of all. It is true, he may have somewhat else at the hither end of his work, but God is at the farther end; as Moses's rod swallowed up the magician's rods, so God's glory is the ultimate end that swallows up all his other ends. The *almost* Christian fails in this, his ends are corrupt and selfish; God may possibly be at the hither end of his work, but self is at the farther end; for he that was never truly cast out of himself, can have no higher end than himself.

Examine thyself then, by these characters, put the question to thy own soul; dost thou close with Christ upon Gospel terms? Is grace in the heart the principle of thy performances? Dost thou look to the manner, as well as the matter of thy duties? Dost thou do all in sincerity? Is there an answerableness within to the law without? Art thou much *above* duty, when much *in* duty? Is thy obedience universal? Lastly, is God's glory the end of all? If so, then art thou not only *almost* but *altogether* a Christian.

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Second Use of Caution. " O take heed of being *almost*, and yet but *almost* a Christian." It is a great complaint of God against Ephraim that " he is a cake not turned ;" that is, *half baked*, neither *raw* nor *roasted*, neither cold nor hot, as Laodicea, " Because thou art neither hot nor cold, therefore I will spew thee out of my mouth."

This is a condition that of all others, is greatly unprofitable, exceedingly uncomfortable, and desperately dangerous.

First, " It is greatly unprofitable to be *but almost* a Christian ;" for failing in any one point, will ruin us as surely as if we had never made any attempts for heaven. It is no advantage to the soul to be almost converted ; for the little that we want, spoils the good of all our attainments : there is no profit in leaving this or that sin, unless we leave all sin. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things, but he kept his Herodias, and that ruined him. Judas did many things, *prayed* much, preached much, professed much, but yet his *covetousness* spoiled all ; one sin ruined the young man, that had kept all the commands but one. Thus he " that offends in one point, is guilty of all ;" that is, that lives wilfully and allowedly in any one sin, he brings the guilt of the violation of the whole law of God upon his soul, and that upon a two-fold account.

1. Because he manifests the same contempt

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of the authority of God, in the wilful breach of one, as of all.

2. By allowing himself in the breach of any one command, he shews he kept none in obedience and conscience to God; for he that hates sin as sin, hates all sin, and he that obeys the command as the express will of God, obeys every command. And for this cause, the least sin, wilfully, and with allowance lived in, spoils the good of all our obedience, and lays the soul under the whole wrath of God. One leak in a ship may sink her, though she be tight every way else; "Gideon had seventy sons," and but one bastard, and yet that one bastard destroyed all his sons; so may one sin spoil all our services; one lust beloved may spoil all our profession, as that one bastard slew all the sons of Gideon.

Secondly, "It is exceedingly uncomfortable;" as appears *three* ways.

1. "In that such a one is hated of God and men;" the world hates him because of his profession, and God abhors him because of his dissimulation; the world hates him because he *seems* good, and God hates him because he doth *but seem* so. No person that God hates more than the *almost* Christian; "I would thou wert either cold or hot;" either *all* a Christian, or *not at all* a Christian.

"Because thou art neither cold nor hot, therefore I will spew thee out of my mouth."

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What a loathsome expression doth God here use, to shew what an utter abhorrency there is in him against lukewarm Christians!

How uncomfortable then must that condition needs be, wherein a man is abhorred both of God and man?

2. "It is uncomfortable on account of sufferings;" for being *almost* a Christian, will bring us into suffering; but being *but almost* a Christian, will never carry us through suffering. In *Matt.* xiii. 20, 21, it is said, "He that receiveth the seed into stony ground, the same is he that hears the word, and with joy receives it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by-and-by he is offended."

There are *four* things observable in these words.

1. That the stony ground may receive the word with joy.

2. That it may for some time abide in a profession of it; *he dureth for a while.*

3. That this profession will expose to suffering; for mark, *persecution* is said to *arise because of the word.*

4. This suffering will cause an apostatizing from profession; for that which is here called *offence*, is in *Luke* viii. 13, called "falling away: which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away."

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I gather hence, a profession may expose a man as much to suffering as the power of godliness; but without the power of godliness there is no holding out in a profession under suffering. The world hates the shew of godliness, and therefore persecutes it; the *almost* Christian wants the substance, and therefore cannot hold out in it.

This must needs be very uncomfortable; if I *profess* religion, I am like to suffer; if I do *but profess* it, I am never like to endure.

3. "It is uncomfortable on account of that deceit it lays our hopes under;" to be deceived in our hopes causeth sorrow as well as shame. He that is *but almost* a Christian, hopes for heaven; but unless he be *altogether* a Christian, he shall never come there.

Now to perish with hopes of heaven, to go to hell by the gates of glory, to come to the very door, and then be shut out, as the *five virgins* were; to die in the wilderness, within sight of the promised land, at the very brinks of Jordan; this must needs be sad; to come within a stride of the goal, and yet miss it; to sink within sight of harbour; O how uncomfortable is this!

4. "As it is greatly unprofitable, and exceedingly uncomfortable, to be *but almost* a christian, so it is desperately dangerous;" For,

1. "This hinders the true work:" a man lies in a fairer capacity for conversion, that lies in

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open enmity and rebellion, than he that soothes up himself in the formalities of religion. This I gather from that parable of the two sons which our Lord urged to the professing Scribes and Pharisees.

"There was a man had two sons, and he came to one, and said, *Go work to-day in my vineyard:* he said, *I will not;* but afterwards repented and went."—(*Matt.* xxi. 28—32.)

"And he came to the second, and said likewise; and he said, *I go, Sir;* but went not."

The first represents the carnal open sinner, that is called by the word, but refuses, yet afterwards repents and believes. The second represents the hypocritical professor, that pretends much, but performs little. Mark how Christ applies this parable, verse 31, "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

And upon this account it is better not to be at all, than to be *almost* a Christian; for the almost hinders the altogether. It is better, in this regard, to be a sinner without a profession than to be a professor without conversion, for the one lies fairer for an inward change, when the other rests in an outward. Our Lord tells the Scribe, "thou art not far from the kingdom of God," yet never like to come there. None farther from the kingdom of God, than such as are not far from the kingdom of God. As for instance, when there lies but

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one lust, one sin between a soul and Christ, that soul is not far from Christ; but when the soul rests in this nearness to Christ, and yet will not part with that one lust for Christ, but thinks his condition secured, though that lust be not subdued; who is farther from the kingdom of God than he?

So our Lord tells the young man, "One thing thou lackest;" why, he was very near Heaven, near being a Christian altogether, he was almost saved; he tells Christ he had kept all the commands. He lacked but *one thing;* I say, but one thing: but it was a great thing; that one thing he lacked was more than all things he had, for it was the *one thing necessary;* it was a new heart, a work of grace in his soul, a change of state, a heart weaned from the world; this was the one thing, and he that lacks this one thing, perishes with his all things else.

2. "This condition is so like a state of grace, that the mistake of it for grace is easy and common;" and it is very dangerous to mistake any thing for grace that is not grace; for in that a man contents himself, as if it were grace. Formality doth often dwell next door to sincerity, and one sign serves both; and so the house may be easily mistaken, and by that means a man may take up his lodging there, and never find the way out again.

What one saith of wisdom, (many might

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have been wise, had they not thought themselves so when they were otherwise,) the same I may say of grace; many a formal professor might have been a sincere believer, had he not mistook his profession for conversion, his duties for grace, and so rested in that for sincerity that is but hypocrisy.

3. "It is a degree of blasphemy to pretend to grace, and yet have no grace." I gather this from that, *Rev.* ii. 9, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not." This place undergoes a variety of constructions; *Grotius* and *Paræus* do not make their blasphemy to lie in their saying they are *Jews*, and are *not;* but to lie in the reproaches that these Jews fastened upon Christ, calling him *imposter, deceiver, one that hath a devil*, &c.

Brightman goes another way, and saith, this was the blasphemy of these Jews, they retained that way of worship that was abrogated, and thrust upon God those old *rites* and *ceremonies* which Jesus Christ had abolished, *and nailed to his cross*, by which they overthrew the glory of Christ, and denied his coming.

But I conceive the blasphemy of these Jews to lie in this, that *they said they were Jews and were not.* A *Jew* here is not to be taken literally and strictly only, for one of the lineage of *Abraham*, but it is to be taken *metonymically* for a true believer, one of the spiritual

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seed of *Abraham*: *He is a jew which is one inwardly*; so that for a man to say he is a *Jew* when he is not, to profess an interest in Christ when he hath none, to say he hath grace when he hath none, this Christ calls blasphemy.

But why should Christ call this blasphemy? This is hypocrisy; but how may it be said to be blasphemy? Why, he blasphemes the great attribute of God's omnisciency, he doth implicitly deny that God sees and knows our hearts and thoughts; for if a man did believe the omnisciency of God, that he searches the heart, and sees and knows all within, he would not dare to rest in a graceless profession of godliness: this, therefore, is blasphemy in the account of Christ.

4. "It is dangerous to be *almost* a Christian, in that this stills and serves to quiet conscience." It is very dangerous to quiet conscience with any thing but the blood of Christ: it is bad being at peace, till Christ speaks peace: nothing can truly pacify conscience less than that which pacifies God, and that is the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the almost Christian quiets conscience, but not with the blood of Christ; it is not a peace flowing from Christ's propitiation, but a peace rising from a formal profession; not a peace of Christ's giving, but a peace of his own making; he silences and bridles conscience with a form of godliness, and so makes it give

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way to an undoing, soul-destroying peace; he rocks it asleep in the cradle of duties, and then it is a thousand to one it never awaketh more till death or judgment.

Ah, my brethren, it is better to have conscience never quiet, than quieted any way but by *the blood of sprinkling:* a good conscience unquiet, is the greatest affliction to saints, and an evil conscience quiet, is the greatest judgment to sinners.

5. "It is dangerous to be almost a Christian, in respect of the unpardonable sin:" the sin that the Scripture saith, "can never be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come;" (*Matt.* xii. 32,) I mean *the sin against the Holy Ghost.* Now such are only capable of sinning that sin as are but almost Christians.

A true believer cannot, the work of grace in his heart, "that seed of God abiding in him," secures him against it.

The profane, ignorant, open sinner cannot; though he lives daily and hourly in sin yet he cannot commit this sin, for it must be from an enlightened mind; every sinner, under the Gospel especially, sins sadly against the Holy Ghost, against the strivings and motions of the Spirit; he "resists the Holy Ghost," but yet this is not the sin against the Holy Ghost.

There must be three ingredients to make up that sin.

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1. It must be wilful; "if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin."

2. It must be against light and convictions, "after we have received the knowledge of the truth."

3. It must be in *resolved malice:* you shall find all these ingredients in the sin of the Pharisees, *Matt.* xii. 22. Christ heals one that was "possessed with a devil," a great work which all the people wondered at, verse 23. But what say the Pharisees? see verse 24. "This fellow casteth out devils by the prince of devils." Now that this was *the sin against the Holy Ghost* is clear, for it was both *wilful* and *malicious,* and against clear convictions: they could not but see that he was the Son of God, and that this work was a peculiar work of the Spirit of God in him, and yet they say he wrought by the devil; whereupon Christ charges them with this "sin against the Holy Ghost," verse 31—33. Now the Pharisees were a sort of great professors; whence I gather this conclusion, that it is the professor of religion that is the subject of this sin; not the open carnal sinner, not the true believer, but the formal professor.

Not the sinner, for he hath neither *light* nor *grace;* not the believer, for he hath both *light* and *grace;* therefore the formal profes-

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sor, for he hath *light*, but no *grace*. Here then is the great danger of being *almost* a Christian, he is liable to this dreadful unpardonable sin.

6. " This being *but almost* a Christian, subjects us to apostasy :" he that gets no good by walking in the ways of God, will quickly leave them, and walk no more in them : this I gather from *Hosea* xiv. 9. " Who is wise, and he shall understand these things ? prudent and he shall know them ? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein."

The just shall walk in them ;] he whose heart is renewed and made right with God, he shall keep close to God in his ways.

But the transgressor shall fall therein ;] the word in the *Hebrew* is *peshangim*, from a word that signifies to *prevaricate :* so that we may read the words thus, " the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them ; but he that prevaricates, that is, an hypocrite in the ways of God, he shall fall therein."

An unsound heart will never hold out long in the ways of God ; " he was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in that light."—(*John* v. 35.)

For a season,] for *an hour*, a short space, and then they left him. It is a notable question *Job* puts concerning the hypocrite, " Will

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he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?"

He may do much, but these two things he cannot do.

1. He cannot make God his delight.

2. He cannot persevere in duties at all times, and in all conditions.

He will be an apostate at last: the scab of hypocrisy usually breaks out in the plague-sore of apostasy: conversion-ground is standing ground, it is *terra firma;* but a graceless profession of religion is a slippery ground, and falling ground. *Julian* the apostate was first *Julian* the professor. I know it is possible a believer may fall, but yet "he rises again, the everlasting arms are underneath;" but when the hypocrite falls, who shall help him up?

Solomon saith, "Woe to him that is alone when he falls," that is, without an interest in Christ. Why woe to him? "For he hath none to help him up." (*Eccl.* iv. 10.) If Jesus Christ do not recover him, who can? *David* fell and was restored, for he had one to help him up; but *Judas* fell and perished, for he was alone.

7. "This being *but almost* a Christian, provokes God to bring dreadful spiritual judgments upon a man."

Barrenness, is a spiritual judgment: this provokes God to give us up to barrenness.

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When Christ found the fig-tree that had leaves, but no fruit, he pronounces the curse of barrenness upon it; "Never fruit grow on thee more."—(*Matt.* xxi. 19.) And so *Ezek.* xlvii. 11; "The miry places thereof, and the marshy places thereof, shall not be healed, they shall be given to salt."

A spirit of delusion is a sad judgment; why this is the *almost* Christian's judgment; that receives the truth, but not in the love of it: "Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, for this cause God shall send them strong delusions."

"To lose either light or sight, either ordinances or eyes," is a great spiritual judgment: why, this is the *almost* Christian's judgment: he that profits not under the means, provokes God to take away either light or sight; either the ordinances from before his eyes, or else to blind his eyes under the ordinances.

To have a *hard heart* is a dreadful judgment, and there is no hypocrite but hath a hard heart.

My brethren, it is a dreadful thing for God to give a man up to spiritual judgments.

This being almost a Christian, provokes God to give a man up to spiritual judgments; surely therefore, it is a very dangerous thing to be almost a Christian.

8. "Being *almost* and *but almost* Christians, will exceedingly aggravate our dam-

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nation;" the higher a man rises under the means, the lower he falls if he miscarries; he that falls but a little short of Heaven, will fall deepest into hell; he that hath been nearest to conversion, being not converted, shall have the deepest damnation when he is judged. Capernaum's sentence shall exceed Sodom's for severity, because she exceeded Sodom in the enjoyment of mercy; she received more from God, she knew more of God, she professed much for God, and yet was not right with God, therefore she shall be punished more by God. The higher the rise, the greater the fall; the higher the profession, the lower the damnation; he miscarrieth with a light in his hand, he perisheth under many convictions, and convictions never end but in a sound conversion, as in all saints, or in a sad damnation, as in all hypocrites: praying ground, hearing ground, professing ground, and conviction ground, is, of all, the worst ground to perish upon.

Now then to sum up all under this head.

"If to be *almost* a Christian hinders the true work of conversion; if it be easily mistaken for conversion; if it be a degree of blasphemy; if this be that which quiets conscience; if this subjects a man to commit the unpardonable sin; if it makes us liable to apostasy; if it provokes God to give us up to spiritual judgments; and if it be that which

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exceedingly aggravates our damnation;" sure then it is a very dangerous thing to be *almost* and *but almost* a Christian.

O labour to be *altogether* Christians, to go farther than they who have gone farthest, and yet fall short! This is the great counsel of the Holy Ghost, "so run that ye may obtain." "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure."

Need you any motives to quicken you up to this important duty?

Consideration 1. "This is that which is not only commanded by God, but that whereunto all the commands of God tend:" a perfect conformity of heart and life to God, is the sum and substance of all the commands both of the Old and New Testament. As the harlot was for the *dividing of the child*, so Satan is for dividing the heart; he would have our love and affections shared between Christ and our lusts, for he knows that Christ reckons we love him not at all, unless we love him above all: but God will have all or none. "My son, give me thy heart. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might."—(*Deut.* vi. 5.)

Look into the Scripture, and see what that is upon which your *only* stands, and you shall find that God hath fixed it upon those great duties which alone tend to the perfection of

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your state as Christians. God hath fixed your *only* upon believing; *only believe.* God hath fixed your *only* upon obedience; "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Only let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ:" so that your *only* is fixed by God upon those two great duties of *believing* and *obeying;* both which tend to the perfection of your state as Christians.

Shall God command, and shall not we obey? Can there be a higher motive to duty than the authority of the great God whose will is the eternal rule of righteousness? O let us fear "God, and keep his commandments," for this is *the whole duty of man.*

Consideration 2. "The Lord Jesus Christ is a Saviour throughout, a perfect and complete Mediator." He hath not shed his blood by halves, nor satisfied the justice of God, and redeemed sinners by halves; no, but he went through with his undertaking, he bore all our sins, and shed all his blood; he died to the utmost, satisfied the justice of God to the utmost, redeemed sinners to the utmost, and now that he is in Heaven he intercedeth to the utmost, and "is able to save to the utmost."

It is observed, that our Lord, when he was upon the earth, in the days of his flesh, wrought no half cures; but whomsoever they brought to him for healing, he healed them

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throughout; "They brought unto him all that were diseased, and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment, and as many as touched were made perfectly whole." (*Matt.* xiv. 35, 36.)

O what an excellent physician is here; none like him; he cureth infallibly, suddenly, and perfectly.

He cureth *infallibly;* none ever came to him for healing that went without it; he never practised upon any that miscarried under his hand.

He cureth *suddenly;* no sooner is his garment touched, but his patient is healed. The Leper, *Matt.* viii. 3, is no sooner touched, but immediately cured; the two blind men, *Matt.* xx. are no sooner touched, but their eyes are immediately opened, verse 34.

He cureth *perfectly;* "As many as were touched, were made perfectly whole."

All this was to shew what a perfect and complete Saviour Jesus Christ would be to all sinners that would come to him. They should find healing in his blood, virtue in his righteousness, and pardon for all their sins, whatever they were. Observe, as Christ healed all the diseases of all that came to him when he was on earth, so he pardons all the sins, and healeth all the wounds of all those souls that come to him now he is in Heaven.

He is a Saviour throughout, and shall not

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we be Saints throughout? shall he be altogether a Redeemer, and shall not we be altogether Believers? O what a shame is this!

Consideration 3. "There is enough in Religion to engage us to be *altogether* Christians; and that whether we respect profit or comfort, for grace brings both.

First, "Religion is a gainful thing," and this is a compelling motive, that becomes effectual upon all. Gain is the God whom the world worships; what will not men do, what will they not suffer for gain? What journies do men take by land, what voyages by sea, through hot and cold, through fair and foul, through storm and shine, through day and night, and all for gain.

There is no calling so gainful as this of Religion; it is the most profitable employment we can take up. "Godliness is profitable unto all things." It is "a great revenue:" if it be closely followed, it brings in the greatest income: indeed some men are religious for the world's sake, such shall be sure not to gain: but they who are religious for religion's sake, shall be sure not to lose, if Heaven and Earth can recompense them; for *Godliness hath the promise both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

Ah, who would not be a Christian, when the gain of godliness is so great! Many gain much in their worldly calling, but the profit

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which the true believer hath from one hour's communion with God in Christ, weigheth down all the gain of the world: cursed be that man who counts all the gain of the world worth one hour's communion with Jesus Christ, said that noble marquis *Galeacius Caracciola.* It is no where said in Scripture, "Happy is the man that findeth silver, and the man that getteth fine gold:" these are of no weight in the balance of the sanctuary; but it is said, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding; for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold."—(*Prov.* iii. 13, 14.)

By *wisdom* and *understanding* here, we are to understand the *grace* of Christ, and so the Spirit of God interpreteth it. "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

Of all Merchants, he that trades in this wisdom and understanding, will prove the richest man; one grain of godliness outweigheth all the gold of Ophir: there is no riches like being rich in grace; for,

1. This is the most *necessary* riches, other things are not so; silver and gold are not so; we may be, and be happy without them. There is but one thing necessary, and that is *the grace of* Jesus Christ in the heart. Have this and have all; want this, and want all.

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2. It is the most *substantial* gain; the things of this world are more *shadow* than *substance;* pleasure, honour, and profit, comprehend all things in this world, and therefore are the carnal man's trinity.

The apostle John calls them, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; this (saith he) is all that is in the world;" and truly, if this be all, all is nothing; for what is pleasure, but a dream and conceit? what is honour, but fancy and opinion? and what is profit, but a thing of nought? "Why wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not?" The things of the world have in them no solid substance, though foolish carnal men call them substance.

But grace is a substantial good; so our Lord calls it; "that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance," to inherit that which is. Grace is a reality, other things are but shew and fancy.

3. "Godliness is the safest gain;" the gain of worldly things is always with difficulty, but seldom with safety. The soul is often hazarded in the over-eager pursuit of worldly things; nay, thousands do pawn and lose, and damn their precious souls eternally for a little silver and gold, which are but the entrails and garbage of the earth; "and what is a man profited to gain the whole world, if he lose his own soul?"

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But the gain of godliness is ever with safety to the soul; nay, the soul is lost and undone without it, and not saved but by the attainment of it; a soul without grace is in a lost and perishing condition; the hazard of eternity is never over with us, until *the grace of* Christ Jesus be sought by us, and wrought in us.

4. Godliness is the surest profit;" as it is safe, so it is sure; men make great ventures for the world, but all runs upon uncertainties; many venture much, and wait long, and yet find no return but disappointment; they sow much, and yet reap nothing.

But the *gain of godliness* is sure; "to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward."

And as the things of this world are uncertain in the getting; so they are uncertain in the keeping.

If men do not undo us, moths may; if robbery doth not, rust may; if rust doth not, fire may; to which all earthly treasures are incident, as our Lord teaches us, *Matt.* vi. 19. Solomon pictures out the world with wings; "riches make themselves wings, and fly as an eagle towards heaven." A man may be rich as Dives to day, and yet poor as Lazarus to-morrow: O how uncertain are all worldly things!

But the true treasure of grace in the heart, that can never be lost: it is out of the reach

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both of rust and robber: "He that gets the *world*, gets a good he can never keep; but he that gets *grace*, gets a good he shall never lose."

5. "The profit of godliness lieth not only in this world, but in the world to come:" all other profit lieth in this world only, riches and honours, &c. are called this world's goods, but the riches of godliness is chiefly in the other world's goods, in the enjoyment of God and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, among saints and angels in glory: Lo, this is the *gain of godliness;* "such honour have all his saints."—(*Ps.* cxlix. 9.)

6. "The gain of godliness is a durable and eternal gain:" all this world's goods are perishing; perishing *pleasures*, perishing *honours*, perishing *profits*, and perishing *comforts;* "riches are not for ever," saith Job: "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?" Gregory upon these words observes, that earthly treasures are treasures of snow: what pains do children take to scrape and roll the snow together to make a snow-ball, which is no sooner done, but the heat of the sun dissolves it, and it comes to nothing? Why, the treasures of worldly men are but *treasures of snow:* when death and judgment come, they melt away, and come to nothing. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death."—(*Prov.* xi. 4.)

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You see here the great advantage of godliness: so that if we look at profit, we shall find enough in *religion* to engage us to be *altogether* Christians. Or,

2. "If we look at comfort," Religion is the most comfortable profession; there are no comforts to be compared to the comforts of *grace* and *godliness*.

1. "Worldly comfort is only outward," it is but skin-deep: "In the midst of laughter the heart is sorrowful." But the comfort that flows from godliness is an inward comfort, a spiritual joy; therefore it is called *gladness of heart*. "Thou hast put gladness in my heart."—(*Ps.* iv. 7.) Other *joy smooths the brow*, but this fills the breast.

2. "Worldly comfort hath a nether spring," the spring of worldly comfort is in the creature, in some earthly enjoyment; and therefore the comfort of worldly men must needs be mixed and muddy; "an unclean fountain cannot send forth pure water." But spiritual comfort *hath an upper spring;* the comfort that accompanies godliness, flows from the manifestations of the love of God in Christ, from the workings of the blessed Spirit in the heart, which is first a *counsellor*, and then a *comforter:* and therefore the comforts of the saints must needs be pure and unmixed comforts, for they flow from a pure spring.

3. "Worldly comfort is very fading and

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transitory :" " The triumphing of the wicked is but short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment :" Solomon compares it to the *crackling of thorns under a pot*, which is but a blaze, and soon out; so is the comfort of carnal hearts: but the comfort of godliness is a durable and abiding comfort, " your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you."—(*John* xvi. 22.)

The comfort of godliness is lasting, and everlasting; it abides by us in life, in death, and after death.

First, " It abides by us in life ;" *grace* and *peace* go together; Godliness brings forth comfort and peace naturally; " the effect of righteousness shall be peace :" it is said of the primitive Christians, " they walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." Every duty done in uprightness and sincerity, reflects some comfort upon the soul: " In keeping the commands there is great reward ;" not only *for* keeping them, but *in* keeping them; as every flower, so every duty carries sweetness and refreshing with it.

Objection. " But who more dejected and disconsolate than saints and believers ; whose lives are more uncomfortable ? whose mouths are more filled with complaints than theirs ? If a condition of godliness and christianity be a condition of so much comfort, then why are they thus ?"

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Solution. That the people of God are oftentimes without comfort, that I grant; "they may walk in the dark, and have no light:" but this is none of the product of godliness; grace brings forth no such fruit as this, there is a three-fold rise and spring of it.

Sin within; Desertion, and Temptation without.

1. *Sin* within; the saints of God are not all spirit and no flesh, all grace and no sin; they are made up of contrary principles; there is light and darkness in the same mind, sin and grace in the same will, carnal and spiritual in the same affections; there is *The flesh lusting against the spirit:* in all these, and too oft, the Lord knows, is the believer led away captive by these warring lusts; so was the holy apostle himself: "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me.—(*Rom.* vii. 21.) I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin;" and this was that which broke his spiritual peace, and filled his soul with trouble and complaints, as you see, verse 24; "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

So that it is sin that interrupts the peace of God's people; indwelling lust stirring and breaking forth, must needs cause trouble and grief in the soul of a believer; for it is as na-

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tural for *sin* to bring forth *trouble*, as it is for *grace* to bring forth *peace;* every sin contracts a new guilt upon the soul, and guilt provokes God; and where there is a sense of guilt contracted, and God provoked, there can be no peace, no quiet in that soul, till faith procures fresh sprinklings of the blood of Jesus Christ upon the conscience.

2. "Another spring of the believer's trouble and disconsolateness of spirit, is the desertions of God;" and this follows upon the former. God doth sometimes disappear, and hide himself from his people; "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself."—(*Ps.* xiii. 1.) But the cause of God's hiding, is the believer's sinning: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you."—(*Isaiah* lix. 2.) In heaven, where there is no sinning, there is no losing the light of God's countenance for a moment; and if saints here could serve God without corruption, they should enjoy God without *desertion;* but this *cannot* be; while we are in this state, remaining lusts will stir and break forth, and then God will hide his face; and this must needs be trouble: "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled."—(*Ps.* xxx. 7.)

The light of God's countenance shining upon the soul, is the Christian's heaven on this side heaven, and therefore it is no won-

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der if the hiding of his face be looked upon by the soul, as one of the days of hell; so it was by David, "The sorrows of death compassed me, the pains of hell gat hold upon me, I found trouble and sorrow."

3. "A third spring of that trouble and complaint that brims the banks of the Christian's spirit is the temptations of Satan;" he is the great enemy of saints, and he envieth the quiet and comfort that their hearts are filled with, when his conscience is brimmed with horror and terror; and therefore, though he knows he cannot destroy their peace, yet he labours to disturb their peace. As the blessed Spirit of God is first a sanctifier, and then a comforter, working grace in order to peace; so this cursed spirit of hell is first a *tempter*, and then a *troubler;* first persuading to act sin, and then accusing for sin; and this is his constant practice upon the spirits of God's people; he cannot endure that they should live in the light of God's countenance, when himself is doomed to eternal, intolerable darkness.

And thus you see whence it is that the people of God are often under trouble and complaint; all arises from these three springs of Sin within, Desertions and Temptations without.

If the saints could serve God without sinning, and enjoy God without withdrawing, and resist Satan without yielding, they might en-

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joy, peace, and comfort without sorrowing: this must be endeavoured constantly here, but it will never be attained fully, but in heaven.

But yet so far as grace is the prevailing principle in the heart, and so far as the power of godliness is exercised in the life, so far the condition of a child of God is a condition of peace; for it is an undoubted truth, that *the fruit of righteousness shall be peace.* But suppose the people of God experience little of this comfort in this life; yet,

2. "They find it in the day of death;" grace and holiness will minister unto us then, and that ministration will be peace; a believer hath a two-fold spring of comfort, each one emptying itself into his soul in a dying season; one is from above him, the other is from within him: the spring that runs comfort from above him, is the *blood of Christ sprinkled upon the conscience;* the spring that runs comfort from within him, is the sincerity of his heart in God's service; when we lie upon a death-bed, and can reflect upon our principles and performances in the service of God, and there find uprightness and sincerity of heart running through all, this must needs be comfort; it was so to Hezekiah; "remember, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart; and have done that which is good in thy sight."

Nothing maketh a death-bed so uneasy and

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hard, as a life spent in the service of sin and lust; nothing makes a death-bed so soft and sweet, as a life spent in the service of God and Christ. Or put the case, the people of God should not meet with this comfort then; yet,

3. "They shall be sure to find it after death;" if *time* bring none of this fruit to ripeness, yet eternity shall; grace in *time* will be glory in eternity; holiness *now*, will be happiness then; "whatever it is a man soweth in *this world*, that he shall be sure to reap in the *next world*: "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." When sin shall end in sorrow and misery, holiness shall end in joy and glory: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Whoever shareth in the grace of Christ in this world, shall share in the joys of Christ in the world to come; and that joy is joy unspeakable and full of glory:" Lo, here is the fruit of godliness: say now, if there be not enough in religion, whether we respect profit or comfort, to engage us to be *Christians* throughout?

Consideration 4. "What an entire resignation wicked men make of themselves to their lusts! and shall not we do so to the Lord Christ?" They give up themselves without reserve to the pleasures of sin, and shall we

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have our reserves in the service of God? They are altogether sinners, and shall not we be *altogether* Saints? They *run, and faint not*, in the service of their lusts; and shall we *faint* and *not run*, in the service of Christ? Shall the servants of corruption have their ears bored to the door-posts of sin, in token of an entire and perpetual service, and shall we not give up ourselves to Christ, to be his for ever? Shall others make a "covenant with hell and death;" and shall not we "join ourselves to God in an everlasting covenant that cannot be forgotten?" Shall they take more pains to damn their souls, than we do to save ours? and make more speed to a place of vengeance, than we do to a *crown of righteousness?*

Which do you judge best, to be saved everlastingly, or to perish everlastingly? Which do you count the best Master, God or the Devil? Christ or *your* lusts? I know you will determine it on Christ's side: O then! when others serve their lusts with all their hearts, do *you* serve Christ with all *your hearts*. "If the hearts of the sons of men be fully set in them to do evil," then *much* more let the hearts of the sons of God be fully set in them to do good.

Consideration 5. "If ye be not *altogether* Christians, ye will never be able to appear with comfort before God, nor to stand in the

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judgment of the last and great day?" For this sad dilemma will silence every hypocrite: if my commands were not *holy*, *just*, and *good*, why didst thou *own* them? If they were *holy*, *just*, and *good*, why dost thou not *obey* them? If Jesus Christ was not worth the having, why didst thou profess him? If he was, then why didst thou not cleave to him, and close with him? If my ordinances were not appointed to convert and save souls, why didst thou sit under them, and rest in the performance of them? Or if they were, then why didst thou not submit to the power of them? If Religion be not good, why dost thou profess it? If it be *good*, why dost thou not practise it? "Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding-garment?" If it was not a *wedding feast*, why didst thou come at the invitation? If it was, then why didst thou come without a *wedding-garment?*

I would but ask an hypocritical professor of the Gospel, what he will answer in that day. Verily you deprive *yourselves* of all possibility of apology in *the day of the righteous judgment of God*: it is said of the man that had no wedding-garment on, that when Christ came and examined him, *he was speechless;* he that is *graceless* in a day of grace, will be *speechless* in a day of judgment: professing Christ without a heart to close with Christ, will leave

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our souls inexcusable, and make our "damnation unavoidable, and more intolerable."

These are the motives to enforce the duty; and O that God would *set them home* upon your hearts and consciences, that you might not dare to rest a moment longer in a *half-work*, or in being Christians *within a little*, but that you might be *altogether* Christians?

Question. "But you will say possibly, how shall I do? what means shall I use, that I may attain to a thorough work in my heart; that I may be no longer *almost* but *altogether* a Christian?"

Answer. Now I shall lay down three rules of *direction* instead of many, to further and help you in this *important duty*, and so leave this work to God's blessing.

Direction 1. First, "Break off all false peace of conscience;" this is the devil's *bond*, to hold the soul from seeking after Christ. As there is the *peace of God*, so there is the *peace of Satan;* but they are easily known, for they are as contrary as Heaven and Hell, as light and darkness.

The peace of God flows from a work of grace in the soul, and is the peace of a regenerate state; but the peace of Satan is the peace of an unregenerate state, it is the peace of death; in the grave Job saith there is *peace;* "there the wicked cease from troubling;" so a soul dead in sin is full of peace, the wicked one troubleth him not.

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The peace of God in the soul is a peace flowing from removal of guilt, by justifying grace; "Being justified by faith in his blood, we have peace with God;" but the peace of Satan in the soul arises and is maintained by a stupidity of spirit, and insensibility of guilt upon the conscience.

The peace of God is a peace *from* sin, that fortifies the heart against it: "The peace of God that passeth all men's understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The more of this peace there is in the soul, the more is the soul fortified against sin; but the peace of Satan is peace in sin: "The strong man armed keeps the house, and there is all at peace." The saint's peace is a peace with God, but not with sin; the sinner's peace is a peace with sin; but not with God: and this is a peace better broken than kept: it is a false, a dangerous, and undoing peace; my brethren, "death and judgment will break all peace of conscience," but only that which is *wrought* by Christ in the soul, and is the fruit of the "blood of sprinkling: when he gives quietness, who can make trouble?" Now that peace that death will break, why should you keep? Who would be fond of that quietness which the flames of Hell will burn in sunder? and yet how many travel to hell through the fool's paradise of a false peace!

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O break off this *peace!* for we can have no peace with God in Christ, whilst this peace remains in our hearts; the Lord gives no *peace* to them that will not seek it; and that man will never seek it, that does not see his need of it: and he that is at peace in his lusts, sees no need of the *peace* of Christ. The sinner must be *wounded* for sin, and *troubled* under it, before Christ will heal his wounds, and give him peace from it.

Direction 2. "Labour after a thorough work of conviction;" every conviction will not do it; the *almost* Christian hath his convictions as well as the *true* Christian, or else he had never gone so far; but they are not sound and right convictions, or else he had gone farther: God will have the soul truly sensible of the bitterness of sin, before it shall taste the sweetness of mercy. The plow of conviction must go deep, and make deep furrows in the heart, before God will sow the precious seed of grace, and comfort there, that so it may have depth of earth to grow in. This is the constant method of God; first to shew man his sin, then his Saviour; first his danger, then his redeemer; first his wound, then his cure; first his own vileness, then Christ's righteousness. We must be brought to cry out, "Unclean, unclean; to mourn for him whom we have pierced," and then he sets open for us a "fountain to wash in for sin, and

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for uncleanness." That is a notable place, *Job* xxxiii. 27, 28, "He looked upon men, and if any say, I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light;" the sinner must see the unprofitableness of his unrighteousness, before he profit by Christ's righteousness. The Israelites are first stung with the fiery serpents, and then the brazen serpent is set up. Ephraim is first thoroughly convinced, and then God's bowels of mercy work towards him. Thus it was with Paul, Manasseh, the Jailor, &c. So that this is the *unchangeable* method of God in working grace, to begin with conviction of sin.

O therefore labour for thorough conviction; and there are three things we should especially be convinced of.

First. "Be convinced of the evil of sin;" the filthy and heinous nature of it; this is the greatest evil in the world; it wrongs God, it wounds Christ, it grieves the Holy Spirit, it ruineth a precious soul; all other evils are not to be named with this, My brethren, though to do sin is the worst work, yet to see sin is the best sight; for sin discovered in its vileness, makes Christ to be desired in his fulness.

But above all, labour to be convinced of the mischief of an unsound heart; what an abhorring it is to God, what certain ruin it

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brings upon the soul. O think often upon the hypocrite's hell. (*Matt.* xiv. 15.)

Secondly, "Be convinced of the misery and desperate danger of a natural condition;" for till we see the plague of our hearts, and the misery of our state by nature, we shall never be brought off ourselves to seek help in another.

Thirdly, "Be convinced of the utter insufficiency and inability of any thing below Christ Jesus to minister relief to thy soul in this case:" all things besides Jesus Christ, are "physicians of no value;" duties, performances, prayers, tears, self-righteousness, avail nothing in this case; they make us like the troops of Tema, to return "ashamed at our disappointment," from such "failing brooks."—(*Job* vi. 19.)

Alas! it is an infinite righteousness that must satisfy for us, for it is an infinite God that is offended by us. If ever thy sin be pardoned, it is infinite mercy that must pardon it; if ever thou be reconciled to God, it is infinite merit must do it; if ever thy heart be changed, and thy state renewed, it is infinite power must effect it; and if ever thy soul escape hell, and be saved at last, it is *infinite grace* must save it.

In these three things right and sound *conviction* lieth; and wherever the spirit of God worketh these thorough convictions, it is in

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order to a true and sound conversion; for by this means the soul is brought under a right qualification for the receiving of Christ.

You must know that a sinner can never come to Christ; for he is dead in sin, in enmity against Christ, an enemy to God, and the grace of God; but there are certain qualifications that come between the soul's dead state in sin, and the work of conversion and closing with Christ, whereby the soul is put into a capacity of receiving the Lord Jesus Christ; for no man is brought immediately out of his dead state, and made to *believe in* Jesus Christ; there are some qualifications coming in between: sound convictions are the right qualifications for the sinner's receiving Christ; "for he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;" that is, such as see themselves sinners, and thereby in a lost condition; so Luke exemplifies it, "The son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost; he is anointed, and sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all that mourn."

O therefore, if you would be sound Christians, get sound convictions; ask those that are believers indeed, and they will tell you, had it not been for their convictions, they had never sought after Christ for sanctification and salvation; they will tell you, they had perished, if they had not perished; they had

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been in *eternal* bondage, but for their *spiritual* bondage; had they not been lost as to themselves, they had been utterly lost as to Christ.

Direction 3. "Never rest in convictions till they end in conversion;" this is that wherein most men miscarry, they rest in their convictions, and take them for conversion, as if sin seen were therefore forgiven, or as if a sight of the want of grace were the truth of the work of grace.

That is a notable place in *Hosea* xiii. 13.—"Ephraim is an unwise son, for he should not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children." The place of the breaking forth of children is the womb; as the child comes out of the womb, so is conversion born out of the womb of conviction. Now when the child sticks between the womb and the world, it is dangerous, it hazards the life both of mother and child; so when a sinner rests in conviction, and goes no farther, but sticks *in the place of the breaking forth of children;* this is very dangerous, and hazards the life of the soul.

You that are at any time under convictions, O take heed of resting in them, do not stay long in the place of the breaking forth of children; though it is true, that conviction is the first step to conversion, yet it is not conversion; a man may carry his convictions along with him into hell.

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What is that which troubleth poor creatures, when they come to die, but this—I have not improved my convictions; at such a time I was convinced of sin, but yet I went on in sin in the face of my convictions; in such a sermon I was convinced of such a duty, but I slighted the conviction; I was convinced of my want of Christ, and of the readiness of Christ to pardon and save; but, alas! I followed not the conviction.

My *brethren*, remember this; *slighted convictions* are the worst death-bed companions. There are two things especially, which above all others, make a death-bed very uncomfortable:

1. "Purposes and promises not performed;

2. Convictions slighted and not improved."

When a man takes up purposes to close with Christ, and yet puts them not into execution; and when he is convinced of sin and duty, and yet improves not his convictions; O this will sting and wound at last.

Now therefore, hath the spirit of the Lord been at work in your souls; have you ever been convinced of the evil of sin, of the misery of a natural state, of the insufficiency of all things under heaven to help, of the fulness and righteousness of Jesus Christ, of the necessity of resting upon him for pardon and

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peace, for sanctification and salvation? Have you ever been really convinced of these things? O then, as you love your own souls, as ever you hope to be saved at last, and enjoy God for ever improve these convictions, and be sure you rest not in them till they rise up to a thorough close with the Lord Jesus Christ, and so and in a sound and perfect conversion. Thus shall you be not only *almost*, but *altogether* a Christian.

FINIS.

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