

Personal Declension
and
Revival of Religion in the Soul
Octavius Winslow

- I. Incipient Declension
- A. Proof text
1. ***[Proverbs 14:14]- The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.***
- B. Declension Introduced.
1. After all God has done for him, - after all the rich displays of his grace, the patience and tenderness of his instructions, the repeated discipline of his covenant, the tokens of love received, and the lessons of experience learned, there should still exist in the heart a principle, the tendency of which is to secret, perpetual, and alarming departure from God.
- C. The Cause of Declension.
1. The believer's constant forgetfulness of the truth.
 2. There is a proneness in us to deify the graces of the Spirit.
 - a. "We often think of faith and love, and their kindred graces, as though they were essentially omnipotent; forgetting that though they undoubtedly are divine in their origin, spiritual in their nature, and sanctifying in their effects, they yet are sustained by no self-supporting power, but by constant communications of life and nourishment from Jesus; that, the moment of their being left to their inherent strength, is the moment of their certain declension and decay."
 - b. Divine grace in the soul can never really die; true faith can never utterly and finally fail. We are speaking now but of their decay.
 - c. ***[1 Peter 1:5]- Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.***
 3. No child of God ever recedes into a state of inward declension and outward backsliding, but by slow and gradual steps.
 4. The process of spiritual decay may be going forward within the secret recesses of the soul, and not a suspicion or a fear be awakened in the mind of the believer.
- D. The doctrine considered: *The Life of God in the Soul of Man.*
1. The believer in Jesus is a partaker of the divine nature.
 - a. ***[2 Peter 1:4]- Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.***
 2. He is "born of the Spirit;"
 - a. ***[John 3:5]- Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.***
 3. Christ dwells in him by faith.
 - a. ***[Colossians 1:27]- To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:***
 - b. ***[Galatians 2:20]- I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.***
 4. Christ who is our life.

- a. *[Colossians 3:4]- When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*
 - b. Christ possesses this life.
 - 1.) *[John 5:26]- For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;*
 - c. Christ communicates it.
 - 1.) *[John 5:25]- Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*
 - d. Christ sustains it.
 - 1.) *[John 6:57]- As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.*
 - e. Christ crowns it with eternal glory
 - 1.) *[John 17:24]- Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*
5. Characteristics of the life of God in the soul.
- a. It is concealed.
 - 1.) Your life is hid with Christ in God
 - a.) *[Colossians 3:3]- For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*
 - 2.) Its nature, its source, its actings, its supports are veiled from the observation of men.
 - a.) *[I John 3:1]- Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.*
 - b.) *'That the believer should be unknown, and yet well known; should die, and yet live; should be chastened, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing all things, is indeed an enigma - a paradox to a carnal mind.'*
 - b. It is security.
 - 1.) It is hid in the hand, in the heart, in the all-sufficiency, yes, in the eternity of God. Oh the perfect security of the spiritual life of the believer!
 - 2.) No power on earth or in hell can move it.
 - a.) It may be stormed by Satan, assaulted by corruption, scorned by men, and even in the moment of unbelief and in the hour of deep trial its existence doubted by the believer himself.
 - b.) Yet there it is, deep lodged in the eternity of God, bound up in the heart and with the existence of Jehovah, and no foe can destroy it.
 - c.) *"As soon, might Satan pull God out of heaven, undermine the security of Christ, and tear him from the bosom of the Father, as deprive the believer of his spiritual life, or destroy that principle of grace which God has implanted in him." – Stephen Charnock*
 - d.) *[John 10:28]- And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.*
- E. Incipient Declension defined.
- 1. That decay of spiritual life and grace in the believer which marks its earliest and more concealed stage.
 - a. It is latent and hidden, and therefore the least suspected and the more dangerous.

F. Incipient Declension described.

1. *[Judges 16:20]- And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.*
2. *[Hosea 7:9]- Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not.*
3. A state that has to do, not with the outward observation of men, but more especially and immediately with a holy and heart-searching God.
4. What an incipient state of declension does not necessarily involve.
 - a. It does not involve any alteration in the essential character of divine grace, but is a secret decay of the health, vigor, and exercise of that grace in the soul.
 - b. This decay of grace may be advancing, too, without any marked decline in the spiritual perception of the judgment, as to the beauty and fitness of spiritual truth.
 - 1.) The loss of spiritual enjoyment, not of a spiritual perception of the loveliness and harmony of the truth, shall be the symptom that betrays the true condition of the soul. The judgment shall lose none of its light, but the heart much of its fervour;
 - c. It may not involve any lowering of the standard of holiness; and yet there shall be no ascending of the heart, no reaching forth of the mind towards a practical conformity to that standard.
 - 1.) *[Hebrews 12:4]- Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*
 - d. This state of secret departure from God may exist in connection with an outward and rigid observation of the means of grace; and yet there shall be no spiritual use of, or enjoyment in, the means.
 - 1.) A declining believer may have sunk so deeply into a state of formality, as to substitute the outward and the public means of grace for a close and secret walk with God.
 - 2.) *[John 6:48,53,55]- I am that bread of life. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.*
 - 3.) *[Isaiah 24:16]- From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.*
 - e. When a professing man can read his Bible with no spiritual taste, or when he searches it, not with a sincere desire to know the mind of the Spirit in order to a holy and obedient walk, but with a merely curious, or literary taste and aim.
 - 1.) *[2 Timothy 3:16-17]- All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*
 - f. When a professing Christian can pray, and yet acknowledge that he has no nearness to the throne, no touching of the scepter, no fellowship with God.
 - g. When the believer has but few dealings with Christ.
 - 1.) *[1 Corinthians 1:12]- Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.*
 - 2.) *[1 Corinthians 3:4-5]- For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?*
 - h. An uncharitable walk towards other Christians marks a low state of grace in the soul.
 - 1.) *[Ephesians 4:31-32]- Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another,*

tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

- 2.) *[1 Corinthians 13:4-8]-Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*
 - 3.) *[Galatians 5:13]- For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*
 - 4.) *[1 Peter 1:22]- Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:*
 - 5.) *[1 John 3:14]- We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*
5. Characteristics of Declension in the church.
- a. Her drowsy.
 - 1.) *[Song of Solomon 5:2]- I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.*
 - 2.) She knew that she had fallen into a careless and slumbering state, that the work of grace in her soul was decaying, that the spirit of slumber had come over her;
 - 3.) The awful feature was, she was content to be so.
 - b. When she did arise, Christ had withdrawn himself.
 - 1.) *[Song of Solomon 5:6]- I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.*
 - 2.) Weary with waiting so long, grieved at the discovery he made of her deep declension, and wounded by her cold repulse, he withdrew his sensible, loving presence, and left her to the consequences of her sad departure.
 - 3.) The Lord never withdraws himself from his people willingly: he is never actuated by an arbitrary impulse of his will.
 - 4.) *[Hosea 5:15]- I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.*
 - c. She receded into this state of declension immediately after a peculiar manifestation of Christ's love to her soul.
 - 1.) *[Song of Solomon 4:16]- Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.*
 - 2.) *[Song of Solomon 5:1]- I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.*
 - 3.) Thus was her declension preceded by near and peculiar communion with her Lord.
 - 4.) Some of their saddest departures have immediately followed seasons of the most endeared and holy fellowship with their God and Father!
 - 5.) *[Luke 22:19-24]- And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with*

me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

- 6.) Trust not in frames and feelings, pray without ceasing, and particularly "watch unto prayer" immediately after seasons of peculiar nearness to God, or especial mercies received at his hands.
- 7.) *"Special spiritual enjoyments, are dangerous, and render a man very needy of the helping grace of God. They expose to special temptations, are apt to give rise to special corruptions, such as spiritual pride, contentedness with a present good condition, dullness of desire after a better state. If the Lord grant singular communications of himself, know that it is a season of special need of grace to guide them well. They would return more frequently, and would spring higher and last longer if they were better improved. The greater the blessing be, the greater is the difficulty of guiding it well' and the more difficult the work, the greater our need of the grace of God; and the more frequent and fervent should our applications be to the throne of grace for that needful, helpful grace."* – Robert Traill

d. The hardening tendency of repeated declension in her case.

- 1.) *[Song of Solomon 3:1]- By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.*
- 2.) Trace the steps, and mark the deadening nature of soul declension. She first places herself in the posture of sloth.
- 3.) Why is it that so many who appear to be seeking Christ, rest short of him?
 - a.) They seek him in a slumbering posture - on their beds.
 - b.) Their desires are so languid, their frame of spirit so dead, their hearts so cold,
 - c.) Their very manner of seeking him seems to give an air of insincerity to their desires, and would seem to plead for a denial of their requests.
 - d.) *[Psalm 27:8]- When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek.*
 - e.) *[Proverbs 13:4]- The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.*

e. Christ was hers, and she was Christ's.

- 1.) *[Song of Solomon 5:2]- I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.*
- 2.) In the worst frame that can affect a true child of God, there is always some indication that the Divine life in the soul is not quite extinguished.
- 3.) In its greatest decay, there is yet some symptom of life.
- 4.) In the darkest hour, there is that in the nature of true grace, which emits some scintillation of its essential glory;
- 5.) In its greatest defeat, that which asserts its divinity.
- 6.) *[Romans 7:17,19,20]- Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

G. Directives concerning Incipient Declension and revival of the Divine life in the soul of the believer.

1. Acquaint yourself thoroughly with the real state of your soul as before God.
 - a. Search and see what graces and fruits of the Spirit have decayed.
2. Discover and bring to light the cause of the soul's declension.
 - a. *[Galatians 1:6]- I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:*

- b. *[Galatians 4:9,11,15,20]- But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.*
 - c. *[Galatians 5:7]- Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?*
 - d. Your declension is secret, perhaps the cause is secret, some spiritual duty secretly neglected, or some known sin secretly indulged.
3. Take the cause of the soul's declension immediately to the throne of grace, and lay it before the Lord.
- a. There must be no parleying with it, no compromise, no concealment: there must be a full and unreserved disclosure before God, without anything of palliation or disguise.
 - b. This is just what God loves - an open, ingenuous confession of sin. Searching and knowing, though he does, all hearts, he yet delights in the honest and minute acknowledgment of sin from his backsliding child.
 - c. *[Leviticus 26:40-42]- If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.*
 - d. *[Micah 7:18]- Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.*
 - e. *[Psalm 32:5]- I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.*
 - f. *[Jeremiah 31:18,20]- I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD.*
 - g. *[1 John 1:9]- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
 - h. *[Jeremiah 3:13]- Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD.*
4. Strive to have a true posture of a returning soul to God.
- a. *[Hosea 14:1-2]- O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips.*
 - b. Here are conviction, godly sorrow, humiliation, and confession, the essential elements of a true return to God.
 - 1.) Conviction of the true state of the declining soul;
 - 2.) Godly sorrow resulting from the discovery;
 - 3.) Humiliation, deep and sincere, on account of it;
 - 4.) A full and unreserved confession of it before God.
5. Essentially connected with the discovery and the confession, there must be the entire mortification and abandonment of the cause of the soul's secret declension.

- a. The means of grace, too, may be returned to - the secret declension felt, deplored and acknowledged, but the hidden cause remaining unmortified and unremoved, all appearance of recovery quickly and painfully subsides
 - 1.) The reason is found in the fact, that there was no true mortification of sin.
 - 2.) The external means of revival may be sedulously employed, means of grace diligently used and even multiplied, but all to no real and permanent effect, while a worm secretly feeds at the root; and until the hidden cause of decay be mortified, removed, and utterly extirpated, the surface revival does but end in a profounder sleep, and a more fearful deception of the soul.

- 6. This great work of mortification of sin may not be undertaken in your own strength.
 - a. It is pre-eminently the result of God the Holy Spirit working in, and blessing the self-efforts of the believer:
 - 1.) ***[Romans 8:13]- For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.***
 - 2.) ***[Exodus 15:26]- And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.***

- 7. Endeavour to enrich and enlarge your mind with more spiritual apprehensions of the personal glory, love, and fullness of Christ.
 - a. All soul-declension arises from the admission of things into the mind contrary to the nature of indwelling grace. The world, - its pleasures, its vanities, its cares, its varied temptations,
 - b. *[Song of Solomon 2:15]- Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.***
 - c. *[Revelation 3:20]- Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.***

- 8. The great secret of all personal revival is yet to be disclosed; we allude to a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. The descent of the Holy Spirit was to bring all things that he had taught them to their remembrance; it was to perfect them in their knowledge of the supreme glory of his person, the infinite perfection of his work, the nature and spirituality of his kingdom, and its ultimate and certain triumphs in the earth.
 - b. The descent of the Spirit, too, was to mature them in personal holiness, and more eminently fit them for their arduous and successful labour in his cause, by deepening their spirituality, enriching them with more grace, and enlarging them with more love.
 - c. Nothing short of this will quicken your dying graces, and melt your frozen love; nothing save this will arrest your secret declension, and restore your backsliding heart.
 - d. *[Psalm 72:6]- He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth.***
 - e. *[Hosea 14:4-7]- I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.***
 - f. *[Hosea 6:1-3]- Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.***

g. *[Ephesians 5:18]- And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;*

9. Be not surprised if the Lord should place you in circumstances of deep trial, in order to recover you from your soul-declension:
 - a. The Lord often adapts the peculiarity of the discipline to that of the case.
 - b. Is it secret declension? He may send some secret rebuke, some secret cross, some hidden chastisement; no one has discovered your concealed declension, and no one discovers your concealed correction.
 - c. The declension was between God and your soul, so also it may be is the rebuke; the backsliding was of the heart, so also is the chastisement.
 - d. *[Psalm 119:67-68,71]- Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

II. Declension in Love

A. Proof text.

1. *[Matthew 24:12]- And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

B. Declension in Love described.

1. It is no longer the concealed, but developed,
2. Its type is more marked, and its symptoms more palpable and visible to the eye.
3. Just as in the physical frame, a slight sinking in the heart's pulsation, even though the seat of disease is invisible, may be traced in the external symptoms that ensue.
4. The spiritual men, when there is a secret unhealthiness of the soul, the effects are so marked in their character.
5. The man may not himself be sensible of his backsliding state; but with a spiritual and advancing believer, one whose eye is keen to detect an unfavorable symptom, and whose touch is skillful to mark a sickly pulse, the case is involved in no mystery.
6. The Grace of Love.
 - a. The springhead of all the kindred graces.
 - b. The spiritual state of the soul, and the vigor and promptness of its obedience, will correspond with the state and tone of the believer's affections toward God.
 - c. If decay, coldness, declension, exists here, it is felt and traced throughout the entire obedience of the new man.
 - d. Every grace of the Spirit feels it; every call to duty feels it; and every throb of the spiritual pulse will but betray the secret and certain declension of Divine love in the soul.
7. The necessity, nature, and operation of Divine love in the soul.
 - a. Love to God is spoken of in his word, as forming the primary and grand requirement of the Divine law.
 - 1.) *[Matthew 22:37-38]- Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*
 - 2.) It was infinitely wise and good in God, that he should have presented himself as the sole object of supreme love and worship to his intelligent creatures.
 - a.) His wisdom saw the necessity of having one center of supreme and adoring affection, and one object of supreme and spiritual worship to angels and to men.
 - b.) His goodness suggested that that center and that that object should be himself, the perfection of infinite excellence, the fountain of infinite good.
 - b. Love to God, then, forms the grand requirement, and fundamental precept of the Divine law.

- 1.) This obligation, too, to love God with supreme affection, is binding upon the creature irrespective of any advantage which may result to him from so loving God.
- c. Love, too, is the great influential principle of the Gospel.
- 1.) **[2 Corinthians 5:14]- For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:**
 - 2.) A conviction of duty and the influence of fear may sometimes urge forward the soul, but love alone can prompt to a loving and holy obedience; and all obedience that springs from an inferior motive is not the obedience that the gospel of Jesus inculcates.
 - 3.) **[Galatians 4:6-7]- And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**
 - 4.) **[Romans 8:16]- The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:**
 - 5.) **[John 14:15,23-24]- If ye love me, keep my commandments. Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.**
 - 6.) This motive is the most holy and influential of all motives of obedience.
 - a.) *'Under the constraining influence of this principle, how easy becomes every cross for Jesus! - how light every burden, how pleasant every yoke! Duties become privileges - difficulties vanish - fears are quelled - shame is humbled - delay is rebuked; and, all on flame for Jesus, the pardoned, justified, adopted child exclaims, "Here, Lord, am I, a living sacrifice; your for your, and your for eternity!"'*
- d. Love is that principle that expels all legal fear from the heart.
- 1.) **[1 John 4:18]- There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.**
 - 2.) **[Job 9:28]- I am afraid of all my sorrows, I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent.**
 - 3.) **[Job 21:6]- Even when I remember I am afraid, and trembling taketh hold on my flesh.**
 - 4.) **[Job 23:15]- Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him.**
 - 5.) **[Psalm 56:3]- What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.**
 - 6.) **[Psalm 119:120]- My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.**
 - 7.) **[Romans 8:1]- There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**
 - 8.) O you of fearful heart! why these anxious doubts, why these tormenting fears, why this shrinking from the thought of death, why these distant, hard, and unkind thoughts of God? Why this prison-house, - why this chain?
 - a.) You are not perfected in the love of Jesus, for "perfect love casts out fear;" you are not perfected in that great truth, that Jesus is mighty to save, that he died for a poor sinner, that his death was a perfect satisfaction to Divine justice; and that without a single meritorious work of your own, just as you are, poor, empty, vile, worthless, unworthy, you are welcome to the rich provision of sovereign grace and dying love.
- e. Love is that grace of the Spirit that brings faith into active exercise.
- 1.) Faith brought into exercise, bringing every spiritual blessing into the soul.

- a.) *[Galatians 5:6]- For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.*
- 2.) A believer stands by faith
- a.) *[Romans 11:20]- Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:*
- 3.) He walks by faith.
- a.) *[2 Corinthians 5:7]- (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)*
- 4.) He overcomes by faith.
- a.) *[1 John 5:4]- For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*
- 5.) He lives by faith.
- a.) *[Galatians 2:20]- I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*
- 6.) Love is therefore a laboring grace;
- a.) *[Hebrews 11:10]- For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*
- f. The Holy Spirit distinguishes love as a part of the Christian armor
- 1.) *[1 Thessalonians 5:8]- But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*
- 2.) There is something so shielding in its influence, so repelling to the spirit of enmity and darkness, so obnoxious to sin, that he only is fit for the conflict who is well clad in the bosom-plate of love.
- a.) *[Romans 8:37]- Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*
- g. Love is immortal; it is that grace of the Spirit that will never die.
- 1.) The day is not far distant, when faith will be turned to sight, and hope will be lost in full fruition, but love will never die;
- 2.) *[1 Corinthians 13:8]- Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*
- h. Christian call to mind the period and the circumstances of your first espousal to Jesus.
- 1.) If there ever was a blissful period of your life, - if a spot of verdure in the remembrance of the past, on which the sunlight ever rests, - was it not the time, and is it not the place, where your heart first expanded with the love of Jesus?
- 2.) You have have buffeted many storms, have waded through many deep afflictions, and fought many severe battles, - but all have well-near faded from your memory.
- 3.) The hour and the events of your "first love," - these you never have forgotten, you never can forget.
- a.) The period when the chains of your bondage were broken,
- b.) When your fettered soul broke from its thralldom, and sprang into the liberty of the sons of God,.
- c.) When light discovered your darkness, and that darkness rolled away before its increasing luster.
- d.) When the Spirit wounded you, then healed that wound with the precious balm of Gilead.

- e.) When he gave you sorrow, then soothed that sorrow by a view of the crucified Lamb of God.
 - f.) When faith took hold of Jesus and brought the blessed assurance into the soul,
 - g.) *[Song of Solomon 6:3]- I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.*
 - h.) *[Revelation 2:1-4]- Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*
- i. The grace of love in a child of God may greatly and sadly decline.
- 1.) The solemn charge, which he brought against his ancient professing people.
 - a.) *[Jeremiah 2:2,5,31]- Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? O generation, see ye the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?*
 - b.) *[Matthew 24:12]- And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*
 - c.) *[Revelation 2:4]- Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*
 - 2.) When God becomes less an object of fervent desire, holy delight, and frequent contemplation, we may suspect a declension of Divine love in the soul.
 - a.) The moment the supreme love of Adam to God declined, - the instant that it swerved from its proper and lawful center, he shunned converse with God, and sought to embower himself from the presence of the Divine glory.
 - b.) Conscious of a change in his affections, - sensible of a divided heart, of subjection to a rival interest, - and knowing that God was no longer the object of his supreme love, nor the fountain of his pure delight, nor the blessed and only source of his bliss, - he rushed from his presence as from an object of terror, and sought concealment in Eden's bowers.
 - c.) That God whose presence was once so glorious, whose converse was so holy, whose voice was so sweet, became as a strange God to the rebellious and conscience-stricken creature, and, "absence from you is best," was written in dark letters upon his guilty brow.
 - 3.) Was God less glorious in himself? Was he less holy, less loving, less faithful, or less the fountain of supreme bliss?
 - a.) Far from it. God has undergone no change. It is the perfection of a perfect Being that he is unchangeable; that he can never act contrary to his own nature, but must ever be, in all that he does, in harmony with himself.
 - b.) The change was in the creature. Adam had left his first love, had transferred his affections to another and an inferior object; and conscious that he had ceased to love God, he would gladly have veiled himself from his presence, and have excluded himself from his communion.

- c.) *[Psalm 63:1-3]- O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.*
- 4.) Not only in the declension of Divine love in the soul, does God become less an object of adoring contemplation and desire, but also there is less filial approach to Him.
- a.) The sweet confidence and simple trust of the child is lost; the soul no longer rushes into his bosom with all the lowly yet fond yearnings of an adopted son, but lingers at a distance; or, if it attempts to approach, does so with the trembling and the restraint of a slave.
- b.) The tender, loving, child-like spirit, that marked the walk of the believer in the days of his espousals, when no object was so glorious to him as God, no being so loved as his heavenly Father, no spot so sacred as the throne of communion, no theme so sweet as his free grace adoption, has in a great degree departed; and distrust, and legal fears, and bondage of spirit, have succeeded it.
- 5.) Hard thoughts of God in his dispensations, may be regarded as another undeniable symptom.
- a.) Divine love in the heart, deepening and expanding towards that God from whence it springs, will, in the hour of trial, exclaim, "My God has smitten me, but he is my God still, faithful and loving. My father has chastened me sore, but he is my Father still, tender and kind. This trying dispensation originated in love, it speaks with the voice of love, it bears with it the message of love, and is sent to draw my heart closer and yet closer to the God of love, from whom it came."
- 6.) When there is but little inclination for communion with God.
- a.) The throne of grace is sought as a duty rather than a privilege, and, consequently, but little fellowship is experienced, a stronger evidence we need not of a declension of love in the soul.
- b.) He who knows God, who, with faith's eye, has discovered some of his glory, and by the power of the Spirit has felt something of his love, will not be at a loss to distinguish between God's sensible presence and absence in the soul.
- c.) Some professing people walk so much without communion, without fellowship, without daily filial and close communion with God; they are so immersed in the cares, and so lost in the fogs and mists of the world; the fine edge of their spiritual affection is so blunted, and their love so frozen by contact with worldly influences and occupations, - and no less so, with cold, formal professors, - that the Sun of righteousness may cease to shine upon their soul, and they not know it!
- 7.) When there is a less tender walk with God, we may be at no loss to ascertain the state of our love.
- a.) When a believer walks in holy circumspection, in uprightness, integrity, close vigilance, and prayerfulness, before God, he then walks softly.
- b.) *[Isaiah 38:15]- What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.*
- c.) When with filial tenderness, he trembles to offend his Father, his God, his best Friend.
- d.) When he increasingly delights himself in the precepts and commandments of the Lord.
- e.) When he would rather pluck from himself the right eye, and sever the right hand, than willfully and knowingly offend God, and grieve the Spirit; then his walk is tender and soft and close with God.

- 8.) When Christ is less glorious to the eye, and less precious to the heart, Divine love in the soul of a believer must be on the wane?
 - a.) Where there is but little dealing with the atoning blood, leaning upon the righteousness, drawing from the fullness, and bearing daily the cross of Christ, the love of a believer waxes cold.
 - b.) *"What think you of Christ? Is he lived to, is he lived upon? Is his name your delight, his cross your boast, his work your resting place?"*

- 9.) A decay of love to the saints of God is a strong evidence of a decay of love to God himself.
 - a.) If we love God with a sincere and deepening affection, we must love his image wherever we find it.
 - b.) Do we trace Christ in the principles that guide him, in the motives that govern him, in the spirit, in the very looks of the man?
 - c.) O, it marks the decay of love to God in the soul, when the heart beats faintly, and the eye looks coldly, towards any dear saint of God, because he belongs not to our party, and wears not our badge; when bigotry, narrow-minded selfishness, warps the mind, congeals the current of love, and almost unchristianises a believer.
 - d.) *[1 John 4:20-21]- If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

- 10.) When love to God declines, with it will decline an interest in the advancement and prosperity of his cause: the one invariably follows the other.
 - a.) That outward zeal may continue long after a process of concealed declension has advanced in the soul, and secret duties have become neglected.
 - b.) A true, spiritual, and lively interest in the increase of Christ's kingdom, in the diffusion of his truth, the deepening of holiness in the church, the conversion of sinners, will invariably decline with the declension of love to God.
 - c.) When we mark a member of a church maintaining his external union, and yet hanging as a dead and fruitless branch upon the vine, doing nothing to advance the cause of God and truth, withholding his money, his prayers, his personal attendance on the means of grace, and rather opposing than cheering on the active portion of the body, we are ready to ask, "How dwells the love of God in him?"

C. The Causes of Declension in Love.

1. Worldly encroachment.
 - a. No two affections can be more opposite than love to God and love to the world:
 - b. Love to God will expel love to the world; love to the world will deaden the soul's love to God.
 - c. *[Matthew 6:24]- No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*
 - d. *[2 Timothy 4:10]- For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.*
 - e. *[1 John 2:15]- Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
 - f. He writes upon the creature? - "My son, give me your heart. I want your love, your pure and supreme affection; I want to be the one and only object of your delight. I gave my Son for you - his life for your; I sent my Spirit to quicken, to renew, to seal, and to possess you for myself: all this I did, that I might have your heart. To possess myself of this, I have smitten your gourds, removed your idols, broken your earthly dependences, and have

sought to detach your affections from the creature, that they may rise, undivided and unfettered, and entwine around one who loves you with an undying love."

2. Interpreting God's covenant dealings in the light of judgments rather than the fruits of love.
 - a. Hard and harsh thoughts of God will be the effect of wrong interpretations of his dealings:
 - b. **[Mark 7:37]- And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.**
 - c. **[Psalm 119:71,75]- It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes. I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.**
 - d. Let this be the reflection that hushes and soothes you to repose, even as an infant upon its mother's bosom: *"My God is love! my Father is unchangeable tenderness and truth! he has done it, and it is well done."*

- D. The revival of this waning grace of Love in the child of God.
 1. Let the believer seek to know the exact state of his love to God.
 - a. Knowledge of himself is the first step in the return of every soul to God.
 - 1.) In conversion, it was self-knowledge - knowledge of ourselves as utterly lost - that led us to Jesus; thus did the Eternal Spirit teach.
 - 2.) In revival, ascertain the exact state of your love, and what has caused its declension; shrink not from the examination, - hide not from the discovery.
 - 3.) Honestly and humbly confess it before God.
 - b. Trace out and crucify the cause of your declension in love.
 - 1.) **[John 3:6]- That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**
 - 2.) *"All the tenderness, the fond affection, the acute sympathy, the true fidelity, that you ever did find or enjoy in the creature, dwells in God, your covenant God and Father, in an infinite degree."*
 2. Draw largely from the fount of love in God.
 - a. All love to God in the soul is the result of his love to us and is begotten in the heart by his Spirit.
 - 1.) **[1 John 4:19]- We love him, because he first loved us.**
 - 2.) **[2 Thessalonians 3:5]- And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.**
 3. Deal much and closely with a crucified Savior.
 - a. **[1 John 4:9-10]- In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.**
 - b. O how will this rekindle the flame that is ready to die in your bosom! How it will draw you up in a holy and unreserved surrender of Body, soul, and spirit!
 4. Do not fail to honor the Holy Spirit in this great work of revival.
 - a. Pray much for his anointings;
 - 1.) Go to him as the Glorifier of Christ, as the Comforter, the Sealer, the Witness, the Earnest of his people: it is he who will apply the atoning blood,
 - 2.) It is he who will revive your drooping graces, - it is he who will fan to a flame your waning love, by unfolding the cross, and directing your heart into the love of God.
 - b. Honor him in his love; let it encourage you to draw largely from his influences, and to be "filled with the Spirit."

5. Remember that though your love has waxed cold, the love of your God and Father towards you has undergone no diminishing: not the shadow of a change has it known.
 - a. Not one moment has God turned his back upon you, though you have turned your back upon him times without number:
 - b. ***[Psalm 89:30-33]- If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.***

III. Declension in Faith

A. Proof text.

1. ***[Luke 17:5]- And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.***

B. The "Value" of Graces.

1. Each grace of the Spirit must be considered by the believer as forming an essential element of his Christian character.
2. We may not be sensible of possessing them all in the same degree.
3. We may not know what graces of the Spirit we may possess, until the dealings of a covenant God call them into holy and active exercise.
4. Every grace of the Spirit be thus indispensable and costly, the declension and decay of that grace in the believer must attract the especial notice of God, and involve solemn and serious consequences.
5. Any part of God's great and gracious work of grace in the soul that is suffered to decay, seems like a reflection upon God himself; there is a dishonoring of him in it to a degree of which the believer is but little aware.
6. What, next to his Son, is most glorious, and costly, and precious in God's sight?
 - a. Is it the world? - No, he sees no glory in that.
 - b. Is it the heavens? - No, they are not clean in his sight, and he charges his angels with folly.
 - c. It is his kingdom in his saints, his renewing, adopting, sanctifying grace in his people.
 - d. Next to his Son, nothing is so glorious and costly; He sees, compared with this, no real beauty in anything besides; here his profoundest thoughts dwell, here his fondest love rests; to commence, carry forward and perfect this, all his arrangements in the vast provinces of nature, providence, and grace, are rendered subservient.
7. What must be the mind of God in view of a decaying, declining state of grace in the soul, and what the peculiar method which he adopts to resuscitate and recover it.

C. Faith described.

1. Faith is that grace against which the attacks of Satan are more directly and constantly directed than almost any other.
2. Scriptural and spiritual views of faith form the very basis of experimental godliness.
3. The authors of systems of divinity have generally classified the subject of faith.
 - a. They speak of speculative faith, - of historical faith, - practical faith, - saving faith, - realizing faith.
 - b. These distinctions serve only to mystify the subject and perplex the mind, and frequently lead to great errors.
4. The Holy Spirit speaks of faith.
 - a. One faith.
 - 1.) ***[Ephesians 4:5]- one Lord, one faith, one baptism,***
 - b. Faith of God's elect.
 - 1.) ***[Titus 1:1]- Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness;***

5. Faith is that act of the understanding and the heart by which a repenting sinner - a sinner under the mighty operation of the Eternal Spirit, convicting him of sin, and working in him true contrition - closes in with God's free proclamation of pardon through a crucified Savior: he believes, he receives, he welcomes the promise of eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus "sets to his seal that God is true."
 - a. *[John 3:33]- He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.*
 - b. *[Luke 18:13]- And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*
 - c. A man must know his lost and ruined condition before he will accept of Christ; and how can he know this, without a spiritually enlightened mind?
 - d. The same blessed Spirit that convinced of sin, presents to the soul a Savior crucified for the lost,
 - 1.) He enfolds a salvation full and free for the most worthless.
 - 2.) He reveals a fountain that "cleanses from all sin,"
 - 3.) He holds up to view a righteousness that "justifies from all things."
 - 4.) All that he sets the poor convinced sinner upon doing to avail himself of this, is simply to believe.

6. The entire spiritual life of a child of God is a life of faith.
 - a. *[Galatians 2:20]- I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

7. A believer stands by faith.
 - a. *[Romans 11:20]- Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:*

8. The peculiar blessedness of the life of faith.
 - a. *[2 Corinthians 5:7]- (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)*
 - b. A walking every step by faith:
 - c. A looking above trials, above necessities, above perplexities, above improbabilities and impossibilities,
 - d. A looking above all second causes;
 - e. In the face of difficulties and discouragements, going forward, leaning upon God.

9. Faith is an essential part of the spiritual armor.
 - a. *[Ephesians 6:16]- Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*
 - b. *[1 Thessalonians 5:8]- But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*
 - c. *[1 John 5:4]- For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

10. Faith is a purifying grace.
 - a. *[Acts 15:9]- And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*
 - b. *[Acts 26:18]- To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*
 - c. He is most holy who has most faith; he who has least faith is most exposed to the assaults of his inbred corruptions.
 - d. If there is in any child of God a desire for Divine conformity, for more of the spirit of Christ, more weanedness, and crucifixion, and daily dying, this should be his ceaseless prayer, "Lord, increase my faith."
 - 1.) *[Luke 17:5]- And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.*

- e. Faith in Jesus checks the power of sin, slays the hidden corruption, and enables the believer to "endure as seeing him who is invisible."
 - 1.) *[Hebrews 11:27]- By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*
- f. Faith is the grace that smoothes the rugged way, lightens the daily burden, "glorifies God in the fire;" is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;" rests upon God's word because he has said it; and keeps the soul, through all its conflicts and trials, safe unto eternal glory: "Kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation."
 - 1.) *[Daniel 3:25]- He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*
 - 2.) *[Hebrews 11:1]- Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*
 - 3.) *[1 Peter 1:5]- Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

D. Declension in Faith described.

- 1. All the graces implanted in the soul are the product of the Spirit.
- 2. They must necessarily be in their nature spiritual and indestructible.
- 3. Yet they may so decline in their power, become so enfeebled and impaired in their vigor and tendency, as to be classed among the "things that are ready to die."
 - a. *[Revelation 3:2]- Be watchful, and strengthen the things, which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.*
- 4. There is no part of the Spirit's work more constantly and severely assailed, and consequently more exposed to declension, than faith.
- 5. Examples of Declension.
 - a. Abraham, at God's command, binding his son upon the altar, and raising the knife for the sacrifice.
 - 1.) Yet, tracing the history of the patriarch still further, we find that very giant faith now trembling, and yielding under a trial far less acute and severe;
 - 2.) He, who could surrender the life of his promised son - that son, through whose lineal descent Jesus was to come - into the hands of God, could not entrust that same God with his own.
 - b. Job: in the commencement of his deep trial we find him justifying God;
 - 1.) *[Job 1:21]- And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*
 - 2.) Yet the very faith, which thus bowed in meekness to the rod, so declined, as to lead him to curse the day of his birth!
 - 3.) *[Job 3:1]- After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day.*
 - c. David's faith at one time led him out to battle with Goliath.
 - 1.) Now fleeing from a shadow, and exclaiming.
 - 2.) *[1 Samuel 27:1]- And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.*
 - d. Peter's faith at one period could walk boldly upon the tempestuous sea.
 - 1.) Yet at another time deny his Lord, panic-struck at the voice of a little maid.

6. What, reader, is the real state of your faith?
 - a. Is it as lively, vigorous, and active, as it was when you first believed?
 - 1.) Has it undergone no declension?
 - b. Is the Object of faith as glorious in your eye as he then was?
 - 1.) Are you not now looking at second causes in God's dealings with you, instead of lifting your eye and fixing it on him alone?
 - c. What is your faith in prayer?
 - 1.) Do you come boldly to the throne of grace, asking, nothing doubting?
 - 2.) Do you take all your trials, your wants, your infirmities, to God!
 - d. What is your realization of eternal things, - is faith here in constant, holy exercise? Are you living as a pilgrim and a sojourner, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," than float along on the summer-sea of this world's enjoyments?
 - 1.) ***[Hebrews 11:25]- Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;***
 - e. What is the crucifying power of your faith? - Does it deaden you to sin, and wean you from the world, and constrain you to walk humbly with God and near to Jesus?
 - f. When the Lord brings the cross, and says, "Bear this for me," does your faith promptly and cheerfully acquiesce, "any cross, any suffering, any sacrifice for you, dear Lord?"
 - g. When a believer's visits to his closet grow less frequent and spiritual, faith will assuredly decline.
 - 1.) Prayer is the channel that supplies faith with its nourishment and vigor.
 - 2.) There is a beautiful connection between faith and prayer, - their influence is reciprocal: constant and ardent prayer strengthens faith, and faith, brought into exercise, stimulates to prayer.
 - 3.) A praying man will be a believing man, and a man of faith will be a man of prayer.
 - 4.) Mary Queen of Scotland is said to have expressed a greater dread of the prayers of John Knox the Reformer, than of all the armies leagued against her. But what infused such power into the prayers of Knox, rendering them "terrible as an army with banners?" - it was his mighty faith; and his mighty faith rendered him mighty in prayer.
 - a.) ***[Song of Solomon 6:4,10]- Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?***
- E. The Causes of Declension in Faith.
1. Dealing much with a life of sense.
 - a. It is impossible to walk by sight and by faith at the same time; the two paths run in opposite directions.
 - b. When God, about to deliver the Israelites from the power of Pharaoh, commanded them to advance, it was before he revealed the way by which he was about to rescue them.
 - 1.) ***[Exodus 14:15]- And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward:***
 - 2.) ***[2 Corinthians 5:7]- For we walk by faith, not by sight:***
 - c. God may call you to go into a place, not making known to you where you go; but it is your duty, like Abraham, to obey.
 - 1.) ***[Romans 4:19-21]- And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in***

faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

2. Faith unexercised in dark and afflictive providences, leads greatly to its declension.
 - a. When gloomy providences, and sharp trials and temptations, thicken around a poor believing soul, then is it the time for faith to put on its strength, and come forth to the battle.
 - b. God never places his child in any difficulties, or throws upon him any cross, but it is a call to exercise faith; and if the opportunity of its exercise passes away without improvement.
 - c. The more faith is brought into play, the more it increases; the more it is exercised, the stronger it becomes; the reverse of this is frequently the cause of its sad declension.

3. The habitual, or even the occasional, doubtful apprehension indulged in of his interest in Christ,
 - a. Every misgiving felt, every doubt cherished, ever fear yielded to, every dark providence brooded over, tends to unhinge the soul from God, and dims its near and loving view of Jesus.
 - b. To doubt the love, the wisdom, and the faithfulness of God; to doubt the perfection of the work of Christ; to doubt the operation of the Spirit on the heart, - what can tend more to the weakening and decay of this precious and costly grace?
 - c. Imperfectly may the doubting Christian be aware what dishonor is done to Jesus, what reflection is cast upon his great work, by every unbelieving fear he cherishes.
 - 1.) It is a secret wounding of Jesus, however the soul may shrink from such an inference.
 - 2.) It is a lowering, an undervaluing of Christ's obedience and death.
 - a.) That glorious work of salvation with which the Father has declared himself well pleased.
 - b.) That work with which Divine justice has confessed itself satisfied.
 - c.) That work on the basis of which every poor, convinced sinner is saved, and on the ground of which millions of redeemed and glorified spirits are now bowing around the throne.
 - d.) That work, we say, is dishonored, undervalued, and slighted by every doubt and fear secretly harbored, or openly expressed by a child of God.
 - 3.) It is thought by some, that to always doubt one's pardon and acceptance is the evidence of a lowly spirit. It is the mark of the very opposite of a lowly and humble mind.
 - 4.) That is true humility that credits the testimony of God.
 - a.) That believes because he has spoken it.
 - b.) That rests in the blood, and righteousness, and all-sufficiency of Jesus, because he has declared, "whoever believes in him shall be saved."
 - 5.) This is genuine lowliness, - the blessed product of the Eternal Spirit. To go to Jesus just as I am, a poor, lost, helpless sinner.
 - a.) To go without previous preparation.
 - b.) To go glorying in my weakness, infirmity, and poverty, that the free grace and sovereign pleasure, and infinite merit of Christ, may be seen in my full pardon, justification, and eternal glory.

 4. The power of unsubdued sin in the heart: nothing, perhaps, more secretly and effectually militates against the vigor of a life of faith than this.
 - a. Faith is a holy, indwelling principle; it has its root in the renewed, sanctified heart; and its growth and fruitfulness depend much upon the progressive richness of the soil in which it is embedded.
 - b. If the noxious weeds of the natural soil are allowed to grow and occupy the heart, and gain the ascendancy, this celestial plant will necessarily droop and decay.

- c. Imagine the case of a believer living in the practice of unsubdued sin.
 - 1.) What is the real power of faith in him?
 - 2.) Where is its strength?
 - 3.) Where are its glorious achievements?
 - 4.) Where the trophies it has won in the field of battle?

- d. We look for the fruit of faith.
 - 1.) The lowly, humble, contrite spirit.
 - 2.) The tender conscience.
 - 3.) The traveling daily to the atoning blood.
 - 4.) The living upon the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
 - 5.) The carrying out of Christian principle.
 - a.) Crucifixion to the world.
 - b.) Patient submission to a life of suffering.
 - c.) Meek resignation to a Father's discipline.
 - d.) A living as beholding Him who is invisible.
 - e.) A constant and vivid realization of eternal realities.
 - 6.) We look for these fruits of faith; but we find them not.
 - a.) There is the worm of unmortified sin feeding at the root; and until that is slain, faith will always be sickly, unfruitful, and "ready to die."
 - b.) ***[Romans 8:12-13]- Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.***

- 5. A looking off of Christ will tend greatly to the weakening and unfruitfulness of faith.
 - a. The eagle's eye becomes strong through the early discipline of the parent; placed in such a position when young, as to fix the gaze intently upon the sun, the power of vision gradually becomes so great, as to enable it in time to look at its meridian splendor without uneasiness, and to observe the remotest object without difficulty.
 - b. The same spiritual discipline strengthens the eye of faith; the eye grows vigorous by looking much at the Sun of righteousness.
 - c. The more constantly it gazes upon Jesus, the stronger it grows; and the stronger it grows, the more glory it discovers in him, the more beauty in his person, and perfection in his work.
 - d. Thus strengthened, it can see things that are afar off, - the promises of a covenant-keeping God, the hope of eternal life, the crown of glory - these it can look upon and almost touch.
 - e. ***[Hebrews 11:1]- Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.***
 - f. ***[Hebrews 11:13]- These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.***

- F. The way the Holy Spirit revives, strengthens, and increases the declining grace of faith.
 - 1. The Spirit discovering to the believer the cause of its declension, and setting him upon, and strengthening him in, the work of its removal.
 - a. The Spirit leads the declining believer to the spiritual duty of self-examination.
 - b. When any grace of the Spirit is in a sickly and declining state, an effect so painful must originate in a cause that needs to be searched out.
 - 1.) The great difficulty in a backsliding soul, is, to bring it to the spiritual and needed duty of self-scrutiny:
 - 2.) There is something so humiliating, so foreign to the natural inclination of the heart, and withal, to which the very declension of the soul is so strongly opposed, that it requires

no little putting forth of the Spirit's grace, to bring the believer honestly and fully into it.

2. Perhaps you have been misinterpreting the Lord's providential dealings with you; you have been indulging in unbelieving, unkind, unfilial views of your trials, bereavements, and disappointments.
 - a. Nothing perhaps more tends to unhinge the soul from God, engender distrust, hard thoughts, and rebellious feelings, than thus to doubt his loving-kindness and faithfulness in the discipline he is pleased to send.
 - b. But faith, looking through the dark cloud, rising on the mountain wave, and anchoring itself on the Divine veracity, and the unchangeable love of God, is sure to strengthen and increase by every storm that beats upon it.

3. Is it the enchantment of the world that has seized upon your faith?
 - a. Come out from it, and be separate; resign its hollow friendship, its temporizing policy, its carnal enjoyments, its fleshly wisdom, its sinful conformity.
 - 1.) ***[1 Peter 2:9]- But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;***
 - 2.) ***[Romans 12:2]- And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.***

4. Is it unmortified sin that feeds at the root of faith?
 - a. Bring it to the cross of Christ, - condemn it there, nail it there, and leave it not until you are enabled to exclaim, "*Thanks be unto God, who always causes me to triumph through Christ Jesus!*"
 - 1.) ***[1 Corinthians 15:57]- But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

5. Is it the indulgence of unbelieving and dishonoring fears touching your interest in Christ?
 - a. Yield them, and let the wind scatter them; there is no ground for the doubts and unbelief of a child of God.
 - b. There may be much in himself to cast him down, but nothing in the truth which he professes to believe;
 - c. There is nothing in the subject-matter of faith, nothing in Christ, nothing in the work of Christ, nothing in the word of God, calculated to beget a doubt or a fear in the heart of a poor sinner.
 - d. There is everything to inspire confidence, strengthen faith, and encourage hope.
 - e. Does his sin plead loud for his condemnation?
 - 1.) The voice of Immanuel's blood pleads louder for his pardon.
 - f. Does his own righteousness condemn?
 - 1.) The righteousness of Christ acquits.
 - g. Thus there is nothing in Christ to engender an unbelieving doubt in a poor convinced sinner.
 - 1.) Himself he may doubt.
 - a.) He may doubt his ability to save himself.
 - b.) He may doubt his power to better his condition, to make himself more worthy and acceptable.
 - 2.) But never let him doubt that Christ is all that a poor, lost, convinced sinner wants.
 - 3.) Let him not doubt that Jesus is the Friend of sinners, the Savior of sinners

- 4.) Do not doubt and that He was never known to cast out one whom in lowliness and brokenness of heart, sought His compassionate grace.
6. By leading him to rest more simply on the faithfulness of God.
- a. What a restorative to drooping faith are these declarations of the Divine word, which represent God as infinitely unchangeable and faithful.
 - 1.) *[Malachi 3:6]- For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*
 - 2.) *[James 1:17]- Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*
 - 3.) *[Hosea 2:20]- I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.*
 - 4.) *[Isaiah 11:5]- And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.*
 - 5.) *[Psalm 89:33]- Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail.*
 - 6.) *[Lamentations 3:23]- They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*
 - 7.) *[Hebrews 10:23]- Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)*
 - b. Remember, that the unbelief of the believer never affects the faithfulness of God!
 - 1.) *[2 Timothy 2:13]- If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.*
 - c. This is the only true and secure anchorage-ground for a poor soul, tossed amid the waves of doubt and perplexity.
 - 1.) To know that God cannot alter his word.
 - 2.) That it is impossible that he should lie.
 - 3.) That were he to deviate from his infinite perfection, he would cease to be a perfect Being, and consequently would cease to be God.
 - 4.) To know that he is faithful in the midst of the unfaithfulness and perpetual startings aside of his child.
 - 5.) To know He is faithful in the depth of the deepest affliction, - faithful when earthly hopes wither, and human cisterns are broken, and when the soul is led to exclaim, "His faithfulness has failed!"
7. To remember, that when the Lord is about to impart any peculiar mercy, there is always travail of faith for that mercy.
- a. Faith may be long and sharply tried, yet the blessing it will bring forth will more than repay for all the weeping, and suffering, and crying, it has occasioned.
 - b. Be sure that when faith is tried, God is about to bring your soul into the possession of some great, and perhaps, hitherto unexperienced mercy.
 - c. *[Psalm 130:1-2]- Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.*
 - d. *[2 Samuel 22:7]- In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears.*
 - e. *[Psalm 34:3-4,6]- O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.*
 - f. *[Psalm 30:5]- For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*
 - g. *[Psalm 126:6]- He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*
8. The trial of faith is a test of its degree.

- a. We know not what faith we possess, until the Lord calls it into exercise.
 - b. He bids us come to him upon the water, and then we begin to sink.
 - c. He suffers us to be assailed by our enemies, and we shrink from the cross.
 - d. He puts our faith to the trial, and then we learn how little we possess.
9. The trial of faith is also a test of its character.
- a. It is the furnace that tries the ore, of what kind it is.
 - 1.) It may be brass, or iron, or clay, or perhaps precious gold; but the crucible will test it.
 - 2.) There is much that passes for real faith, which is no faith.
 - 3.) There is much spurious, counterfeit metal; it is the trial that brings out its real character.
 - a.) The true character of Judas was not known until his covetousness was tempted;
 - b.) Simon Magus was not discovered to possess a spurious faith, until he thought to purchase the gift of God with money;
 - c.) Demas did not forsake the apostle, until the world drew him away.
 - 4.) *[Matthew 13:20-22]- But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth 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. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.*
 - 5.) *[Titus 1:1]- Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness;*
 - 6.) *[Malachi 3:3]- And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*
 - 7.) *[1 Peter 1:7]- That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*
10. Be careful of not making a Savior of faith.
- a. There is a danger - and it cannot be too vigilantly guarded against - of substituting the work of the Spirit for the work of Christ; this mistake it is that leads so many of God's saints to look within, instead of without, themselves for the evidences of their calling and acceptance; and thus, too, so many are kept all their spiritual course walking in a state of bondage and fear, the great question never fully and fairly settled, or, in other words, never quite sure of their sonship.
 - b. The work of Christ is a great and finished work; it is so glorious that it can admit of no comparison, so complete that it can allow of no addition, and so essential that it can give place to no substitution.
 - c. Precious as is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, and essential as it is to the salvation of the soul, yet he who places it where the work of Jesus ought only to be, deranges the order of the covenant, closes up the legitimate source of evidence, and will assuredly bring distress and uncertainty into his soul.
 - d. *[Romans 14:17]- For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*
 - e. If, then, your faith is feeble and tried, be not cast down; faith does not save you.
 - 1.) Then make not a Savior of your faith; despise it not if it is feeble, exult not in it if it is strong, trample not on it if it is small, deify it not if it is great; such are the extremes to which every believer is exposed.
 - 2.) If your faith is feeble and sharply tried, it is no evidence that you are not a believer; but the evidence of your acceptance in the Beloved, is to arise from Jesus alone.

- 3.) *[Hebrews 12:2]- Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
- 4.) *[Luke 17:5]- And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.*
- 5.) *[2 Timothy 1:12]- For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

IV. Declension in Prayer

A. Proof text.

1. *[Job 15:4]- Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God.*

B. True Prayer Described.

1. The nature of true prayer.

- a. It is the communion of the spiritual life in the soul of man with its Divine Author; it is a breathing back the Divine life into the bosom of God from whence it came; it is holy, spiritual, humble converse with God.
- b. *"I open my Bible, and God talks with me; I close my Bible, and then I talk with God."*
- c. It is a talking with God as a child talks with his father, as a friend converses with his friend.
- d. *[Exodus 33:9]- And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses.*
- e. True prayer is the aspiration of a renewed soul towards God.
 - 1.) It is the breathing of the Divine life, sometimes in the accents of sorrow, sometimes as the expression of want, and always as the acknowledgment of dependence.
 - 2.) It is the looking up of a renewed, afflicted, necessitous, and dependent child to its own loving Father, in all the consciousness of utter weakness, and in all the sweetness of filial trust.

2. The Object of Prayer.

- a. Jehovah, the Lord of heaven and earth.
- b. He only has an ear to hear our tale of sorrow, an arm that can support in time of need, and a heart that can sympathize with our deep necessity.

3. The Medium of Prayer.

- a. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, equal in might, majesty, and dominion with the Father, and yet the Elder Brother, the Slain Lamb, the Mediator and Surety, the High Priest of his people.
- b. Prayer finds acceptance within the veil, only as it is presented in the name of Jesus.
- c. He who pleads the blood of Jesus in prayer, may have ten thousand tongues all pleading against him, but " the blood of Jesus speaks better things," and drowns their every voice.
 - 1.) *[Hebrews 12:24]- And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

4. The Author of prayer.

- a. *[Romans 8:26]- Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*
- b. It is the Holy Spirit who begets the desire, indicts the petition, and breathes it forth in prayer through Christ to God.

5. Prayer as a necessity.

- a. The child of God requires repeated stimulus to the sweet and precious privilege of communion with his heavenly Father.

- b. Without the exercise of prayer, the child of God cannot live.
 - 1.) It is the drawing in of the Divine life, and the breathing of it forth again;
 - 2.) The spiritual nature requires constant supplies of spiritual nourishment; and that the only evidence of its healthy existence is, its constant rising towards God.
 - 3.) Cease to pray, and all grace withers, all vigor decays, and all comfort dies.
- c. Prayer as a duty.
 - 1.) *[Psalm 50:15]- And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*
 - 2.) *[Matthew 6:6]- But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*
 - 3.) *[John 16:23]- And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.*
 - 4.) *[Philippians 4:6]- Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*
 - 5.) *[Ephesians 6:18]- Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*
 - 6.) *[James 1:5]- If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*
- d. Prayer as a privilege.
 - 1.) Happy is that believer, when duties come to be viewed as privileges.
 - 2.) To have a door of access ever open to God.
 - 3.) To cast the burden upon One who has promised to sustain.
 - 4.) To go and tell Jesus;
 - a.) When the world is slowly stealing upon the heart.
 - b.) When that heart is wounded through the unkindness of friends.
 - c.) When that heart is bleeding under severe bereavement.
- e. The infidelity to prayer.
 - 1.) That is infidelity that takes a believer in the hour of his need first to the arm of flesh, rather than in prayer to God.
 - 2.) To go to the creature first, is to " go down into Egypt" for help, - a sin which God has signalized with his severest displeasure.
 - a.) *[Genesis 26:2]- And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:*

C. Declension in Prayer described.

- 1. If an incipient process of declension is going forward in the soul - if the heart is wandering, and love waxes cold, and faith is decaying, the spirit and the habit of prayer will immediately betray it.
 - a. The form and the habit of prayer may for a while continue, the domestic altar sustained, and even the closet occasionally visited; - but the spirit of prayer has evaporated, and all is coldness and dullness, the very torpor and frigidity of death!
 - b. A man may not be able to give expression to his deep emotion in prayer, his thoughts may find no vehicle of utterance, language may entirely fail him; or, if he attempts the audible expression of his wants, there may be much that offends a refined taste, and that grates harshly upon a musical ear, and yet the spirit of prayer may glow in his bosom, - and this - the true language of prayer - finds its way to the ear and to the heart of God.
- c. Real prayer is the breathing of God's own Spirit in the heart; have you this?
 - 1.) It is communion and fellowship with God; know you what this is?
 - 2.) It is brokenness, contrition, confession, and that often springing from an overwhelming sense of his goodness and his love shed abroad in the heart; is this your experience?

D. Signs of Declension in Prayer.

1. The habit of prayer declines with the spirit; the latter having gone, the former becomes insipid and tedious, and is at last thrown off as a thing irksome and painful to the mind.
 - a. The first habit that is relinquished with the declension of the spirit of prayer, is that of closet prayer because it is the most spiritual of all devotional exercises, and has most to do with the secret communion of the soul with God.
 - b. The relinquishment of ejaculatory prayer then follows.
 - 1.) ***[Acts 12:5]- Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.***
 - 2.) ***[Romans 1:9]- For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;***
 - 3.) ***[2 Timothy 1:3]- I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;***
 - c. Family prayer is the next devotional habit that is abandoned.
 - 1.) That " border which keeps the web of daily life from unraveling "
 - 2.) That exercise which throws so hallowing an influence around the domestic circle.
 - 3.) The exercise cementing the hearts, awakening and concentrating the sympathies, fortifying the mind, and softening the cares and trials of each loved member, is now yielded:
 - d. Social prayer is now relinquished without a sigh.
 - 1.) The hour of prayer arrives, we look at the vacant place and we inquire, " Where is he?"
 - a.) Away, amid the world's turmoil and ardent in its pursuit.
 - b.) Gone, perhaps, to some scene of carnal amusement, folly, and sin.
 - c.) He, who, when the season of social communion returned, was present to cheer and encourage with his prayers and exhortations the souls of the devout assembly, is now away " sowing to the flesh," and giving to the " things that are temporal,"
 - 1.) ***[Galatians 6:8]- For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.***
 - 2.) ***[2 Corinthians 4:18]- While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.***
 - e. A distant walk from God will super-induce distant thoughts of God,
 - 1.) ***[Job 22:21]- Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee.***
 - 2.) The farther the soul gets from him, the more imperfect must be its knowledge of him.
 - f. A change in the sweetness and enjoyment of spiritual duties, may be regarded as another and painful effect of a declension in this holy exercise: they will become less desired, and more irksome and insipid: will be regarded less as a privilege, more as a burden and a task.
 - 1.) We might enumerate all the spiritual duties familiar to the child of God; and not one will be found to possess attraction or sweetness to that soul passing through a process of declension in prayer.
 - 2.) Why is it, reader, that meditation, and the research of God's word, and holy communion with his saints, and praise, are privileges dry and tasteless to your soul?
 - g. A falling off in the external deportment of the believer is a necessary and often a certain consequence of a declension of the spirit and habit of prayer.

- 1.) The lowliness, self-oblivion, softness of walk, and exemplary regard for the honor and glory of God, of the prayerful man, are often succeeded by loftiness of spirit and of mien, self-confidence, a readiness to sit in judgment upon the conduct and infirmities of others, a cold indifference to the increase of the kingdom of Christ and the conversion of sinners, and a carelessness in the outward deportment of the prayerless man.
 - 2.) The restraining of prayer before God was the first step in departure and the first step taken, and was quickly succeeded by others.
 - 3.) The path of a backslider from God is always downward: the descent is easy and rapid: the velocity of the soul's departure increases with its progress; and when a professing man evinces an inclination and an evidence of spiritual declension, there are not wanting influences ready to assist him on in his departure.
2. An accumulation of daily crosses, seldom fails to follow declension in prayer.
- a. The constant exercise of prayer makes light every burden, and smoothes every rugged step of a child of God: it is this only that keeps down his trials; not that he is ever exempt from them.
 - 1.) ***[Acts 14:22]- Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.***
 - 2.) He is a disciple of the cross, his religion is that of the cross, he is a follower of Him who died upon the cross, and entire exemption from the cross he never expects until he passes to the possession of the crown.
 - a.) But he may pray down his crosses: prayer will lessen their number, and will mitigate their severity.
 - 3.) Few of the tried, afflicted, and constantly disappointed believers think, how closely related are these very trials, and afflictions, and disappointments, to their restraining of prayer before God.
 - a.) Every step seems attended with some new cross.
 - b.) Every scheme is blasted by some adverse wind.
 - c.) Every effort is foiled.
 - d.) Disappointment follows disappointment.
 - e.) Wave attends upon wave.
 - f.) Nothing they attempt prospers, all they enter upon fails.
 - g.) Everything seems against them.
 - h.) O! Could we pass behind the scene, what should we discover? - A deserted throne of grace!
 - i.) ***[Proverbs 3:5-6]- Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.***
- E. The means, which the Lord has appointed and owned, for the revival of the spirit and exercise of prayer in the believer.
1. The believer should correctly ascertain the true character of his prayers.
 - a. Are they lively and spiritual?
 - b. Are they the exercises of the heart, or of the understanding merely?
 - c. Are they the breathings of the indwelling Spirit, or the cold observance of a form without the power?
 - d. Is it communion and fellowship?
 - e. Is it the filial approach of a child, rushing with confidence and affection into the bosom of a Father, and sheltering itself there in every hour of need?

- f. It should be remembered by every professing man, that there is a great difference between prayer and praying; we mean, between the formal observance of the duty, and the spiritual character of the performance.
 - 1.) All prayer is not communion; and here a man may be greatly and awfully deceived; he may repeat his visits to the throne of grace, and go and come without having exhaled a single breath of spiritual prayer; there may be no respiration in the soul; all is formal, cold, and lifeless.
2. Examine the character of your devotions.
 - a. Are they such as will stand the test of God's word?
 - b. Will they compare with the holy breathings of David, and Job, and Solomon, and the New Testament saints?
 - c. Are they the breathings forth of the life of God within you?
 - d. Are they ever accompanied with filial broken-ness, lowliness of spirit, and humble and contrite confession of sin?
3. Become more thoroughly acquainted with our many and varied necessities.
 - a. It is the knowledge of his need that gives true eloquence to the petition of the beggar: a sense of destitution, of absolute want, of actual starvation, imparts energy to his plea, and perseverance in its attainment.
 - 1.) *[Genesis 32:24-28]- And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.*
 - 2.) Begin the day with thinking over what you may possibly need before its close; whether any cross is anticipated, or any temptation is apprehended, or any danger to which you may be exposed; and then go and wrestle for the needed and the promised grace.
4. There should be the searching out and the removal of that which hinders prayer.
 - a. Unsubdued sin.
 - b. Unrepented sin.
 - c. Unpardoned sin.
 - d. Worldly-mindedness.
 - e. Light and trifling conversation.
 - f. Vain disputations.
 - g. Much and frequent communion either with unconverted individuals or cold and formal professors;
5. Earnestly plead for a more enlarged communication of the Holy Spirit's gracious influence.
 - a. The grand source and secret of all true, spiritual, believing, persevering, and prevailing prayer;
 - b. It is the lack of this that is the cause of the dulness, and formality, and reluctance,
 - 1.) *[Zechariah 12:10]- And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*
 - c. Let the Holy Spirit be acknowledged as the Author, and constantly sought as the Sustainer of this holy exercise;

- 1.) *[Romans 8:26]- Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*
6. The outpouring of the Spirit of prayer, too, is needed to give frequency, and life, and directness, to our petitions on behalf of the church and the world.
- a. *[1 Timothy 2:1-3]- I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;*
 - b. *[Psalm 122:6]- Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.*
 - c. *[James 5:16]- Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*
 - d. *[Hebrews 13:18]- Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.*
7. In all true prayer, great stress should be laid on the blood of Jesus.
- a. Where the atoning blood is kept out of view; not recognized, not pleaded, not wrestled with, not made the grand plea, there is a deficiency of power in prayer.
 - 1.) Words are nothing, fluency of expression nothing, niceties of language and brilliancy of thought nothing, and even apparent fervor nothing, where the blood of Christ, - the new and living way of access to God, the grand plea that moves Omnipotence, that gives admission within the holy of holies, - is slighted, undervalued, and not made the groundwork of every petition.
 - 2.) Oh, how much is this overlooked in our prayers, - how is the atoning blood of Immanuel slighted!
 - 3.) How little mention we hear of it in the sanctuary, in the pulpit, in the social circle; whereas it is this that makes prayer what it is with God!
 - 4.) All prayer is acceptable with God, and only so, as it comes up perfumed with the blood of Christ;
 - 5.) All prayer is answered as it urges the blood of Christ as its plea.
 - 6.) It is the blood of Christ that satisfies justice, and meets all the demands of the law against us;
 - 7.) It is the blood of Christ that purchases and brings down every blessing into the soul;
 - 8.) It is the blood of Christ that sues for the fulfillment of his last will and testament, every precious legacy of which comes to us solely on account of his death.
 - 9.) It is the blood of Christ that gives us boldness at the throne of grace.
 - a.) *[Hebrews 10:19]- Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,*
8. The season of trial and of bereavement is often the sanctified occasion of a revival of prayer in the soul.
- a. *[Psalm 56:8]- Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?*
 - b. He causes you to "pass under the rod," sends some sore trial, lays on you some weighty cross, brings trouble and sorrow into your soul, and then you cry unto him, and do besiege the mercy-seat.
 - 1.) *[Ezekiel 20:37]- And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:*
 - c. O how eagerly is God sought, how attractive and how precious does the throne of grace become, when the soul is thus led into deep waters of trial!

- d. No longer silent, no longer dumb, the believer calls upon God, pleads with *"strong crying and tears,"* wrestles and agonizes, and thus the slumbering spirit of prayer is stirred up and revived in the soul.

- 1.) ***[Hebrews 5:7]- Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;***

9. Guard against the least declension in prayer.
 - a. Let the first unfavorable symptom that appears alarm you; go to the Lord in your worst frames; stay not from him until you get a good one.
 - b. Satan's grand argument to keep a soul from prayer is, *"Go not with that cold and insensible frame; go not with that hard and sinful heart; stay until you are more fit to approach God."*
 - c. ***[Psalm 6:6-9]- I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies. Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping. The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer.***

V. Declension in Connection with Doctrinal Error

A. Proof text.

1. ***[John 17:17]- Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.***

B. God appointed the Church as the great conservator of His Truth.

1. God also appointed His Truth as the especial medium of sanctification to his church.
2. The church may be compared to the golden lamp, which contains the sacred oil, which, in its turn, feeds the flame of its light and holiness.
3. The church is to guard with a jealous and vigilant eye the purity of the truth, while the truth is to beautify and sanctify the ark, which preserves it.
4. ***[1 Timothy 3:15]- But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.***
5. ***[John 17:17]- Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.***
6. Every individual believer in Jesus is himself a subject, and therefore a witness, of the truth; he has been quickened, called, renewed, and partially sanctified through the instrumentality of God's revealed truth:
 - a. ***[James 1:18]- Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.***
 - b. ***[2 John 2]- For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.***
 - c. ***[Isaiah 43:12]- I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.***
 - d. The child of God is a subject of truth, he is a repository of the truth, and he is a witness for the truth; yes, he is the only living witness to the truth which God has on earth.
 - e. ***[Philippians 2:15]- That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;***

C. The holy tendency of Divine truth, or the intimate relation between truth and holiness.

1. The truths of the Gospel are the grand means, which God employs for the sanctification of his people.
 - a. One of the grand errors of modern divinity is that all belief in the mere power of the truth itself produces holiness.
 - 1.) The mere presentation of truth to the un-renewed mind, either in the form of threatening, or promise, or motive, can never produce any saving or sanctifying effect.

- 2.) *[Ephesians 2:1-5]- And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*
- 3.) *[John 3:3]- Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*
- 4.) The power of the truth for which we plead, is that which results from the attending energy and demonstration of the Holy Spirit.
- 5.) Divine truth is utterly impotent to the production of spiritual life, love, and holiness in the soul of man.
- 6.) The three thousand, who were converted on the day of Pentecost, were doubtless awakened under one sermon, and some would declare it was the power of the truth, which wrought those wonders of grace. With this we perfectly agree, only adding, that it was truth in the mighty hand of God which pierced them to the heart, and wrung from them the cry,
 - b. Plead for a personal experimental acquaintance with, and reception of, the truth, before it can produce anything like holiness in the soul.
 - 1.) That it has found an entrance to the judgment merely, will not do; advancing not further, - arresting not the will, touching not the heart, renewing not the whole soul, - it can never erect the empire of holiness in man; the reign of sanctification cannot have commenced.
 - 2.) Let a man receive the truth in his heart by the power of God himself; let it enter there, disarming and dethroning the strong man; let Jesus enter, and the Holy Spirit take possession, renewing, sealing, and sanctifying the soul; and then we may look for the "fruits of holiness which are unto eternal life."
 - a.) *[John 4:36]- And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.*
2. The design of the whole plan of redemption was to secure the highest holiness and happiness of the creature.
 - a. When the gospel comes with the power of God unto the salvation of the soul, this end is pre-eminently secured.
 - b. The renewed man is a pardoned man; the pardoned man becomes a holy man; and the holy man is a happy man.
3. The tendency of every doctrine, precept, promise, and threatening, and mark the holy influence of each.
 - a. The doctrine of God's everlasting love to his people, as seen in their election to eternal life.
 - 1.) *[Ephesians 1:3-4]- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*
 - b. The revealed doctrine of God's free, sovereign, and distinguishing grace.
 - 1.) *[Galatians 1:4]- Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:*
 - c. The precepts, too, are on the side of holiness.
 - 1.) *[John 14:15]- If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

- 2.) *[1 John 2:15]- Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*
 - 3.) *[2 Corinthians 6:17]- Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*
 - 4.) *[Mark 14:38]- Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*
 - 5.) *[1 Thessalonians 5:17]- Pray without ceasing.*
 - 6.) *[1 Peter 3:8]- Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:*
 - 7.) *[Leviticus 11:45]- For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.*
 - 8.) *[1 Thessalonians 4:7]- For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*
 - 9.) *[Colossians 1:10]- That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;*
- d. Those "exceeding great and precious promises " which the word of truth contains.
- 1.) *[2 Peter 1:4]- Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*
 - 2.) *[2 Corinthians 7:1]- Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*
- e. Equally holy is the tendency of the Divine threatenings.
- 1.) *[2 Peter 3:10-14]- But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*
 - 2.) *[Ephesians 2:20-22]- And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

D. The unholy tendency of Divine error.

1. To promote unholiness.
2. To foster his proud conceit of himself,
3. To beget a lofty view of his own gifts and attainments.
4. To lessen his views of sin's exceeding sinfulness.
5. To lower the motive and weakening the power of holiness.
6. To give the unchecked rein to all the corrupt propensities of a fallen nature.
7. To divert the mind into a wrong channel: it leads the soul away from God.
8. Error cherished in the mind leads the heart from God.
9. It imparts distorted views of the Divine character, gives low conceptions of the Divine law, beclouds the finished work of Christ, weakens the power of moral obligation, and, from step to step, leads the soul entirely, and, if grace do not interfere, forever, from God.
10. Case studies in these unholy tendencies.
 - a. The case of an individual believer.

- 1.) Trace the sad effects in his uneven walk, his careless spirit, his low-toned spirituality, his hardened conscience, his insensible heart, his neglect of means.
 - 2.) What a distant spirit now marks him whose walk was once so close with God!
 - 3.) What exhibitions of self in him who was once so humble and so retiring, whose carriage did seem to speak the inward consciousness of the soul " less than the least of all saints!"
 - 4.) What a turning of the back upon the means of grace by him to whom they were once so highly prized, so eagerly sought, so richly enjoyed, amid which he walked as through green pastures, and by the side of still waters!
 - 5.) What unkindness, what haughty bearing, what frigid distance, now marks his conduct towards the saints of God, once so dear to his heart, his chosen and beloved companions, with whom he desired to live and to die!
- b. The case of the professed minister of the Gospel.
- 1.) Has he relinquished any fundamental doctrine of the Gospel?
 - 2.) Has he abandoned any essential element of revealed truth?
 - 3.) Perhaps he has given up the Godhead of Christ, the sacrificial character of his death.
 - 4.) He denies the Deity and Personality of the Spirit.
 - 5.) His views touching the obligation of the believer to holiness have undergone a painful alteration.
 - 6.) How changed the spiritual frame of his mind! - No more zeal, tenderness, or solemnity marks him.
 - 7.) How altered the character of his ministry! - No more power, earnestness, or spirituality, clothes it.
 - 8.) How different its results! - No more conversions, and no more edification, comfort, and establishing of the saints, follow it.
 - 9.) How differently he prays, - no more unction, life, and power breathe in his petitions.
 - 10.) He has imbibed error, he has turned his back upon God's truth, and God has turned his back upon him.
- c. The case of the history of a church.
- 1.) The prevailing deficiency in spirituality be traced to the influence of lax views of Divine truth among professedly orthodox Christians.
 - 2.) To what are we to refer it as a cause? We unhesitatingly reply, to a defective theology, to false doctrine, to low and lax views of God's revealed truth.
 - 3.) Are there not in the present day a criminal keeping back by some, and a painful undervaluing by others, of the scriptural and holy doctrines of grace?
 - a.) The sovereignty of his grace in their election.
 - b.) The effectual power of the Spirit in their calling.
 - c.) The free justification of their persons through the imputed righteousness of Christ, and the entire putting away of their sins by his atoning blood.
 - d.) The solemn obligation to " live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world," and the certainty of their final glorification in the world to come.
 - 4.) Are not these Divinely-revealed truths excluded from our pulpits and exiled from our land?
 - a.) Are they not considered mean and unfashionable?
 - b.) Having lost their savor with the many, are they not cast out and trodden under foot of men?
 - 5.) These are the doctrines, which shine so luminously in every page of the apostle's writings.
 - a.) These are the doctrines, which formed the grand themes of Christ's ministrations.

- b.) These are the doctrines, to the preaching of which by the reformers, we owe all the civil and religious liberty, which, as a nation, we now possess.
- 6.) The preaching of false doctrine may build up a church composed of "wood, hay, stubble," but the preaching of truth alone can rear a church composed of "gold, silver, precious stones."
- a.) ***[1 Corinthians 3:12-13]- Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.***
- E. The ways the Holy Spirit revives, strengthens, and increases against Doctrinal error.
1. Do we long, and pray, and labor for a true revival of the Lord's work?
 - a. What is more calculated to bring down the Holy Spirit of God upon us in all the plenitude of his awakening influence, - arousing the careless, convincing the impenitent and unbelieving of sin, annihilating the self-righteousness, prostrating the high thoughts, and slaying the pride of the human heart, - than a clear, pointed, and faithful exhibition of God's own revealed truth?
 - b. *"I think I have found, that no discourses have been more remarkably blessed than those in which the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his just liberty with regard to his answering the prayers, or succeeding the pains of mere natural men, continuing such, have been insisted on. I never found so much immediate saving fruit, in any measure, of any discourses I have offered to my congregation, as some from those words, ' That every mouth may be stopped Rom. iii. 19; endeavoring from thence to show, that it would be just with God forever to reject and cast off mere natural men." – Jonathan Edwards*
 - 1.) ***[Romans 3:19]- Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.***
 - c. What was the great revival at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost the result of, but a faithful exhibition of the truth, brought to bear upon the consciences and the hearts of three thousand rebellious sinners, by the bold apostle Peter.
 - 1.) ***[Acts 2:23,37-39]- Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.***
 - 2.) ***[Ephesians 6:17]- And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:***
 - 3.) ***[Jeremiah 23:29]- Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?***
 2. Is there not in the present day a sad declension in the setting forth of the Lord Jesus Christ?
 - a. ***[1 Corinthians 2:2]- For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.***
 - b. Is not Jesus kept in the background? Is not his cross hidden, and much of his glory veiled, as if ashamed to bring him fully forward? Are the glory, the majesty, and the beauty of his Divine and human nature, his wondrous person, clearly set forth? Are the nature, necessity, and perfection of his great work, fully and fearlessly unfolded? Are his precious blood, his

imputed righteousness, his mediatorial fullness, his exaltation and intercession at the right hand of God, truths prominently exhibited and fervently preached?

- 1.) Are not human knowledge, and splendid talents, and brilliant eloquence, and moral suasion, greatly substituted for the preaching of the cross?
 - 2.) That there should be a sad declension of vital piety, of real spirituality, and of active exertion, where Christ is not fully preached, is not to be wondered at. The cross of Jesus is the very soul of Christianity; all is death where Jesus is not.
 - 3.) Grace decays, piety languishes, and formality takes the place of the power of the Gospel, where the person and the work of Christ are slighted, undervalued, or denied.
 - 4.) How we should pray that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain, who is "worthy to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing," should be more fully and simply preached through the length and breadth of our land; that the church and the pulpit should more manifestly crown him Lord of all!
 - a.) ***[Revelation 5:12]- Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.***
3. Is not the doctrine of the Holy Spirit held slightly?
- a. Is he not denied in his person, dishonored in his work, wounded and grieved in his influence?
 - b. Is there not a more marked dependence on creature power than upon the power of the Spirit?
 - c. Do not sermons, and books, and reports sadly forget to recognize and honor him as the grand source of all blessing?
 - d. Are his power, grace, and love, in the great work of conversion, distinctly acknowledged and duly honored?
 - e. That there should be no precious gales of grace, no revival of the Lord's work, no true spiritual prosperity where the Holy Spirit is not glorified, we cannot marvel.
 - f. All must be cold, formal, and lifeless - that church a stagnant pool, and that ministry a powerless instrument, where the Spirit of God is slighted, wounded, or absolutely denied.
4. Those who believe the truth ought to fearlessly to maintain it.
- a. Let there be no compromise, no barter of the truth; buy it at any sacrifice of human opinion, sell it at no price whatever.
 - 1.) ***[Proverbs 23:23]- Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.***
 - b. Stand up a witness of the truth, humbly, boldly, and in the strength of the Lord, wherever his providence may place you.
 - 1.) O consider the honor of being permitted to testify to the truth as it is in Jesus!
 - 2.) You may be a lone, a solitary witness, yet fear not; he who is "the truth" itself says to you, as he did to the church in Philadelphia.
 - a.) ***[Revelation 3:10-11]- Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.***
5. Let those who hold the truth, be careful to maintain good works.
- a. So walk in all the holiness of the truth they profess;
 - b. See that by no carelessness of deportment, by no want of integrity, by no neglect of the means of grace, by no exhibitions of unholy temper, by no worldly conformity, yes, by no inconsistency whatever, they bring a slur upon the holy doctrines they avowedly maintain and love.

- c. Let them not be satisfied with maintaining a string of doctrines, unaccompanied with their sanctifying power: but let them see that with the truth in their judgments, they possess grace in the heart, and unspotted holiness in the life.

1.) ***[John 8:31-32]- Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.***

VI. On Grieving the Spirit

A. Proof text.

1. ***[Ephesians 4:30]- And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.***

B. The Works of the Spirit.

1. All that has been wrought in the believer in the way of conviction, repentance, faith, joy, holiness, etc., the blessed and Eternal Spirit is the sole Author.
2. Great and glorious is his work: yes, but for it, the redemption accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ, as to any saving effects, would have availed nothing.
3. The "Sun of righteousness" might have risen upon the world in all his peerless splendor; but until the mental eye had been opened by the Holy Spirit, not a beam had found its way into the dark chambers of the understanding and the heart.
 - a. ***[Malachi 4:2]- But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.***
4. The Gospel "supper" might have been prepared, the Lamb slain, and the invitation issued; but without a supernatural power working upon the will, the desires, and the affections of man, all would have "made light of it, and have gone their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise."
 - a. ***[Matthew 22:2-5]- The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:***
5. ***[John 16:7-8]- Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:***
6. Our views of the work of the Spirit cannot be too spiritual, nor can our estimate of its value be too high.
7. Anything tends more to wound, grieve, and chase from us his sensible presence, than a known and permitted declension of his work, we cannot imagine.

C. Grieving the Spirit described.

1. The great danger to which we are exposed, is, not in overrating, but in undervaluing the office-work of the Spirit; not in thinking too high, but in thinking too low of it.
2. Anything tends more to wound, grieve, and chase from us his sensible presence, than a known and permitted declension of his work, we cannot imagine.
3. "Vexing the Spirit," "grieving the Spirit," "quenching the Spirit," "resisting the Spirit," &c., though metaphorical, are nevertheless highly significant and solemn in their meaning.
4. Grief is not a passion in the Holy Spirit, as it is in us, any more than "anger," "wrath," "revenge," are unholy emotions in God, though ascribed to him.

- a. These expressions are employed to set forth God's extreme hatred of sin, and the holy sensitiveness of the Eternal Spirit to any neglect, undervaluing, or declension of his most gracious work and influence in the soul.
 - b. The Spirit cannot be grieved, cannot be quenched, cannot be resisted; because he is not a creature, though a person.
5. To "grieve the Spirit" is to disregard his voice, oppose his influence, and slight his kind, loving, and tender nature.
- a. To cause a withdrawalment from the soul - in some cases temporary, in others eternal - of his presence, influence, and blessing.
 - b. In the case of the regenerate, the withdrawalment of the Spirit on being grieved is for a season only; in that of the finally impenitent and unbelieving, the hushing of his voice, speaking to them in conscience, in providence, and in his word, is the giving of them up for ever.
6. The effects of grieving the Spirit.
- a. Spiritual coldness, sterility, and lethargy.
 - b. To seem like one abandoned of the Spirit to the fearful and ruinous consequences of his sin: his spirituality withers, his grace decays, the spirit of devotion languishes, and at length expires.
 - c. If he ministers in the pastoral office, all power and unction in his ministrations evaporate.
 - d. If he moves in a private walk, all zeal, and ardor, and devotedness in the cause of Christ become stagnant, and the curse and the reproach of barrenness fall like a blight upon the once fertile and flourishing soul.
 - e. These dire effects may be traced to low views of the personal dignity and official work of the Holy Spirit.
- D. The declension of the Spirit's work of grace in the soul of a child of God.
1. It is a dreadful slight cast upon the most glorious and stupendous production of his power:
 - a. Nowhere has he erected a temple so glorious.
 - b. Nowhere has he put forth energy so mighty.
 - c. In nothing has he imprinted so deeply the outline of his own holy character, as in the work of grace, which he has commenced, and carries on in the heart of man.
 - d. To witness any decay, declension, or languor in this work;
 - e. To mark the loss of vigor, healthfulness, or fruitfulness, in any single grace.
 - f. To see those who did seem to "run well" and promised much fruit, and "an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom, "now slacken their pace, grow weary of the way, fold their arms again in slumber, grow earthly, sensual, and groveling; the temple neglected, its gates unwatched, and other guests admitted.
 - 1.) *[Galatians 5:7]- Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?*
 - g. To see holy motives losing their power, love ceasing to constrain, spiritual things no longer attracting, delighting, and satisfying the soul.
 - h. Can we imagine the loving, faithful, tender heart of the Spirit more sensibly touched with grief by anything than this?
 - 1.) *[Isaiah 5:4]- What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?*
 - 2.) *[Hosea 6:4]- O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.*
 2. Lukewarmness is most abhorrent to God, and grieving to the Holy Spirit.

- a. ***[Revelation 3:15-16]-I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.***
 - b. God declared his utter detestation of this state.
 - c. Who contemplates it in this awful light; who pauses to examine himself.
 - 1.) To ascertain what real progress his soul is making.
 - 2.) What grace is enfeebled?
 - 3.) What part of the Spirit's work is decayed?
 - 4.) What spot of his soul is barren and unfruitful?
 - 5.) How far he is secretly and effectually grieving the Holy Spirit, by a known, allowed, and cherished state of spiritual declension?
 - 6.) "The heart of the Spirit is infinitely more tender towards us, than that of the most affectionate parent can be towards an only child. And when he with cost and care has nourished and brought us up into some growth and progress in spiritual affections, wherein all his concerns in us do lie, for us to grow cold, dull, earthly-minded, to cleave unto the pleasures and lusts of this world, how is he grieved, how is he provoked!"
 - d. If the enthroned Redeemer looks down with satisfaction upon the travail of his soul in the calling in of his redeemed, equally joyous must it be to the Eternal Spirit.
 - 1.) To behold the widening of his kingdom in the saints.
 - 2.) The maturing of the soul for the inheritance and the companionship of " just men made perfect."
 - a.) ***[Hebrews 12:23]- To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,***
 - 3.) To mark a growing conformity to the image of Christ
 - a.) Holiness expanding its root.
 - b.) Each grace in active exercise.
 - c.) Every weight cast aside.
 - d.) Every sin mortified.
 - e.) The whole body, soul, and spirit, a rising temple to God, must indeed fill all heaven with joy.
3. The Spirit is grieved by a denial, or undervaluing of his gracious work in the heart.
 - a. Among all the examples of deep humility, self-abasement, consciousness and confession of sin recorded of the saints in the word, not one appears to afford an instance of a denial or undervaluing of the Spirit's work in the heart.
 - b. Keen as appears to have been the sense of unworthiness felt by Jacob, David, Job, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, and others; deep as was their conviction, and humiliating as were their confessions of sin's exceeding sinfulness, not one expression seems to betray a denial of the work of the Holy Spirit in their souls.
 - 1.) They felt, and mourned, and wept, and confessed as men called of God, pardoned, justified, adopted, not as men who had never tasted that the Lord was gracious, and who therefore were utter strangers to the operation of the Spirit upon their hearts.
 - 2.) They acknowledged their sinfulness and their backslidings as converted men, always ready and forward to crown the Spirit in his work.
 - c. What can grieve the tender, loving heart of the Spirit more deeply than a denial of his work in the soul?
 - 1.) Yet there is a perpetual tendency to this, in the unbelieving doubts, legal fears, and gloomy forebodings, which those saints yield to.

- 2.) At every discovery of the sin that dwells in them, resign themselves to the painful conviction that they have been given over of God to believe a lie!
- 3.) Deep self-abasement, the consciousness of utter worthlessness, need not necessarily involve a denial of indwelling grace in the heart; yes, this blessed state is perfectly consistent with the most elevated hope of eternal life.
 - a.) He who can confess himself the " chief of sinners " and " the least of saints," is most likely to acknowledge, " I know in whom I have believed," - "He has loved me, and given himself for me."
 - b.) *[1 Timothy 1:15]- This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.*
 - c.) *[Ephesians 3:8]- Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;*
 - d.) *[2 Timothy 1:12]- For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*
 - e.) *[Galatians 2:20]- I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*
- 4.) Not merely writing hard and bitter things against themselves, but also against the blessed, loving, faithful Spirit of God, - calling grace nature, denying his work in them, and, in a sense most painful to his tender heart, "*speaking words against the Holy Spirit*" he cannot but feel.
 - a.) It is not pride gratefully to acknowledge what great things the Lord has done for us.
 - b.) It is pride that refuses to acknowledge them;
 - c.) It is not true humility to doubt, and underrate, until it becomes easy to deny altogether the work of the Holy Spirit within us.
 - d.) It is true humility and lowliness to confess his work, bear testimony to his operation, and ascribe to him all the power, praise, and glory.
- 5.) Though the work of the Spirit in your heart may, to your imperfect knowledge and dim eye, be feeble.
 - a.) The outline scarcely visible amid so much indwelling sin.
 - b.) The spark almost hid amid so much abounding corruption.
- 6.) Yet, to the Spirit's eye, that work appears in all its distinctness and glory. "The Lord knows them that are his."
 - a.) *[2 Timothy 2:19]- Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*
- 7.) This declaration will apply with equal truth to the knowledge which the Holy Spirit has of his own work in the believer.
 - a.) His eye is upon the gentlest budding of indwelling grace the faintest spark of love.
 - b.) The softest whisper of holy desire.
 - c.) The feeblest yearnings of the heart towards Jesus.
 - d.) All is known to, and loved by, the Spirit; it is his own work, and strange should he not recognize it.
- 8.) Suffer this consideration to have its proper weight in hushing those murmurings, and soothing those fears, and neutralizing those doubts that so deeply grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

- a.) Yield yourself up unto him; humbly acknowledge what he has done in you;
 - b.) Follow the little light he has given you,
 - c.) Call into constant and active exercise the small degree of grace and faith, which he has imparted.
 - d.) Seek " with all prayer and supplication " an enlarged degree of his holy, anointing, sanctifying, and sealing influence.
 - 1.) *[Ephesians 6:18]- Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*
4. A substitution of his own work in the soul for the atoning and finished work of Jesus, greatly grieves the Holy Spirit of God.
- a. One essential and important office of the Spirit is to glorify Christ:
 - 1.) *[John 16:14-15]- He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.*
 - 2.) *[John 15:26]- But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*
 - 3.) How does the Spirit most glorify Christ, but by exalting his atoning work.
 - a.) Giving to it the pre-eminence, the importance, and the glory it demands.
 - b.) Leading the sinner, whom he has first convinced of sin, to accept of Jesus as a willing, an all-sufficient Savior.
 - c.) To cast away all trust in self, all reliance upon a covenant of works.
 - 4.) Imagine how grieving it must be to the Spirit, when there is any resting in his work in the soul, either for acceptance, or for comfort, or for peace, or for strength, or even for evidence of a state of grace, and not solely and entirely in the atoning work which Jesus has wrought out for the redemption of sinners.
 - 5.) The work of the Spirit and the work of Christ, though they form parts of one glorious whole, are yet distinct, and to be distinguished in the economy of grace, and in the salvation of a sinner.
 - a.) It is the work of Jesus alone, his perfect obedience to the broken law of God, and his sacrificial death as a satisfaction of Divine justice, that form the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God, - the source of his pardon, justification, and peace.
 - b.) The work of the Spirit is, not to atone, but to reveal the atonement; not to obey, but to make known the obedience; not to pardon and justify, but to bring the convinced, awakened, penitent soul to receive the pardon and embrace the justification already provided in the work of Jesus.
 - c.) If there is any substitution of the Spirit's work for Christ's work, - any undue, unauthorized leaning upon the work within, instead of the work without, the believer, there is a dishonor done to Christ, and a consequent grieving of the Holy Spirit of God.
 - 1.) *"If I look to convictions of sin within me, to any motion of the indwelling Spirit, to any part of his work, as the legitimate source of healing, of comfort, or of evidence, I turn my back upon Christ, I remove my eye from the cross, and slight his great atoning work."*
 - 2.) *"I make a Christ of the Spirit! I make a Savior of the Holy Spirit! I convert his work into an atoning work, and draw the evidence and the consolation of my pardon and acceptance from what he has done, and not from what Jesus has done!"*
- b. Do not think that we undervalue the Spirit's work: great and precious is it.
 - 1.) As a Quickener.

- a.) *[John 6:63]- It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*
- 2.) As an Indweller.
- a.) *[1 Corinthians 6:19]- What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*
- 3.) As a Sanctifier.
- a.) *[2 Thessalonians 2:13]- But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:*
- 4.) As a Sealer.
- a.) *[Ephesians 1:13]- In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,*
- 5.) As a Witness.
- a.) *[1 John 5:10]- He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.*
- 6.) As a Comforter.
- a.) *[John 14:26]- But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.*
- 7.) As the Author of Prayer,
- a.) *[Romans 8: 26]- Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*
- c. The crown of redemption must be placed upon the head of Jesus; he alone is worthy to wear it, - he alone has a right to wear it. "You have redeemed us by your blood," is the song they sing in glory, and " You shall wear the crown," should be the song echoed back from the redeemed on earth.
- 1.) *[Revelation 5:9]- And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;*
- 2.) *[Revelation 14:14]- And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.*
- d. See, then, that you grieve not the Spirit, either by misplacing or by undervaluing the atoning work of Jesus.
- 1.) His blood, applied by the Spirit, pardons; his righteousness, received by faith, justifies you; and " the peace of God which passes all understanding," is the certain and blessed fruit of both.
- e. The Spirit's own work may be so slighted, as deeply to grieve his heart.
- 1.) There is a proneness to extreme points even in the child of God: he may either overrate, or he may underrate a thing; he may place an unwarrantable dependence upon that which, at another period, he may be found painfully and sinfully to slight.

- a.) Concerning the afflictions of the believer, the Word of God exhorts him on the one hand not to despise them, and tenderly admonishes him on the other hand not to faint under them.
 - b.) ***[Hebrews 12:5]- And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:***
 - c.) *“When thinking on being a child of God and also a servant of God, there is a tendency in my own heart to feel like a child of God during times of prosperity and to feel like a servant of God during times of affliction. What a blessing it would be to feel like a servant of God in prosperity and a child of God in affliction and ultimately, to feel like both son and servant in both light and dark providences, Phil. 4.11-13” – reader ****
 - d.) ***[Philippians 4:11-13]- Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.***
5. He may cherish an imperfect consciousness of the indwelling of the Spirit in his heart.
- a. To show any indifference to the presence of a guest, to manifest any want of marked and proper attention, is a slight of no ordinary nature: in this sense may the Holy Spirit of God be grieved.
 - b. For the Holy Spirit effectually to call, renew, sanctify, and take possession of the soul - make it his temple, his permanent dwelling-place; and yet, for that soul to entertain inadequate views of this great truth, forget who is dwelling with and in him, slight his heavenly guest, and go out and come in, and live and act as if he were not a temple of the Holy Spirit, - what can be more dishonoring to the Blessed and Eternal Spirit!
- 1.) ***[Isaiah 57:15]- For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.***
6. When his still small voice is unheeded, and his gentle constraints are not yielded to, there is a slight put upon his work of a very grievous nature.
- a. The Spirit is perpetually speaking to, admonishing, leading, drawing, and constraining the soul; his great work there is to teach, to sanctify, to shield, to check, and to comfort the believer.
 - 1.) Every holy shrinking from sin.
 - 2.) Every firm resistance of its power.
 - 3.) Every victory achieved over its motions.
 - 4.) Every aspiration after holiness.
 - 5.) Every feeble desire to walk in the way of filial obedience to.
 - 6.) Every sweet communion with God.
 - 7.) How grieving, then, to that Spirit, when this loving voice of his, and these gentle constraints of his, are overlooked, stifled, disregarded, and slighted by the soul he so tenderly loves, and so faithfully watches over!
 - b. He desires your true happiness, - he would draw you off from carnal things, he would allure you from objects of sense and sin, and open to you springs of higher and purer enjoyment, and lead you into fairer and greener pastures: this would he do, by unfolding to you what you possess in Jesus, in the covenant of grace, and in a covenant God.
7. Inconsistency in the Christian profession must be highly grieving to the Holy Spirit of God.

- a. To mark a want of harmony between the professed principles and the habit of life in one avowedly his temple;
 - b. To trace a love of the world, a panting for its fame, a grasping for its wealth, an adoption of its policy,
 - c. To conform to the world's maxims, its pursuits, its pleasures, and its religion.
 - d. ***[1 Timothy 2:9-10]- In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.***
 - e. ***[1 Peter 3:3-5]- Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:***
8. Shall the believer, the professed temple of the Holy Spirit, be found mingling with the world, taking pleasure in its amusements, courting its society, working upon its principles, and adopting its policy?
- a. How can the Divine life in the soul be fed and sustained from such a source?
 - b. What a fitness for prayer, for communion with God, for the reading of his sacred word, can a believer find in the giddy dance, in carnal song, in the immoral novel?
 - c. What is the line of duty marked out for the walk of a professing believer?
 - 1.) ***[Romans 12:2]- And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.***
 - 2.) ***[2 Corinthians 6:17-18]- Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.***
 - 3.) ***[1 John 2:15-16]- Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.***
 - 4.) ***[James 4:4]- Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.***
 - 5.) ***[James 1:27]- Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.***
- E. Helps against Grieving the Spirit and reviving the Holy Spirit's working in the soul of the believer.
1. Grieve not, then, the Holy Spirit of God by any known inconsistency of conduct, any sinful conformity to the world, any inordinate pursuit of its wealth, its honors, its pleasures, its friendships, and its great things.
 - a. Pray against the sin of covetousness.
 - b. Pray against a love of dress.
 - c. Pray against a thirst for light and trifling reading.
 - d. Pray against the spirit of worldly, sinful conformity in everything.
 2. Let not this be the model of your religion.
 - a. ***[John 15:18-19]- If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.***
 - b. ***[1 John 3:13]- Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.***

- c. ***[Galatians 6:14]- But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.***
- 3. The Spirit may be grieved by a slight put upon the means of grace: these are his channels for the conveyance of his covenant blessings into the soul.
 - a. He communicates his blessing and transmits his voice through the word, the ministry, the mercy seat, and various other channels.
 - b. Look not for his blessing, nor expect to hear his voice, save as you are found walking in his own appointed way
 - c. These are the green pastures, where the shepherd causes his flock to rest at noon; these are the "still waters," where he leads their souls: and if the back is turned slightly upon them, leanness and barrenness, coldness and death, must ensue.
 - d. ***[Isaiah 40:31]- But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.***
 - e. The Spirit is grieved by any deviation from the strict and holy walk of a child of God.
 - 1.) By any sense of guilt retained upon the conscience.
 - 2.) By any sin unconfessed, unrepented, and unforsaken.
 - 3.) By any known defilement of the temple he inhabits.
 - 4.) By any slight put upon Jesus.
 - 5.) By any neglect of the atoning blood. By any light and trifling deportment.
 - 6.) By any uncharitable walk towards other Christians.
 - 7.) By any taking of the judgment-seat against them.

VII. The Fruitless and the Fruitful Professor.

A. Proof text.

- 1. ***[John 15:2]- Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.***

B. Our Perfect Example of a Fruitful Professor.

- 1. No one, on hearing him, could retire without the deep conviction that he was the man whose moral image Jesus had been drawing, and in such true and vivid resemblance, as to compel him to acknowledge the faithfulness of the portrait.
- 2. There was no personality, no harshness, no unnecessary keenness in his reproof, no exaggeration of coloring, nothing overdrawn; but such a simple, faithful, scriptural dealing with human conscience.
- 3. ***[Matthew 21:45]- And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.***
- 4. ***[John 8:9]- And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.***
- 5. ***[John 15:1-2]- I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.***

C. The Fruitless Professor Described.

- 1. An individual may approach so near in his external resemblance to a child of God, may look so like a believer in Jesus, may appear to be united to him, and still remain among the dead.
- 2. Of all states this side of eternity, this is the most awful: and yet it is to be feared, if we are to judge of the tree by its fruits, and not by its leaves, that this is the state of thousands at the present moment.
 - a. They should be careful how they preach.
 - b. Their preaching should be discriminating without being harsh, pointed without being personal, searching without being caustic.

- c. That no hearer should go away from beneath their ministrations, without a faithful delineation of his own character, the voice sounding in his conscience, and following him amid all his windings and his wanderings.
 - 1.) *[2 Samuel 12:5-7]- And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;*

- 3. Jesus speaks of the fruitless branch as united to himself.
 - a. *[John 15:2]- Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*
 - b. We are not to understand this of a vital union, a spiritual grafting into Christ; the analogy of truth is opposed to such an interpretation.
 - c. We are to understand our Lord as referring to an external union, to an outward profession only.
 - d. Look at such a professor!
 - 1.) Where is the fruit?
 - 2.) Where is the real severing from the wild olive-tree?
 - 3.) Where is the great separation between himself and his own righteousness?
 - 4.) Where is the breaking up of the fallow ground of a hard, corrupt, stony heart?
 - 5.) Where is the humble, lowly, contrite spirit?
 - 6.) Where is the self-loathing, self-aborrence, self-accusing, self-condemnation? Hear we the cry, " God be merciful to me a sinner?"
 - a.) *[Luke 18:13]- And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*
 - 7.) Where, too, is a living faith in Christ, a living upon Christ, and a living to Christ?
 - 8.) Where is conformity to the Divine image?
 - 9.) Where the fruits of holiness increasing and abounding?
 - 10.) What of the spirit, the meekness, the lowliness, the gentleness, the sanctity of Jesus, do we discover?
 - 11.) What self-denial, bearing of the cross, crucifixion to sin, deadness to the world, and living for eternity?
 - e. Look at the profession of our day.
 - 1.) If to put on the Lord Jesus by an outward avowal of his religion.
 - 2.) If to profess and call themselves Christians.
 - 3.) If to bow the knee at the mention of his name.
 - 4.) If to partake of the outward symbols of his body and his blood.
 - 5.) If to speak well of Jesus.
 - 6.) If to assent and consent to his doctrine,
 - 7.) If to approve of his Gospel,
 - 8.) If to follow his ministers, crowd his temple.
 - 9.) If to contribute liberally to his cause.
 - 10.) If these constitute the sole and essential elements of real spiritual union to Christ, then may we not exclaim, - *"The millennium has broken upon us in noontide splendor!"*
 - 11.) Among all sects are to be found the lifeless, fruitless professor.

- 4. Cases of Fruitless Professors.
 - a. Simon Magus.
 - 1.) He had " neither part nor lot in the matter.

- 2.) His heart was not right in the sight of God.
 - 3.) He was in the gall of bitterness.
 - 4.) He was in the bond of iniquity.
 - 5.) *[Acts 8:17-24]- Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the LORD for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*
- b. Demas.
- 1.) He loved this present world.
 - 2.) *[2 Timothy 4:10]- For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.*
- c. Judas Iscariot.
- 1.) The eminent and awful instance of a mere external union to Christ.
 - 2.) *[John 17:12]- While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.*
- d. Those whose union to himself was but external, and where life was fruitless.
- 1.) *[Luke 13:24-28]- Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*
- e. The Word of God unfolds the final doom of the Christless, fruitless professor.
- 1.) *[Matthew 3:10,12]- And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*
- f. The fruitless professor may not cling to his bare profession, until his doom arrives.
- 1.) There are many, who, long before the awful note of approaching judgment falls on their ear, throw off the outward garb, and stand forth in their true character.
 - a.) *[Luke 8:12-14]- Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*

- b.) *[John 15:1-2]- I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*
- c.) The season of temptation, the time of persecution, the accumulation of worldly cares, the increase and glitter of riches, are periods and occasions that place a man's religion in the crucible that bring it to the test. The bare professor cannot stand it.
- d.) *[Philippians 3:18-19]- (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)*

D. The Pruning of the Fruitful Branch.

- 1. Every branch that bears fruit, he purges it.
 - a. This fruit-bearing branch is in Christ; grafted upon him, united to him, and dwelling in him.
 - 1.) *[2 Corinthians 5:17]- Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*
 - 2.) *[Romans 12:5]- So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*
 - 3.) *[1 Corinthians 15:18]- Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*
 - b. To be in Christ truly, spiritually, vitally, is more than this; it is to be in that eternal covenant of grace made with Christ, as the Surety and Mediator of his people; one of the number spoken of as the Lord's "peculiar treasure," - "For the Lord has chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure,"
 - 1.) *[Exodus 19:5]- Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:*
 - 2.) *[Psalm 135:4]- For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.*
 - c. The Holy Spirit declares that they are elected in Christ.
 - 1.) *[Ephesians 1:3-4]- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*
 - d. To be in Christ is to,
 - 1.) To stand accepted in his righteousness,
 - 2.) To be justified by him freely from all things.
 - 3.) To be brought to the knowledge of our own vileness, insufficiency, and guilt.
 - 4.) To be made to cast aside all self-dependence.
 - 5.) To be the subject of a living, holy, influential principle of faith.
 - 6.) To be brought into the blessed state thus described by the apostle as his own.
 - a.) *[Galatians 2:20]- I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*
 - 7.) To be one with him; it is to be a member of his mystical body, of which he is the spiritual head; and the head and the members are one.
 - 8.) To have Christ dwelling in the heart: "Christ in you the hope of glory" - "Know you not that Christ dwells in you, except you be reprobates?" - "I in them."

- a.) *[Colossians 1:27]- To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*
- b.) *[2 Corinthians 13:5]- Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*
- 9.) To dwell in the heart of Christ;
- 10.) To rest there in the very pavilion of his love, to dwell there every moment, to be sheltered there from all evil, and to be soothed there under all sorrow.
- a.) *[Romans 8:1]- There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*
- e. These are the living branches, united to the true Vine, which bear fruit. From their union to the living Vine their fruit comes.
- 1.) *[Hosea 14:8]- Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.*
- 2.) *[John 15:4]- Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*
- 3.) What precious fruit does such a living branch bear!
- a.) The broken heart.
- b.) The contrite spirit. The mourning over sin.
- c.) The low, abasing, humbling views of self.
- d.) The venturing by faith on a full, mighty, and willing Savior.
- e.) The going out of self, and resting in his all-atoning work and all-satisfying righteousness.
- f.) The progressive advance in all holiness and godliness.
- g.) The close walk with God.
- h.) The submission of the will in all things to his.
- i.) The conformity of the life to the example of Jesus.
- j.) The "power of his resurrection" felt - the "fellowship of his sufferings" known - and "conformity to his death" marking the entire man.
- 1.) *[Philippians 3:10]- That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*
- k.) *[Ephesians 5:9]- (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)*
- l.) *[Galatians 5:22-23]- But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*
2. It is the fruitful branch only that the Husbandman prunes:
- a. *[John 15:2]- Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*
- b. It is only the fruitful branch that bears the pruning.
- c. He prunes it, because it is fruitful, because it has life from, and union with, the Vine.
- d. This purging is the trial of his own work.
- e. The very discipline proves the existence and reality of grace in the soul.
- f. When he takes his child in hand to deal with him, it is with a view of drawing forth the grace, which he has first implanted in the soul.
- g. The very trial of faith supposes the existence of faith; and the trial of any one grace of the Spirit, supposes the previous indwelling of that grace in the believer.
- h. *[Isaiah 61:3]- To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that*

they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

- i. *[Matthew 15:13]- But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.*
- j. See the solemn fulfillment of this threatening in the case of graceless professors.
 - 1.) The first blast of temptation has carried them away, root and branch.
 - 2.) God has brought them into deep trial.
 - a.) The storm of adversity has fallen upon them;
 - b.) Death has snatched away the "desire of their eyes with a stroke".
 - 1.) *[Ezekiel 24:25]- Also, thou son of man, shall it not be in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds, their sons and their daughters,*
 - c.) Riches have taken wings and flown away;
 - d.) Character has been assailed;
 - e.) Temptations have overtaken them; and what has been their end?
 - 3.) Their religion is like the chaff of the threshing-floor before the sweeping hurricane.
 - 4.) Their profession is all gone.
 - 5.) Their prayers have evaporated into empty air.
 - 6.) *[2 Peter 2:20-22]- For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*
- k. We cannot always see the necessity of the discipline.
 - 1.) We wonder why such a believer is so constantly and so severely dealt with.
 - 2.) We look at his godly conversation in all things.
 - 3.) We mark his holy deportment,
 - 4.) We see his consistent walk.
 - 5.) We note his lowly spirit.
 - 6.) We see his spiritual gifts and graces,
 - 7.) We wonder at his devotedness and zeal in the cause of the Lord.
 - 8.) *[Jeremiah 17:10]- I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*
 - 9.) *[Psalm 44:21]- Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.*
- l. If you are a living branch of the true Vine, it will be nothing new for you that the Canaanites still dwell in the land.
 - 1.) What these Canaanites, these heathenish idolaters, were to the children of Israel, the natural corruptions of the heart are to the called children of God.
 - a.) *[Joshua 17.12]- Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, but did not utterly drive them out.*
 - 2.) Now this is what the children of God must do with the spiritual Canaanites that yet dwell in the renewed heart: they cannot be driven out, but they may be put to tribute; they cannot be entirely extirpated, yet they may be brought into complete subjection,

and even made to contribute to the spiritual advance of the soul, and to the glory of God.

a.) *[Joshua 17:13]- Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, but did not utterly drive them out.*

3.) When the believer has waxen strong in the Divine life, and has learned to put his indwelling corruptions to tribute, though he may not utterly expel them from his bosom.

a.) *[Nehemiah 13:2]- Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.*

b.) *[Romans 7:24-25]- O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*

m. This pruning does not destroy or weaken the power of the Divine life in the soul.

1.) The principle of life still remaining, - the genial showers, and the warm sunshine, will cause it again to spring forth and bud, blossom and bear fruit.

2.) The Divine life in the soul of man is indestructible, - it cannot perish; the seed that grace has implanted in the heart is incorruptible, - it cannot be corrupted.

3.) Look at Job.

a.) So far from destroying, or even weakening, the Divine life within him, the severe discipline of the covenant through which he passed, did but deepen and expand the root, bringing forth in richer clusters the blessed fruits of holiness.

b.) *[Job 42:5]- I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.*

c.) The pruning of the fruitful branch impairs not, but rather strengthens and renders more fruitful the principle of holiness in the soul, as we now proceed to show.

n. It is the will of God that his people should be a fruitful people.

1.) *[1 Thessalonians 4:3]- For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:*

2.) *[Ezekiel 6:9]- And they that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives, because I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go a whoring after their idols: and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations.*

3.) *[Ezekiel 20:43]- And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed.*

4.) *[Ezekiel 16:5]- None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born.*

5.) It is often difficult to detect the under-current working of the principle; for, frequently, where suspicion of its existence is most lulled to rest, there is it most rife and powerful.

a.) Self-confidence as in Peter, self-boasting as in Hezekiah, self-righteousness as in Job, self-deception as in Balaam, - in how many numberless ways may this hateful, ruinous principle discover itself!

b.) *[2 Thessalonians 2:10]- And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

- c.) *[Jeremiah 17:10]- I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*
 - d.) *[Romans 8:13]- For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*
3. The pruning of the fruitful branch is to endear the Lord Jesus in his person, work, and offices.
- a. There are many professors in whose hearts there is not room for Christ: the world, unmortified sin, take up all the space, occupy all the affections; and while his name is outwardly professed, His cross is inwardly despised.
 - b. What emptying, what humbling, what pruning, are necessary, in order to make room for the lowly Lamb of God in the heart of a poor believing sinner!
 - c. This emptying and pruning is needed for years after the first reception of Jesus.
 - 1.) By these means he seeks to establish himself in our affections.
 - a.) He would have our whole hearts,
 - b.) He would make us fruitful.
 - c.) *[John 15:4]- Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*
 - d.) *[Lamentations 3:24]- The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*
 - e.) *[2 Corinthians 12:9]- And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

E. Cautions and Encouragements.

- 1. Let the believer beware, how he despises what little fruitfulness the Lord the Spirit may have given him.
 - a. It is a mercy for you to know that the Lord does not regard your estimate of a fruitful state.
 - 1.) Were the Lord to judge and condemn us as we do ourselves, were he to despise his own work as we too frequently do, it would indeed go hard with us.
 - 2.) *[Song of Solomon 1:6]- Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.*
 - 3.) *[Zechariah 4:10]- For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.*
 - b. It is still more blessed to press forward towards a deeper and more spiritual acquaintance with Christ, the source of all real fruitfulness.
 - 1.) Too many rest in a mere deploring of their barrenness; they will ingenuously acknowledge their state, freely confess it before God, and yet meet them when you will, this is always their posture, and this their confession.
 - c. Seek an increasing knowledge of Christ; be assured of this, - here lies the grand secret of a growing, fruit-bearing Christian.
 - 1.) *[John 15:4]- Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.*
 - 2.) Here is the fatness of your soul found.
 - a.) This it is that heals the wound, wins the heart, and hushes to repose every fear of condemnation;
 - b.) This it is that enables a poor sinner to look full at God, feeling that justice, holiness, truth, and every Divine perfection are on his side.
 - c.) It is the blood of Jesus, applied by the Spirit, that moistens each fiber of the root of holiness in the soul, and is productive of its fruitfulness;

- d.) This it is that sends the warm current of life through every part of the regenerate man, quickening the pulse of love, and imparting a healthy and vigorous power to every act of obedience.
- 3.) When the spiritual seasons change.
- a.) It is not always springtime with the soul of a child of God.
 - b.) When the summer's sun withers, or the autumnal blast scatters the leaves, and winter's fiercer storm beats upon the smitten bough.
 - c.) The blood and righteousness of Christ, lived upon, loved, and cherished, will yet sustain the Divine life in the soul.
 - d.) In due season the spring blossom and the summer fruit shall again appear, proving that the Divine life of a believer is "hid with Christ in God."
 - 1.) *[Colossians 3:3]- For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*
 - 2.) *[Song of Solomon 2:11-13]- For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.*
 - 3.) *[Song of Solomon 4:16]- Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.*
 - 4.) *[Philippians 1:11]- Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.*
2. Do not forget that it is the fruitful branch only that the Lord prunes.
- a. *[Hebrews 12:6]- For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*
 - b. *[Revelation 3:19]- As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*
 - c. Thank him for the pruning; bless him for the sanctified trial that weans you from earthly things, that deadens your heart to every rival of Christ, and that imparts an upward spring to faith, hope, and love.
 - 1.) *[John 15:8]- Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*
 - d. Is God smiling upon you? Does the summer sun shine? Is your sea smooth and flowing? Does the "south wind" blow upon you? See, then, that you walk humbly with God.
 - 1.) *[Romans 11:20]- Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:*
 - e. Take your worst frames to Christ, your sins as they rise, your weakness as you are conscious of it, your corruptions as they discover themselves, even so shall you be a fruitful branch of the true Vine.
 - 1.) In the very act of going, just as he is, to Christ, the believer brings forth fruit.
 - 2.) For what marks the frame of the soul thus traveling up to the cross, but self-distrust, self-abasement, deep conceptions of its own nothingness, high views of Christ's sufficiency?
 - f. Let the fruitful believer anticipate the approaching period of his translation to a more genial and healthy soil.
 - 1.) In heaven, the home of the saints, there will be nothing to blight the flower of grace; no frosts of winter, no burning heat of summer, no crushing storms, no sweeping tempests; the former things will all have passed away, and a new heaven and a new earth, in which dwells righteousness, shall have succeeded them.

2.) *"Oh what a garden will be seen,
When all the flowers of grace
Appear in everlasting green,
Before the Planter's face!*

*"No more exposed to burning skies,
Or winter's piercing cold;
What never-dying sweet will rise
From every op'ning fold!*

*"No want of sun or showers above,
To make the flowers decline;
Fountains of life and beams of love,
Forever spring and shine.*

*"No more they need the quickening air,
Or gently rising dew!
Unspeakable their beauties are,
And yet forever new.*

*"Christ is their shade, and Christ their sun;
Among them walks the King:
Whose presence is eternal noon,
His smile eternal spring."*

VIII. The Lord, the Restorer of His People

A. Proof text.

1. ***[Psalm 23:3]- He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.***
2. ***[Psalm 89:30-34]- If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.***

B. The necessity for the restorings of the Lord.

1. The Divine life of a believer has its residence in a heart but partially renewed and sanctified?
 - a. Pre fall Adam, there was nothing in his heart opposed to the life of God within him.
 - 1.) The mind, the will, the affections, yes, the whole soul, were one glorious orb of perfect light and holiness.
 - 2.) Every faculty of the mind, every bias of the will, every emotion of the heart, every breathing of desire, were in agreement with its nature, and were favorable to its growth.
 - b. Post fall Adam, in his fall transmitted to his posterity a nature totally corrupt in every part.
 - 1.) Although Divine and sovereign grace has undertaken to renew that nature, and does so in part, yet it is but in part renewed and restored to its original glory.
 - 2.) The Divine life has its dwelling-place in a fallen, fleshly nature.
 - a.) ***[Galatians 2:20]- I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.***
2. The many external influences, which are hostile to the Divine life in the soul.

- a. As there is nothing internal that is favorable to a state of grace, so there is nothing external that assists it forward.
- b. Satan is ever on the watch to assault it.
- c. The world is ever presenting itself in some new form of fascination and power to weaken it.
- d. A thousand temptations are perpetually striving to ensnare it.
- e. The greatest weakness in himself, and his perpetual exposure to the greatest falls.
 - 1.) ***[Psalm 119:117]- Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.***
- f. The tendencies of his fallen nature, might become a prey to the worst sins.
 - 1.) ***[Psalm 19:13]- Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.***
- g. A constant tendency to depart from God.
 - 1.) ***[Hebrews 3:12]- Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.***
- h. A perpetual proneness to declension.
 - 1.) ***[Hosea 11:7]- And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.***
 - 2.) ***[Jeremiah 8:5]- Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.***
 - 3.) ***"The sun rises but to set, the clock is wound up but to run down; and not more natural is it for them thus to obey the laws that govern them, than for the heart of a child of God to follow the promptings of its corrupt and wayward nature."***
- 3. The principle of all departure from God.
 - a. We look at a believer's lax practice, we mourn and weep over it, and we do well.
 - b. We trace our own, and still deeper shame and confusion of face cover us.
 - c. We forget that the cause of our bitterest sorrow and humiliation should be, the concealed principle of evil from whence springs this unholy practice.
 - d. God looks at
 - 1.) The sin of our fallen unsanctified nature.
 - 2.) This is what we should look at, and mourn over.
 - e. True mortification of sin consists,
 - 1.) Knowledge of our sinful nature, and its subjection to the power of Divine grace.
 - a.) ***[Romans 8:13]- For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.***
 - 2.) A remembrance that the work has to do first and mainly with the root of sin in the soul.
 - a.) ***[Matthew 12:33]- Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.***
 - 3.) A deeper acquaintance with the hidden iniquity of our fallen nature, - a more thorough learning out of the truth,
 - a.) ***[Romans 7:18]- For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.***
 - 4.) A more heartfelt humiliation on account of it, and more frequent confession of it before God.

- f. There is the innate principle of departure in every child of God.
 - 1.) Though God has elected, called, renewed, washed and clothed the believer; yet if he did not check and rein him in, he would depart, and that forever!
 - a.) The subject of a kind and benevolent government, and yet to be always rebelling against the Sovereign.
 - b.) Dwelling under a kind and loving Father's roof, and yet to be perpetually grieving him, and departing from him.
 - c.) To have received so many costly proofs of his love, and yet rendering the most ungrateful returns.
- C. The restorings of the Lord described.
1. The love of the Lord Jesus in restoring a wandering believer.
 - a. Nothing but the most infinite, tender, unchanging love could prompt Him to such an act.
 - b. But for the nature of Christ's love, there could be no possible hope of his return.
 - c. This costly love of Christ is principally seen in his taking the first step in the restoring of the soul: the first advance is on the part of the Lord.
 - 1.) There is no more self-recovery after, than there is before, conversion; it is entirely the Lord's work.
 - 2.) The same state of mind, the same principle that led to the first step in declension from God, leads on to each successive one: until, but for restraining and restoring grace, the soul would take an everlasting farewell of God.
 - 3.) ***[Psalm 23:3]- He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.***
 2. The tender, unchanging love of Jesus towards his wandering child, he should take the first step in restoring him.
 - a. Shall an offended, insulted Sovereign make the first move towards conciliating a rebellious people? - That Sovereign is Jesus.
 - b. Shall an outraged Father seek his wandering child, and restore him to his affections and his house? - That Father is God.
 - c. Oh what love is that which leads Jesus in search of his wandering child:
 - 1.) Love that will not let him quite depart:
 - 2.) Love that yearns after him, and seeks after him, and follows after him through all his devious way, his intricate wanderings, and far-off departures;
 - 3.) Love that no unkindness has been able to cool, no forgetfulness has been able to weaken, no distance has been able to destroy!
 3. The power of Jesus in the restoring of the soul.
 - a. The Omnipotent Shepherd.
 - 1.) We want Omnipotence to bring us back when we have wandered; nothing less can accomplish it.
 - 2.) We want the same power that converted, to re-convert; the power that created, to re-create us.
 - 3.) ***[John 17:2]- As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.***
 - 4.) *"It was necessary that he should have power over all flesh, yes, over all the powers leagued against the church, that he should bring to glory all that were given to him in the covenant of grace."*
 - b. The Glorious power of the Great Shepherd.
 - 1.) Jesus works in the believer, in order to his recovery.
 - 2.) He breaks down the hard heart, arrests the soul in its onward progress of departure.
 - 3.) He places upon it some powerful check, lays it low, humbles, and abases it.

- 4.) He draws from it the blessed acknowledgment, " Behold, I am vile; but, he restores my soul."
 - a.) *[Job 40:4]- Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.*
 - b.) *[Psalm 23:3]- He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

4. There is infinite wisdom in the Lord's restorings.
 - a. The perfection of Jesus in the way he adopts to restore, we see it.
 - b. That he should make our very afflictions the means of restoration to our souls, unfolds the profound depth of his wisdom.
 - 1.) *[Psalm 119:149]- Hear my voice according unto thy lovingkindness: O LORD, quicken me according to thy judgment.*
 - 2.) *[Psalm 119:67]- Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.*
 - 3.) *[Psalm 138:7]- Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.*
 - c. The season of trial is not infrequently the sanctified season of revival.
 - 1.) Then the declension of the soul has been discovered.
 - 2.) Then the hidden cause of that declension has been brought to light.
 - 3.) Then the spirit has bowed in contrition before the Lord.
 - 4.) Then grace has been stirred up in the heart.
 - 5.) Then a new sweetness has been given to prayer.
 - 6.) Then a new impulse to faith, and a new radiance to hope, and from the flame the gold and the silver have emerged, purified of their tin and dross.
 - 7.) Do not think that our heavenly Father takes pleasure in chastening us?
 - a.) No: he is a tender, loving father; so tender and so loving, that not one stroke, nor one cross, nor one trial more does he lay upon us, than is absolutely needful for our good.

5. The gentleness of the Lord's restoring.
 - a. In the recovery of the stray sheep
 - 1.) *[Luke 15:4-5]- What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*
 - b. In the restoring of Peter.
 - 1.) It was but a look; - not a word fell from the lips of the Savior - not an unkind rebuke, not a harsh upbraiding word did he breathe; yet that look - what artist's pencil has ever been able to imitate it; - that look so full of love, so full of gentleness, so full of forgiveness, did seem to say, "*I am going to die for you, Peter - all this and more I suffer for you; will you, can you deny me?*"
 - 2.) The Lord restores the soul gently. The moment he discovers to it its sin, he conveys some token of his pardoning mercy: the balm is applied the moment the wound is given, the remedy is at hand the moment the distemper is discovered.
 - 3.) *[Luke 22:60-62]- And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*
 - 4.) *[John 21:15-17]- So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second*

time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

c. In the case of David.

1.) God sent a kind, tender, faithful prophet, to discover to him his awful backsliding; and the astounding words, "You are the man," had scarcely died away upon his ear, before he pours in this healing balm, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die."

a.) *[2 Samuel 12:7,13]- And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.*

d. In the case of Ephraim.

1.) Oh, what gentleness, what tenderness, are thus shown in the Lord's restorings of his wandering child!

2.) From whom could this have been expected but from him whose nature and whose name is love.

a.) *[Jeremiah 31:20]- Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spoke against him I do earnestly remember him still; therefore my affections are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, says the Lord.*

3.) This is an outgushing of tenderness towards a poor, returning, backsliding soul, which could only have had its dwelling-place in the heart of Jehovah.

D. The poor backslider's return to the Lord.

1. Remember from whence you are fallen.

a. *[Revelation 2:4-5]- Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.*

b. Revert to your past history, your former spiritual state.

1.) Remember your first sorrow for sin, the first joy of its pardon.

2.) Remember the spring-tide of your first love - how precious Jesus was, how glorious was his person, how sweet was his cross, how fragrant was his name, how rich was his grace.

3.) Remember how dear to you was the throne of grace, how frequently you resorted to it, regarding it of all spots on earth the most blessed.

4.) Remember how, under the anointings of adopting love, you walked with God as with a Father - how filial, how close, how holy was your communion with him.

5.) Remember the seasons of refreshing in the sanctuary, in the social meeting, in the closet, how your soul did seem to dwell on the sunny sides of glory, and you longed for the wings of a dove that you might fly to your Lord.

6.) Remember how, publicly and before many witnesses, you put off sin and put on Christ, and turning your back upon the world, took your place among the followers of the Lamb.

7.) Remember how holy, and circumspect, and spotless was your walk, how tender was your conscience, how guileless was your spirit, how humble and lowly your whole deportment.

8.) *"Where is the blessedness I knew*

*When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word?*

*"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still;
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill.*

*"Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made you mourn,
And drove you from my bosom." – William Cowper*

2. Repent and do the first works
 - a. ***[Revelation 2:5]- Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.***
 - b. Repentance implies the existence and conviction of sin.
 - 1.) It is a sin of peculiar magnitude.
 - 2.) It is a sin against God in the character of a loving Father.
 - 3.) It is a sin against Jesus in the character of a tender Redeemer,
 - 4.) It is a sin against the Holy Spirit in the character of a faithful Indweller and a Sanctifier.
 - 5.) It is a sin against the most precious experience of his grace.
 - 6.) It is a sin against the most melting exhibitions of his love.
 - 7.) It is a sin against the most tender proofs of his covenant faithfulness.
 - 8.) Think how you have wounded Jesus afresh, and repent.
 - 9.) Think how you have requited your father's love, and repent.
 - 10.) Think how you have grieved the Spirit, and repent.
 - 11.) ***[Zechariah 12:10]- And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.***
3. All real return of a backsliding soul is through Jesus.
 - a. ***[Hebrews 10:19-22]- Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.***
4. The encouragements to return to the Lord are many and great.
 - a. We have the gracious invitations of God himself.
 - 1.) ***[Jeremiah 3:12]- Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.***
 - b. We have God's own free invitation!
 - 1.) ***[Jeremiah 3:22]- Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.***
 - 2.) ***[Hosea 14:4-7]- I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily,***

and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.

5. The character of God is such as encourages the return of a backsliding soul.
 - a. He urges them upon the ground of what He is, merciful.
 - 1.) *[Jeremiah 3:12]- Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.*
 - b. He urges them upon His pardon.
 - 1.) *[Isaiah 44:22]- I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.*
 - 2.) Return, for I have blotted out your transgressions.
 - 3.) Return, for I have put away your sins.
 - 4.) Return, for I have redeemed you.
 - 5.) The work is already done, - the pardon has already gone forth, - the backsliding has already been forgiven; then linger not, but return, for I have redeemed you.
 - 6.) *[1 John 1:9]- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
 - c. The most expressive of undiminished love, of yearning tenderness, of eagerness to welcome his return.
 - 1.) *[Luke 15:20]- And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*
 - 2.) He is on the eager watch for your first movement towards him.
 - a.) He is looking as with outstretched neck for the first sign of your soul's return.
 - b.) He is listening for the first sound of your footsteps.
 - c.) He is waiting for the first relentings of your heart.
 - d.) He is sending his own Spirit to work that return in your soul, to break your heart, to rouse your slumbering spirit, to draw you, win you to his arms.
6. We must not overlook the grand source of encouragement to a returning soul, that which springs from the cross of Christ
 - a. The cross of Jesus displays the most awful exhibition of God's hatred of sin, and at the same time the most august manifestation of his readiness to pardon it.
 - b. *"Then beneath the cross adoring,
Sin does like itself appear;
When the wounds of Christ exploring,
I can read my pardon there."*
7. If the Lord has restored your soul, remember why he has done it, - to make you hate your sins.
 - a. *[Ezekiel 16:63]- That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.*
8. Remember that, just where the departure commenced, there should commence the return.
 - a. Did it begin at the closet?
 - 1.) Return to secret, closet prayer.
 - 2.) Build up the ruined altar.
 - 3.) Rekindle the expiring flame.

- 4.) Let that holy sanctuary once more witness to your confessions, your humiliations, your strong crying and tears, and your close, filial, and hallowed communion with God.
9. Do not overlook, in this great business of restoration, the intercession of Jesus, the High Priest, at the right hand of God.
- a. *[1 John 2:1]- My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:*
- b. *[Hebrews 9:24]- For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:*
10. In view of all these precious encouragements, persuasive motives, and earnest expostulations, will you, dear backsliding soul, still refuse to return?
- a. *[Luke 15:21]- And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*
- b. I beseech you to return!
- 1.) By all that is tender and forgiving in that Father's heart.
 - 2.) By all that is melting, persuasive, and precious in the work of Jesus.
 - 3.) By his agony and bloody sweat.
 - 4.) By his cross and passion.
 - 5.) By his death, burial, and resurrection.
- c. I implore you to return!
- 1.) By the honor of that holy religion you have wounded.
 - 2.) By all the hopes of glory you have indulged in.
 - 3.) By all that is sacred and precious in the memory of the past.
 - 4.) By all that is solemn and real in the prospect of the future.
- d. I entreat, I implore, I beseech you, wanderer, prodigal, to return!
- 1.) By the faithful promises of God.
 - 2.) By the tender yearnings of Jesus.
 - 3.) By the gentle drawings of the Spirit.
 - 4.) By all that you will experience in the joy and peace and assurance of a restored soul,
 - 5.) By the glory of God.
 - 6.) By the honor of Christ.
 - 7.) By the nearness of death and the solemnity of the judgment.
- e. *"Return, O wanderer, return!
And seek an injured Father's face;
Those warm desires that in you burn,
Were kindled by reclaiming grace.*
- "Return, O wanderer, return!
Your Savior bids your spirit live;
Go to his bleeding side, and learn
How freely Jesus can forgive.*
- "Return, O wanderer, return!
Regain your lost, lamented rest;
Jehovah's melting affections yearn
To clasp his Ephraim to his breast."*

IX. The Lord, the Keeper of His People
A. Proof text.

1. *[Psalm 121:5]- The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.*

B. Salvation is entirely in and of God.

1. Irrespective of all worth, worthiness, or power of the creature.
2. In every respect it is infinitely worthy of Himself.
3. God can do nothing but what harmonizes with his own illimitable greatness.
 - a. He can never act below himself.
 - b. All the productions of his creative power in nature, all the events of his directive wisdom in providence, bear the impress, from the smallest to the greatest, of his *"eternal power and Godhead."*
 - 1.) *[Romans 1:20]- For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

4. In salvation, the whole Deity shines.

- a. How frequently, clearly, and solemnly does the Holy Spirit unfold this great truth in his word, that salvation is entirely in and of God
- b. Jehovah emerges from the veiled pavilion of his greatness and glory, and by one stupendous exercise of power, and by one august act of grace, and by one ineffable display of love - before which all other revelations of his glory seem to fade away and well-near disappear - walks abroad among men in his full-orbed majesty.
- c. This glorious "tabernacle" that is "with men," what less is it than the manifestation of Jesus in our own nature - God manifest in the flesh?
 - 1.) *[Revelation 21:3]- And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*
 - 2.) *[Psalm 21:5]- His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him.*

5. In salvation, God's attributes shine.

- a. Is he the only-wise God? - His salvation must be the most profound result of that wisdom.
- b. Is he most holy? - His salvation must be holy.
- c. Is he just? - His salvation must be just.
- d. Is he gracious? - So must be his salvation.
- e. No other conception of his wisdom, no other product of his power, no other revelation of his greatness, gives any adequate conception of God, but the cross of his beloved Son.
 - 1.) *"It is here that he appears under the new and unequalled aspect of the God of our salvation; and hence that he desires a renewal of praise, not only for his excellent greatness, or his marvelous works, but for what he is in his inherent and illimitable goodness, and for what he imparts in the fruitions of his love. The very thought of such a discovery, is itself a new creation. It is the product of inspiration, not of mortal intelligence: it could proceed only from him by whom it is to be substantiated and accomplished; it constitutes its own evidence, it authenticates itself. Divinity is not more its object than its essence: incommunicable majesty is impressed on every feature, and diffused over all its form. Well may it be said of such a system, even as of Him who is its author, that herein God is manifested in the flesh, beheld in his express image and his uncreated brightness."*

6. This salvation takes in all the circumstances of a child of God.

- a. It is not only a salvation from wrath to come, but it is a present salvation, including deliverance from all evil, help in all trouble, comfort in all sorrow, the supply of all want, and through all conflicts, assaults, and difficulties, perfect safety and final triumph.

- b. It is the present and certain security of the believer, provided for in the covenant of grace, made sure in Jesus the covenant head, and revealed in this glorious covenant plan of salvation.
- C. The Lord is the keeper of his people in the midst of all their weakness, waywardness, and tendency to wander.
1. The perfect weakness of the believer himself.
 - a. The principle of self-confidence is the natural product of the human heart: the great characteristic of our apostate race.
 - b. What is the great citadel, to the overthrow of which Divine grace first directs its power? What is the first step it takes in the subjection of the sinner to God? What, but the breaking down of this lofty, towering, independent conceit of himself, so natural to man, and so abhorrent to God?
 2. No mere creature, angelic or human, can keep itself.
 - a. *[Luke 10:18]- And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.*
 - b. *[Matthew 6:13]- And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*
 - c. *[1 Corinthians 10:13]- There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*
 - d. Look at Adam.
 - 1.) He too was created in perfect holiness and yet, he fell from his original holiness because he could not keep himself:
 - e. Look at the histories of some of the most eminent of God's saints.
 - 1.) *[Deuteronomy 28:32]- Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long; and there shall be no might in thine hand.*
 - 2.) *[Romans 5:6]- For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*
 - 3.) *[Romans 8:3]- For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*
 - 4.) *[Hebrews 11:34]- Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.*
 - 5.) *[Luke 10:3]- Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.*
 - 6.) *[Matthew 10:16]- Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*
 - 7.) *[Song of Solomon 2:2]- As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.*
 - 8.) *[Matthew 12:20]- A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.*
 - f. Look at the Lord as his people's strength.
 - 1.) *[Exodus 15:2]- The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.*
 - 2.) *[Psalm 23:1]- The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
 - 3.) *[Psalm 119:117]- Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*
 - 4.) *[Psalm 19:13]- Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

- 5.) *[Psalm 17:5]- Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.*
- 6.) *[2 Corinthians 1:9]- But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:*
- 7.) *[1 Corinthians 15:10]- But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*
- g. Look at the intemperance of Noah, the unbelief of Abraham, the adultery and murder of David, the idolatry of Solomon, the self-righteousness of Job, the impatience of Moses, the self-confidence, and trimming, temporizing policy of Peter.
- 1.) Solemn are these lessons of the creature's nothingness; affecting these examples of his perfect weakness!
- h. Look at the past of your own life.
- 1.) What marks of perfect weakness may he discover?
- 2.) What evidences of his own fickleness, folly, immature judgment, may he trace?
- 3.) What outbreakings of deep iniquity; what disclosures of hidden corruption?
- 4.) What startling symptoms of the most awful departure and apostasy from God?
- i. Let it be remembered, is the history of a believer in Jesus, a renewed child of God, a partaker of the Divine nature, an expectant of eternal glory!
- 1.) *[Psalm 119:117]- Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually.*
- 2.) *[1 Corinthians 10:12]- Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*
- j. The Lord will cause his people to know their perfect weakness and insufficiency to keep themselves from their own deep personal experience of the truth:
- 1.) When the Holy Spirit first lays his axe at the fabric of their self-righteousness.
- 2.) It is a truth they become growingly acquainted with.
- 3.) It is a lesson they are made daily to learn.
- 4.) He becomes the most perfectly schooled in it, who watches most narrowly his own heart, is most observant of his own way, and deals most constantly and simply with the cross of Jesus.
- 5.) Bringing them into great straits and difficulties, hedging up their path with thorns.
- 6.) In deep adversity after great prosperity, as in the case of Job.
- 7.) Circumstances of absolute prosperity.
- 8.) Permitting the messenger of Satan to buffet.
- 9.) The removal of some beloved prop on which we too fondly and securely leaned.
- 10.) In the body of sin which we daily bear about with us.
- a.) *[Romans 7:18-24]- For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*
- b.) *[Genesis 42:36]- And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.*
- c.) *[Job 16:12-14]- I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. His*

archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground. He breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant.

- k. You are not alone along this path, all the covenant people of God are traveling to their better and brighter home.
 - 1.) Here they become acquainted with their own weakness, their perpetual liability to fall.
 - 2.) Here they renounce their former thoughts of self-power and of self-keeping.
 - 3.) Here they learn more of Jesus as their strength, their all-sufficient keeper, more of him as their "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."
 - a.) *[1 Corinthians 1:30]- But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*

- 3. The Lord Jesus is able to keep his people from falling.
 - a. This is the ground-work of our faith, - that Christ has power to keep, through all time and to all eternity, the people entrusted to his care.
 - 1.) They are his portion, his bride, his jewels.
 - 2.) They were committed to him of his Father, and therefore he is responsible for their present and eternal salvation.

 - b. As God, Christ is able to keep his people.
 - 1.) The Lord that created the heaven and the earth.
 - a.) *[Isaiah 42:5]- Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:*
 - b.) *[Isaiah 45:11-13]- Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me. I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts.*
 - c.) *[Colossians 1:16-17]- For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

 - 2.) Jesus is invested with a creative and a sustaining power, - attributes that can be predicated only of God.
 - a.) *[Hebrews 1:3]- Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:*
 - b.) *The same perfection which qualified him as the covenant head and surety of his people; the same almighty strength which enabled him to work out their salvation, to bear the burden and the curse of their sins, enables him to preserve them while "dead in trespasses and in sins," and to keep them after they have been called and renewed by the operation of the Holy Spirit.*
 - c.) *[Ephesians 2:1-2]- And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*

- c. As God-man Mediator, he is also able to keep his people.
 - 1.) As the covenant Head and preserver of his church, "it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell."
 - a.) *[Colossians 1:19]- For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;*
 - 2.) It pleased God that in his Son, the mediator of his beloved people, should all fullness dwell.
 - a.) A fullness of merit.
 - b.) A fullness of pardon.
 - c.) A fullness of righteousness.
 - d.) A fullness of grace, wisdom, and strength, commensurate with the varied, multiplied, and diversified circumstances of his family.
 - e.) *"Full to a sufficiency for every end of grace; full for practice, to be an example to men and angels as to obedience; full to a certainty of uninterrupted communion with God; full to a readiness of giving supply to others; full to suit him to all the occasions and necessities of the souls of men; full to a glory not unbecoming a subsistence in the person of the Son of God; full to a perfect victory in trials over all temptations; full to an exact correspondence to the whole law, every righteous and holy law of God; full to the utmost capacity of a limited, created, finite nature; full to the greatest beauty and glory of a living temple of God; full to the full pleasure and delight of the soul of his Father; full to an everlasting monument of the glory of God, in giving such inconceivable excellencies to the Son of man." – John Owen*

D. Lessons from The Lord as keeper of his people.

- 1. How is the child of God to avail himself of this provision?
 - a. By faith in Christ the soul is made strong in battle.
 - b. By faith he travels up to this rich and ample supply.
 - c. By faith he takes his nothingness to Christ's all-sufficiency.
 - d. By faith he takes his unworthiness to Christ's infinite merit.
 - e. By faith he takes his weakness to Christ's strength.
 - f. By faith he takes his folly to Christ's wisdom.
 - g. By faith he takes his fearful heart, his timid spirit, his nervous frame, his doubtful mind, his beclouded evidences, his rebellious will, his painful cross, his peculiar case of whatever nature it may be, in the way of believing.
 - h. By faith he takes his fearful heart, his timid spirit, his nervous frame, his doubtful mind, his beclouded evidences, his rebellious will, his painful cross, his peculiar case of whatever nature it may be, in the way of believing.
 - i. By faith he takes the exercise of simple faith, he goes with it to Jesus, and as an empty vessel hangs himself upon that "nail fastened in a sure place," the glorious Eliakim on whom is hung "all the glory of his Father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity; from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons."
 - 1.) *[Isaiah 22:24-25]- And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed, and be cut down, and fall; and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off: for the LORD hath spoken it.*
 - j. By faith the weakest believer, the most severely assailed, the most deeply tried, the most painfully tempted, lay his Goliath dead at his feet, by a simple faith's-dealing with the fullness that is in Christ Jesus.
- 2. The great evil of which the true saints of God most stand in jeopardy, and which their timid, fearful hearts most dread?

- a. Secret and outward backsliding from God, after conversion.
 - b. It is his consolation then to know, that Jesus is "able to keep him from falling"
 - 1.) *[Jude 24]- Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,*
 - c. Some, but imperfectly taught in the word, are dreading awful apostasy from the faith here, and final condemnation from the presence of God hereafter.
 - 1.) Believing that though Christ has made full satisfaction for their sins to Divine justice.
 - 2.) Has cancelled the mighty debt.
 - 3.) Has imputed to them his righteousness.
 - 4.) Has blotted out their iniquities.
 - 5.) Has called, renewed, sanctified, and taken full possession of them by his Spirit.
 - 6.) Has ascended up on high, to plead their cause with the Father; that yet, after all this stupendous exercise of power, and this matchless display of free grace, they may be left to utter apostasy from God, and be finally and eternally lost.
 - d. Others, again, more clearly taught by the Spirit, are heard to say, "I believe in the stability of the covenant, in the un-changeableness of God's love, and in the faithfulness of my heavenly Father, but I fear lest some day, under some sharp temptation, some burst of indwelling sin, when the enemy shall come in as a flood, I shall fall, to the wounding of my peace, to the shame of my brethren, and to the dishonoring of Christ."
 - 1.) Truly you would fall, were he to leave you to your own keeping for one moment; but Jesus is able to keep you from falling.
3. Read the promises, believe them, and rest upon them.
- a. *[Isaiah 27:3]- I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*
 - b. *[Psalm 37:17]- For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous.*
 - c. *[Job 17:9]- The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.*
 - d. *[Psalm 84:7]- They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.*
 - e. *[Psalm 125:1-2]- They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.*
 - f. *[I Peter 1:5]- Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*
 - g. *[Psalm 121:1-5]- I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand.*
 - h. *[John 10:27-28]- My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand*
 - i. *[Ecclesiastes 4:12]- And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*
 - j. *"More happy, but not more secure. The glorified spirits in heaven." - Augustus Montague Toplady*
4. With these promises of the triune God to keep his people from falling, He has wisely and graciously connected the diligent, prayerful use of all the means, which He has appointed for this end.

- a. *[Romans 6:11]- Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
 - b. *[Ephesians 2:10]- For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*
 - c. *[2 Peter 1:4,10]- Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:*
 - d. *[Philippians 2:12]- Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*
 - e. *[Matthew 26:41]- Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*
 - f. *[Jude 20-21]- But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*
 - g. *[Titus 2:12]- Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*
 - h. *[1 Corinthians 6:19-20]- What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*
5. Guard against the slightest abuse of any of the great truths.
- a. The believer is to use diligently all holy means of keeping himself from failing; as a temple of the Holy Spirit, as the subject of the Divine life, as a pardoned, justified man, he is called to labor perseveringly, to pray ceaselessly, and to watch vigilantly.
 - b. He is not to run willfully into temptation, to expose himself needlessly to the power of the enemy, to surround himself with unholy and hostile influences, and then take refuge in the truth, that the Lord will keep him from falling.
 - c. This were most awfully to abuse the "doctrine that is after godliness," to "hold the truth in unrighteousness"; and to make "Christ the minister of sin." Dear reader, watch and pray against this!
 - 1.) *[1 Timothy 6:3]- If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;*
 - 2.) *[Romans 1:18]- For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;*
 - 3.) *[Galatians 2:17]- But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.*
6. Let the cheering prospect of that glory unto which you are kept, stimulate you to all diligent perseverance in holy duty, and constrain you to all patient endurance of suffering.
- a. *[1 Peter 1:3-5]- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*
 - b. *[Jude 24-25]- Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*