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HOW STANDS MY CASE WITH GOD?

THE most famous sentence ever said to have been uttered by a heathen oracle was this, "*Know thyself.*" It well merited the distinction it received, for while self-knowledge brings many advantages, ignorance of ourselves is a fruitful source of folly, sin, and misery. Indeed, it is one of the greatest blots upon our nature. It is the parent of nearly all that is preposterous and ridiculous in human conduct. Nor is this its worst effect. It begets low ideas of sin, and of the love of God in Christ, and so breeds contempt of God's everlasting mercies.

Nor is this all. Not knowing our sins, we do not feel our wants, and so we restrain prayer before God. If we have not a proper view of our faults, pride fills the place of humility, and thus brings many a fall which covers us with disgrace. Did we clearly see our ill-desert we should not be unthankful and fretful, when we have more mercies and fewer trials than we have any right to expect. Our self-conceit will not listen to good counsel, just reproof, or wholesome restraint, and so we are untractable, self-willed, and peevish. Hypocrisy has its seat here, for men never attempt to impose on others till they have first deceived themselves. The flattery of others could not hurt us if we did not first flatter ourselves, and thus help to spread a net

for our own feet. The most affecting events of providence seem to have little or no salutary effect on him, who is ignorant of his own deficiencies and sins. Such a one will hardly be very useful to his neighbour, for not knowing himself, he is not in the right mood to influence others to that which is good. His reproofs will be ill-timed, or given in a wrong spirit. Secret sins, which are the bane of piety, are greatly nourished in the same way. False hopes and foolish fears, spurious joys and carnal sorrows spring very much from the same source. Men in this sad condition are boastful and careless, and walk not circumspectly nor wisely. Ignorance of ourselves perverts truth, reason, conscience, and all our mercies. It makes us call evil good, and good evil. It hides our faults, or makes us esteem them virtues. It puts an excessive value upon mean things, and a low estimate upon the most precious things. In fine, so great are its evils that sober men, not professing Christianity, have often felt the necessity of calling themselves to an account that they might not be given over to utter folly. Listen to the words of one such. Though a heathen, he may both shame and instruct some professed Christians.

WHAT SENECA THOUGHT.

In his treatise on anger he says, "The soul is daily to be called to an account. It was the custom of Sextius, when the day was past, and he betook himself to his rest at night, to ask his soul, 'What evil of thine hast thou healed to-day? What vice hast thou resisted? In what respect art thou better?' Anger will cease and become more moderate when it knows it must come every day before the judge. What practice is more excellent than thus to sift or examine the whole day? How quiet, and sound, and sweet a sleep must follow this reckoning with ourselves, when the soul is either commended or admonished, and, as a secret observer and judge of itself, is acquainted with its own

ways ! I use this power myself, and daily accuse myself, or plead my cause before myself. When the candle is taken out of my sight, and my wife becomes silent, then, according to my custom, I search over the whole day with myself ; I measure over again my doings and my sayings ; I hide nothing from myself ; I pass over nothing ; for why should I fear any of my errors, when I can say, ‘ See that thou do so no more ; I now forgive thee ; in such a disputation thou spakest too contentiously ; engage not therefore in disputes with them that are ignorant. They that have not learned will not learn. Such a man thou didst admonish more freely than thou oughtest ; and therefore didst not amend him, but offend him. Hereafter see, not only whether it be truth which thou speakest, but also whether he to whom it is spoken can bear the truth.’ ” While this paragraph manifests sad ignorance of the heinous nature of sin, both as to its guilt and defilement, and while it evinces that Seneca neither knew nor loved the true method of purifying the heart by faith, of being sanctified by the word and Spirit of God, or of obtaining forgiveness by the precious blood of Christ, it yet shows the usefulness for this life of a serious and close inspection of our tempers, words and ways. Let us look for a moment into the life of that servant of God,

PRESIDENT EDWARDS, THE ELDER.

He thus resolved, “ To examine carefully and constantly what that one thing in me is, which causes me in the least to doubt of the love of God, and to direct all my force against it. To inquire every night, as I am going to bed, wherein I have been negligent,—what sin I have committed,—and wherein I have denied myself ;—also, at the end of every week, month, and year. To inquire every night before I go to bed, whether I have acted in the best way I possibly could, with respect to eating and drinking. To

ask myself, at the end of every day, week, month, and year, wherein I could possibly, in any respect, have done better. Constantly, with the utmost niceness and diligence, and the strictest scrutiny, to be looking into the state of my soul, that I may know whether I have truly an interest in Christ or not; that when I come to die, I may not have any negligence respecting this to repent of. Whenever my feelings begin to appear in the least out of order, when I am conscious of the least uneasiness within, or the least irregularity without, I will then subject myself to the strictest examination. Very much to exercise myself in this, all my life long, viz., with the greatest openness of which I am capable, to declare my ways to God, and lay open my soul to him, all my sins, temptations, difficulties, sorrows, fears, hopes, desires, and every thing, and every circumstance, according to Dr. Manton's sermon on the cxix. Psalm. After afflictions, to inquire, What I am the better for them? what good I have got by them? and what I might have got by them?" The life and writings of this great and good man abundantly prove that these purposes were sincerely carried out. The result was unusual unction, honour and usefulness. Indeed we may learn the same from

THE HISTORY OF MANY OTHERS.

Almost every page of the diary of David Brainerd gives proof of the earnestness with which he sought to know his own heart, and to understand his own errors. The same is more or less evinced in the accounts we have of Luther, Calvin, Halyburton, Rutherford, Leighton, Usher, Bunyan, Thomas Boston, John Brown of Haddington, John Newton, Zinzendorf, Henry Martyn, Pliny Fisk, Dr. Thomas Scott, the Commentator; Drs. Payson, Rice, Nevins, Porter, Nettleton, and Green; Mrs. Isabella Graham, Mrs. Winslow, Lady Colquhoun, and Mary Lundie Duncan. In short, valuable religious biography in all ages is proof of the utility of habits of self-examination. But

WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE?

For after all this is the only rule of life which cannot err. To the law and to the testimony let us go. "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?" 2 Cor. xiii. 5. "Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." Gal. vi. 4. "Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Ps. iv. 4. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." Lam. iii. 40. Here are four commands or exhortations, all agreeing with each other and with the scope of Scripture. They are plain and direct. They clearly bind the conscience. So Asaph thought: "I call to mind my song in the night; I commune with my own heart: and my spirit made diligent search." Ps. lxxvii. 6. So David practised: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." Ps. cxix. 59. Self-examination is, therefore, not a superstition, nor a human invention. We have a divine warrant for it in the word of God: It is as wicked as it is dangerous to neglect this weighty duty. Yet it is but fair to say that

SELF-EXAMINATION IS A DIFFICULT DUTY.

It is not easy to search and find out our true characters. The Scriptures teach as much. For, "who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Ps. xix. 12. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Jer. xvii. 9. This divine teaching well agrees with experience, and with the reason of the case. What is more common than to hear the best men say, "If I know my own heart;" thus confessing that it often deceives them. The soul, like the eye of man, seems better adapted to examine other things than itself. Had man never sinned, his great study would have been

not himself, but the works and perfections of God. How slow and uncertain has been the progress of mental science, although the human mind has always been the same thing that it is now! It is only by some process of *reflection* that the eye can discover its own size, shape, or colour; and it is only when we look into the mirror of truth that we perceive the real qualities of the heart. The mind loves to go forth and gaze on external objects, but self-inspection is a task. Nor is this the worst of our case. Sin has disordered all our powers. It has obscured our view of every spiritual object. It has covered the soul with thick clouds of smoke and darkness, so that it often cannot see what otherwise would be plain enough. There is a veil over the heart, and till that is taken away, we shall neither see the true nature of sin nor the beauty of Him who is altogether lovely. The Bible says that men are blinded, are bewitched, and have the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. Sin has also made our self-love very inordinate, so that we do not naturally wish to know our own faults. Nothing so abases and mortifies us as to discover our own hateful corruptions. Men flatter themselves that however wicked their lives may be, their hearts are good. Some complain of bad memories, but how few bewail the plague of an evil nature! "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the hearts." Prov. xxi. 2. Let us take

SOME ILLUSTRATIONS.

When our first parents were called to an account for sin, were they ready to admit its enormity? The fact of transgressing a plain and reasonable command was undeniable; yet not an expression of humiliation or sorrow escaped the lips of either. Adam lays the blame not on himself, but on his wife, and even on his God. Eve excuses herself by

pointing to the serpent. Yet these persons had committed an offence strongly marked by ingratitude, unbelief, rebellion, and recklessness. Nor were they old offenders. They had never sinned till that day. Look, too, at the Israelites in the days of Malachi. They were dreadfully sunk in sin, and yet they had no right views of their guilt. God says to them, "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words, yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment? . . . Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. . . . Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God; and, What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" To the Pharisees, Christ said, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts." Those hardened hypocrites "trusted in themselves that they were righteous." In fact, the worse men are, the better do they commonly think themselves to be. Saul of Tarsus breathing out threatenings and slaughter, and persecuting the church of God, esteemed himself one of the favourites of heaven, and a model of righteousness. But converted Paul tells a different story. He cries out, "I am not meet to be called an apostle;" "I am less than the least of all saints;" and just before he leaves the world, "I am the chief of sinners." No delusions seem to take a stronger hold of the human mind than those which beget vain self-esteem. John Newton maintains that "lunatics are as reasonable as any persons on earth who glory in themselves." Our Lord tells us that some self-deceptions will be kept up till the judgment day. "Many will

say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity." Matthew vii. 22, 23. Difficult as this duty is, it may yet be performed. Though it is not easy, yet

IT IS POSSIBLE.

It is hard to run a race or fight a battle, to acquire a foreign tongue, or learn a new science, yet all these things have been done, well done, and can be done again. We may learn enough concerning ourselves to avoid fatal mistakes. It is a great advantage, that the rules given us to judge ourselves by are the same that will be applied to us in the last day, and are so plain that any honest mind need not mistake their import. Thus when we look into our Lord's sermon on the mount, we are told with the utmost clearness what sort of persons shall win and wear the crown. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the meek; blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the pure in heart; blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." Matt. v. 3—10. How simple and how clear! Look too at Paul's enumeration of the qualities of a pious heart. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Gal. v. 22, 23. No one of these qualities in their genuine nature ever belonged to a wicked man; but no unsanctified heart ever had such a semblance of them all, as could have deceived any one who really wished to know the truth concerning himself. The word of God abounds with marks of piety as clear and decisive as these. Nor is this all. It very clearly tells us what characters are odious

to God, and what sort of persons shall never see his face in peace. They are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie, and fornicators, and effeminate, and abusers of themselves with mankind, and thieves, and covetous, and drunkards, and revilers, and extortioners, and backbiters, and tale-bearers, and tale-hearers, and usurers, and those who take bribes, and those who are guilty of adultery, uncleanness, lasciviousness, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, revellings, and such like. Rev. xxii. 15; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10; Ps. xv., and Gal. v. 19—21. Sometimes the whole of a character is described, and its destiny declared in one short and striking sentence. “He that believeth not shall be damned.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” “Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.” “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” “He that loveth is born of God.” Sometimes the righteous and wicked are put in contrast thus: “He that doeth righteousness is righteous; he that committeth sin is of the devil.” “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” So that all the points on which our destiny will be finally decided, are now clearly stated in God’s word. More than this, the whole of

LIFE IS A TEST OF CHARACTER.

A wicked man utters a profane or obscene expression in your presence: your behaviour will show the state of your mind at that time. A poor man asks alms: your treatment of him is a test of your principles. There is to be a meeting for prayer, and at the same hour a concert is to be given: now you can see where your heart is. God gives Hezekiah great substance, so that he makes himself treasures for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels, and for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil. In time, the

ministers of a foreign court visit him. Here he has a test of his character. Will he indulge, or will he repress his pride and ostentation? The record is brief and sad, but instructive. "Howbeit, in the business of the ambassadors of the king of Babylon. . . . God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. Do false teachers, showing signs, arise to draw men from truth and from God? You shall not hearken to them, "For the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul." Deut. xiii. 3. So that prosperity and adversity, sickness and health, times of judgment and times of mercy, all are tests of our real principles; and if the heart is hidden, the life is open. If you cannot look directly at your desires and principles, yet what are your overt acts? Would you approve of the conduct of an enemy, whose life was the counterpart of your own? Nay, would you bear in a friend some things which you practise yourself? If your heart is good, your life is good. If your life is evil, your heart is bad. So that by comparing your conduct in secret and in public with God's word, you may learn much of your own heart. Moreover, God's Spirit is promised to all who sincerely ask for so great a gift. He enlightens the mind, he convinces of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, he makes manifest the recesses of the soul. In his hand the word of God is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. He can, and if you wish it he will show you enough of your sins, and weaknesses, and wants, to make you humble and wise. There is no teacher like this blessed Spirit. He can give you a clear discernment of all you are, and all you need to be. He has guided thousands to a correct knowledge of themselves, and to a saving knowledge of God and of Christ.

HOW SHALL WE EXAMINE OURSELVES?

The manner of doing any religious duty is as important as the matter. Indeed, a large part of the miscarriages of

men in spiritual affairs is in this very point. Balaam spoke the truth, but not willingly. Just before his fall Peter declared his love to Christ, but he did it boastfully. Jehu showed great zeal for the Lord of hosts, but he did it ostentatiously. A man may "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints," but if he does it bitterly he will have no reward. "Let not your good be evil spoken of." Self-examination may be so conducted as to rivet gross deceptions on the mind. In such case it wholly fails of its object, and ends in shame. It is therefore of great importance that when we enter upon it, we should do it

WITH SOLEMNITY.

In such a work carelessness is shocking, and even seriousness is not the word that expresses the right state of mind. Here, if ever, deep solemnity is called for. The nature of the duty is such, the questions to be asked are so weighty, and any conclusion reached will so certainly be reviewed at the last day, and be followed by everlasting consequences, that a mind must be fearfully given over to levity and trifling before it can consent to enter upon such a work without calling home its wandering thoughts and being still. God has no pleasure in fools.

IT SHOULD BE DONE FREQUENTLY.

It is too much the practice of men to confine this work to some few occasions. Some think it will be time enough at death. Not a few, perhaps, restrict it to the approach of a communion season. Truly it is a solemn duty to prepare for the Lord's supper by searching our own hearts. "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." 1 Cor. xi. 28. But he who limits the performance of it to such times, will find it irksome then, and so will probably hurry over it and be little profited by it. But he who does something of it daily, and then embraces fit opportunities of specially engaging in it, will find it no wearisome task, but pleasant and profitable.

LET IT BE DONE THOROUGHLY.

The subjects of inquiry are neither few nor light. They embrace our conformity to or transgression of the whole law of God, our likeness or unlikeness to Christ, and the whole circle of Christian experience, temper, speech and behaviour. We may not seem guilty of violating the whole or the half of the law; but are our hearts or our lives set against any one of its precepts? "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James ii. 10. It seems that Paul went over nine commandments, and never found out his own wickedness till he compared his heart with the tenth. Rom. vii. 7. Let the whole ground be gone over. Let a man search and find out whether in humility he surpasses Ahab; in joy, the stony-ground hearers; in reformation, Herod under John's preaching; in constancy, Demas, who adhered to his profession during a persecution, and then gave it up; in morality, the young ruler; and in faith, the devils, who believe and tremble. Leave no stone unturned. We must not be scared at painful discoveries, nor flattered by finding some things encouraging, and so cut short the work.

EXAMINE YOURSELF WITH IMPARTIALITY.

This is perhaps the most difficult part of the matter. When a man is to be tried for his life he is not allowed to be his own judge, or witness, or juror, or prosecutor, though he may sometimes be his own advocate. But in self-examination it is different. Here the culprit is the court and decides upon the law; the culprit gives the testimony, frames the charges, pleads both for and against himself, gives the verdict, and pronounces the sentence. If he favours himself there is no one at the time to charge him with error. It is true, his decisions will undergo revision in the last day, and were he wise, he would desire above all things to be approved of God, but the carnal nature of man greatly prefers

security to safety—present ease to future bliss. And yet what is the use of examining any matter, if we are determined before-hand to decide, not according to the law and the evidence, but according to our prejudices or selfish blindness? “Rather think too ill of your soul’s case before God, and of your conduct in life, than too well.”

USE SCRIPTURAL TESTS.

The work of self-examination is often marred by introducing tests not found in God’s word. This was the grand error of the pharisees in Christ’s day. The ultraists, fanatics, and hypocrites of every generation, invent rules for judging of character, always taking care to insist much on those which will be favourable to themselves. Thus in all ages we find them straining at gnats and swallowing camels, pronouncing lawful things sinful, curtailing Christian liberty, and standing on punctilios, while they pull down the pillars of truth, justice and mercy. So also in judging of Christian character, one man says you must have a remarkable dream or vision; another, you must hear a voice saying, “Thy sins are forgiven thee;” another, you must be willing to be damned before you can be saved; another has no confidence in a conversion not attended with great terrors; another takes popular notions around him for his guide, and another exalts some whim of his own into a rule of judgment. To such we may well say: “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.” Men should not be surprised that, when they ignore God’s word, they fall into the most dangerous mistakes. “The word that I have spoken, it shall judge him at the last day,” says Christ. A wise man thus resolved: “I will regard the Bible as the only infallible test of character. With this in my hands, if I am deceived as to my spiritual state, it is my own fault.”

SELF-EXAMINATION MUST BE ACCOMPANIED WITH PRAYER.

Nature is too weak without help from God rightly to perform any duty. This is so even in the plainest and commonest

affairs of life. How much more then do we need assistance in one of the most difficult of all duties ! Indeed, so impossible is it to do any thing effectual for gaining sound knowledge of our own spiritual maladies and deficiencies without help from God, that if a man should say that he had examined himself without prayer, it would be proclaiming his own folly. In nothing do the truly pious feel need of divine aid more than in this work. It is to them not a terrifying, but a delightful truth that God is omniscient, and tries the reins and the hearts of men. When undergoing that searching examination this was Peter's last resource, "Lord, thou knowest all things ; thou knowest that I love thee." Hear David also, "Search me, O God, and know my heart : try me and know my thoughts : and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. And again, "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me ; try my reins and my heart." Ps. xxvi. 2. Such testing of our motives and characters by the illumination and providence of God is of excellent use. Peter tells his brethren, that the trial of their faith was more precious than the most refined gold, and should be "found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

BE PARTICULAR.

"Deceit lies in generals." "Am I in the way of duty ? Am I a christian ? Do I sin with my tongue ?" are questions too vague and general to be put to any man's conscience, unless they lead to inquiries respecting the particular ways in which men offend with their lips, or the special marks of a renewed nature, or the several precepts which should govern our lives. It is therefore well in reading the Scriptures to form the habit of often pausing, and asking how our characters stand, compared with God's word. Others have found it very useful to draw up for their own use a list of questions, of a discriminating and

searching character. Others keep by them some little manual to aid them, and if this tract shall be found useful to any one in this respect, it will not have been written in vain. The order of nature would suggest that all scrutiny of the heart be begun by comparing it with

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

“By the law is the knowledge of sin.” No man will cease to seek acceptance with God by his own works, until he is satisfied that he is a sinner, and so cannot be saved in that way. And no Christian can maintain deep humility, and a proper sense of his wants, except as he discovers his short-comings and sins by a knowledge of the law. Luther said that if he failed for one day to meditate on the law, he was sensible of a decline in his pious affections. So that the law, which is holy, just, and good, is a proper study for all classes of people. It is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It is the rule by which we are to walk. To aid those who have not a better help, the following questions are presented.

ON THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

Do I take and declare the Lord Jehovah to be the only living and true God, and my God? Am I chargeable with ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, or unworthy and wicked thoughts of him? Do I ever boldly and curiously search into his secrets? Am I guilty of any profaneness, hatred of God, vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelief, distrust, despair, incorrigibleness, hardness of heart, pride, presumption, or carnal security? Do I love myself more than I love God? Do I seek my own honour more than the glory of God? Do I prefer any thing to God's favour? Do I love communion with him more than the riches, honours, pleasures, and friendship of the world? Do I tempt God? Do I use unlawful means? Do I trust in lawful means? Have I any zeal in his cause, and

is it corrupt, blind, indiscreet, or temporary? Am I lukewarm and dead in the things of God? Am I a backslider or an apostate in my heart? Do I prefer any one before God? Do I worship any one but God, or with God? Do I pray to saints or angels, and so worship them? Do I put my trust in any creature? Do I practise witchcraft, sorcery, magic, or any form of the black art? Do I follow any of Satan's suggestions, or give them any entertainment? Do I make any man, or body of men, the lords of my faith or conscience? Do I slight, neglect, or despise God, his commands, his worship, or his people? Do I resist or grieve his Spirit in anything? Am I impatient or rebellious under any trials? Do I charge God foolishly for the evils he sends on me? Do I ascribe any good which is in me, or which I have or do, to fortune, idols, myself, or any creature? Do I worship God secretly and openly? Do I pray to him, and praise him often and fervently? Do I love to think on his name? Do I fear and delight in him? Is his will my will? Do I walk humbly with him?

ON THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

Do I devise, counsel, command, use, encourage, or approve any worship not instituted by God himself? Do I make, worship, or approve of any representation of God, or of either or all of the three persons of the Godhead, either in my mind, or in any kind of image or likeness? Do I pretend thus to honour God? Do I practise any superstition or will-worship? Do I corrupt, add to, or take from God's worship? Do I hinder or discourage others from duly worshipping God? Do I fast? Do I pay my vows? Do I hate all idolatry?

ON THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

Do I ever use the name or the word of God in a vain, ignorant, irreverent, profane, or superstitious manner? Do I ever speak or think lightly of his titles, attributes, or

ordinances? What sins am I guilty of in regard to oaths, curses, vows, and lots? Do I ever speak rashly or reproachfully of God? Do I ever jest with sacred things? Do I ever discuss or entertain idle, curious, or perverted views of God, his word, or his providence? Do I ever revile, malign, scorn, or oppose God's truth, grace, or ways? Is my profession of his religion sincere, open, consistent, and holy?

ON THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

Do I love, remember, and keep holy the Sabbath-day? Are its duties pleasant and profitable? Do I omit or carelessly perform any of them? Am I weary of them or of it? Do I ever spend the day in idleness, in needless sleep, in doing any thing sinful, or in any unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, of a worldly nature? Is holy time a delight to me?

ON THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT.

Do I neglect any duty, honour, or love, which should be paid to my parents, teachers, guardians, or rulers? Do I indulge towards them envy, contempt, rebellion, malignity, or scorn? Is my conduct towards them respectful and kind? Do I often and heartily pray for them? Am I reasonable, just, and benevolent towards my inferiors, not unduly seeking my own honour, profit, ease, or pleasure? Do I by precept and example counsel and encourage them in all that is good? Do I guard them against injustice, oppression, fraud, and temptation? Am I bitter towards them? Do I reprove harshly or excessively? Is my conduct just and noble to my equals? Do I decry or envy their worth? Do I usurp authority over them? Do I keep my place?

ON THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

Have I always taken proper care of my own life, and of the lives of others? Am I guilty of sinful anger, of hatred,

envy, the desire of revenge, excessive passions, distracting cares, or intemperance in the use of meat, drink, labour, or recreations? Do I encourage these things in others? Do I use peevish or provoking words? Do I oppress, quarrel, strike, or wound? Are my thoughts, feelings, words and actions kind, compassionate, meek, gentle, charitable, peaceable, mild, courteous, forbearing and forgiving? Do I give my support to laws which duly punish murder, duelling, fighting and quarrelling? Do I ask the same blessings for my enemies as for myself? Am I glad at calamities befalling my enemies? Am I cruel to brutes?

ON THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

Do I cherish and encourage all chaste and pure thoughts, purposes, affections, imaginations, words, looks, gestures and actions? and do I hate, resist and discourage all that is contrary thereto? Is my apparel modest? Is my behaviour light or impudent? Do I put all due honour on marriage? Am I guilty of excess in eating, drinking or sleeping? Do I abhor all unchaste company, all lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage-plays, and whatever is impure? Do I control my senses, and hold them back from all that is indelicate?

ON THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

Do I in any way practise, favour, or uphold theft, robbery, man-stealing, fraud, unconscionable prices, the use of false weights or measures, oppression, usury, bribery, vexatious law-suits, idleness, prodigality, gaming, lotteries, cheating or inordinate prizing of worldly goods? Do I remove landmarks? Is my calling lawful? Ought I not to make restitution in some case? Do I lend freely? Am I careful of things borrowed? Am I industrious? Do I beg when I might earn my own bread?

ON THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

Do I always speak the truth in my heart? Do I promote the good name of all men as I can? Do I abhor perjury,

the suborning of witnesses, untruth, lying, slander, backbiting, detraction, tale-bearing, whispering, flattery, scoffing, reviling, vain boasting, censoriousness, exaggeration and equivocation? Do I listen to false reports? Do I patiently hear a just defence? Do I pronounce unjust sentence? Do I grieve at the good name of any? Do I needlessly mention the faults of any? Do I fairly construe the acts, words and intentions of men? Do I indulge unfounded prejudices against any man? Am I ever silent when I ought to speak? Am I a brawler? Do I keep my promises?

ON THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

Am I contented with my lot? Do I envy my more prosperous neighbours? Do I grieve at their success? Do I desire any thing belonging to another without giving a fair equivalent? Do I love to show kindness to all, and increase their thrift? Am I fair in making bargains? Are my desires about my worldly estate rational, lawful, sober and moderate?

It will not offend any wise man to know that the foregoing questions have been chiefly framed from the brief exposition of the Decalogue given by the Westminster Assembly; and surely such inquiries must be profitable to all but the careless, and the hardened. Honestly answered, they will cut us off from all hope of salvation by our own innocence, doings or deservings. They will shut us up to the faith of Christ. Thus we shall find it necessary to make new inquiries. I am dead by the law. Have I been made alive by the gospel? In other words

AM I A TRUE CHRISTIAN?

Not merely, was I born in a Christian land, or of Christian parents, or educated in Christian doctrine? But have I been ingrafted into Christ, so as to partake of his fatness and fulness? Am I pardoned, accepted and so justified, and

brought into a state of salvation by Christ? This must be confessed to be as important a question as can be framed. It is to be truly and safely answered by comparing our experience, sentiments, habits and lives with the tests of Christian character given in God's word. In this work great discrimination and patience of inquiry are requisite. The rules and marks are plain. The danger is that we will misapply them. From such perversion God's grace will preserve the humble. It is true that there is often a great similarity between the common and special operations of the Spirit; between the meltings of nature and the meltings of grace; between the wise and the foolish virgins; but the difference can be detected and the truth disclosed. Let not the inquiry be, Am I a perfect or an eminent Christian? but am I a real, sincere Christian? A little child is as truly a human being as a grown man. A dollar may be of as pure gold as an eagle. Our inquiry should first be rather for the quality than the quantity of our gracious affections. And as there is little or no coin without some alloy, so there is no man whose heart is always and purely right. The tenor of the life, and not single acts, the bent of the mind, and not its unusual thoughts, the current of the affections, and not a fit of the heart, must determine the character. Self-deceivers often seem like God's people, but they are really very different in several particulars. No self-deceiver has any deep and abiding sense of his own guilt, depravity, ignorance, helplessness and misery, so as to strip him of all hope of ever doing anything effectual for his own salvation. He is wedded to his own doings, thinks he knows something to the purpose, and hopes to do better and to be better. But the real convert knows that he is nothing, knows nothing, can do nothing of himself, and feels that he is a vile, lost sinner, who has no claims on God, no cloak for his sins, no strength to resist evil and no merit of his own. Again, no spurious convert is so pleased with Christ as to take him alone as his Saviour,

Prophet, Priest and King. He may be willing to divide the work and honours of his salvation with Christ, but never relies on Christ solely and joyfully. He always has some other hope, or help, or merit besides Jesus. But the real child of God desires no other way of access to God, nor any righteousness but that of Christ. Christ is enough. In him the renewed soul finds life, and light, and joy, and peace, and wisdom, and pardon, and acceptance, and victory. Besides, no self-deceiver likes the whole law of God. He always feels that some precepts are too strict, that too much is required, and that close conformity to all is not reasonable. Whereas the true convert consents to the law that it is holy, just and good; delights in it after the inner man, and esteems all its precepts concerning all things to be right. If he comes short of its requirements, he still loves the law, and blames himself. Moreover, no self-deceiver grows in conformity to God, in proper tempers, in habits of devotion, or in deadness to the world. He appears as well at the outset of his profession as he ever does afterwards. But the real Christian grows in grace, and knowledge, and humility, and holiness. In him the work is progressive. His "path is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But as a truly pious soul has various exercises which are called by different names, let us look at them more in detail.

A SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

Let us begin with *faith*. A genuine faith rests upon Christ as the Saviour, awakens longing desires after holiness, makes duties pleasant by giving us a love for them, and gives us strength to overcome the world, and to esteem it a base thing in comparison with Christ and his cause. Is my faith of this sort?

Another grace is *repentance*, which is pious sorrow for sin itself, rather than for the punishment it brings with it.

It blushes at a consciousness of any wickedness. It lays the sinner in the dust, and fills him with self-abhorrence. It draws the soul towards God, leads it to hope in his mercy, and sets it against all forms of wickedness. It always has a reforming power. Is my repentance of this kind?

Then comes *love*, which manifests itself in gratitude to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in delight in the whole character of God, in a sincere desire that God's name may be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will be done in earth as it is in heaven. True love goes forth to all that is like God, or belongs to God, as his word, his people, his ordinances. Do I thus love?

There, too, is *hope*, which is an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, and enters within the veil. It animates the soul when in darkness, nerves it to vigorous efforts to please God, looks beyond the bounds of time for a great and gracious reward, and rests assured that through God all will end well. "We are saved by hope." Have I a good hope through grace, and does my hope make me better?

And why should there not be *joy*, even joy unspeakable and full of glory? True, holy joy is not vain, and does not puff up the mind. It makes one bold, but it makes him meek also. It draws its supplies from the existence, perfections, providence, word and ordinances of God. It is strength to the soul. It exhilarates but does not intoxicate the mind. Do I joy in the God of my salvation? Do I rejoice even in tribulation for Christ's sake?

But a mind rightly affected also *fears God*. His majesty and glory awe and hush it into quiet. "Be still, and know that I am God." This fear is not that of a culprit, which has torment in it, but that of a child, which reveres the exalted excellence of its father. It strongly determines the will against sin. It is "clean," and "a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." Am I in the fear of the Lord all the day long?

And have I the *peace of God* which passeth all understanding? Do I find that when I have the deepest sense of my sins, I can go to God through Christ, and by *his blood* secure peace of conscience and reconciliation with God my Judge? And is this accompanied with peaceable and forgiving feelings towards all men, even my traducers, persecutors and enemies?

Do I hate sin? Do I hate all kinds and degrees of sin in myself, in my friends, and in my enemies, even when it diminishes their power to harm me? Do I rejoice in any iniquity, though it may be ingenious, or popular, or profitable? Do I make it my great business to subdue sin in my own soul? Is the thought of heaven pleasant to me, because once there I shall sin no more?

As to *knowledge*, do I know God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent? Do I understand and approve the plan of salvation? Do I study and meditate upon God's word, and pray to be instructed in all his will? Do all my religious sentiments accord with scripture? Do I hate all false doctrine, and love all God's truth, however it may make war on my pride, prejudices, or practice? Do I cry after knowledge, and lift up my voice for understanding? Do I seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasures?

As to my *tempers*, are they amiable, gentle, sweet, benevolent, generous, charitable, quiet, placable, forgiving, submissive, patient, obliging, sincere, candid, contented, humble, grateful, and uniform? Are they like the tempers shown by Christ? Do I often and earnestly pray that they may be like his? Am I gaining the victory over any of my evil feelings or sentiments?

As to my *practice*, how would I regard a neighbour whose life I knew to be no better than my own? While I profess to know God, do I in works deny him? Is my conduct consistent with God's word? Do I live in any indulgence, the lawfulness of which is doubtful to myself or to

any good man of my acquaintance? Is holiness to the Lord inscribed on my deportment before my family and before all men? When absent from home do I give a loose to any sin? Is my life marked by tenderness of conscience?

These questions may perhaps meet most cases. Should any desire a longer series, they can easily add to those given above. Your calling, your relations in life, your afflictions, your easily besetting sins, your reading and reflection, will suggest many things. And now the great question is,

WILL YOU EXAMINE YOURSELF?

I hope you will. You cannot do a more necessary work. God's word makes it a duty. Rightly performed it brings great blessings with it. It shows us danger which might have swallowed us up. It begets salutary fears and deep humility. It awakens penitence. It puts us upon our guard against temptation. It prepares us for the hour of affliction. It clears up our title to heaven. It makes Christ precious to us. It takes away the terrors of death. On the other hand, reluctance to this duty is one of the worst signs in the case of many. Judas was the last to say, "Lord, is it I?" Instead of using any vehement exhortations to the performance of this duty, I shall simply add a few extracts from the writings of men whose praise is in all the churches. If their testimony will not prevail, my persuasions would be vain.

"Think how much better it will be to discern the mistakes relative to your state, or relative to your thoughts, words and actions now, when sovereign grace may rectify them, than to have them discovered when it is too late to obtain a happy change."—*John Brown of Haddington.*

"When others are censuring and backbiting their neighbours, be you searching and censuring yourselves. Self-examination is a most necessary duty. . . Let conscience bring in the reckonings of every day before you lie down; mourn

over the sins of every day, and apply the blood of Christ for washing them away. Thus keep short reckonings with God and conscience, that you may not have old scores to clear up when you come to a death-bed.”—*John Willison of Dundee*.

“Solitude, silence, and the strict keeping of the heart, are the foundations and grounds of a spiritual life. . . Descant not on other men’s deeds, but consider thine own; forget other men’s faults and remember thine own.”—*Archbishop Leighton*.

“In watchfulness and diligence we sooner meet with comfort, than in idle complaining; our care, therefore, should be to get sound evidence of a good state, and then to keep those evidences clear.”—*Dr. Richard Sibbes*.

As “all must go into the furnace, let every man try his own works; examine yourselves, professors, search your hearts, commune with your own reins: nothing will more encourage you in all the world than this doth.”—*John Flavel*.

“The frequent discussion of conscience, and reviewing our ways, is necessary to our comfortable appearing before our Judge. This is a duty of constant revolution. . . There must be a mournful sight and serious acknowledgment of our daily sins.”—*Dr. W. Bates*.

“Be not afraid to *know the plague of your heart*; the worst of your case, and whatever is amiss in your spirits. Our Saviour observes, (John iii. 20,) that every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. To be averse to bring ourselves to the light, is at once a very bad symptom, and of dangerous tendency. It must either shut us up in a fatal self-ignorance, or prevent our being impartial in our searches.”—*Dr. John Evans*.

“Multitudes of the godly are like idle beggars, who will rather make a practice of begging and bewailing their misery, than to set themselves to labour for their relief;

so do many spend days and years in sad complaints and doubtings, that will not be brought to spend a few hours in examination.”—*Richard Baxter*.

“That the Christian life may flourish abundantly, let us be often engaged to *examine ourselves*; since it will be so great a scandal and so great a snare to be strangers at home. Do we not indeed after all *know ourselves*? Let us search, whether *Jesus Christ be in us*.”—*Dr. P. Doddridge*.

“Diligence in self-examination is necessary, because, to be deceived in this is the *most stinging consideration*. To drop into hell, when a man takes it for granted that he is in heaven; to dream of a crown on the head, when the fetters are upon the feet, will double the anguish. It is better for a rich man to dream that he is a beggar, for when he awakes his fears vanish, than for a beggar to dream that he is rich, for when his dream ends his sorrow begins. The higher men’s expectations of heaven are without ground, the more stinging is their loss of it.”—*Charnock*.

“I am satisfied that one great reason why so many real Christians live doubting and die trembling, is the neglect of self-examination. As my comfort in death must depend on my hope of heaven, I will often examine this hope.”—*Dr. Ebenezer Porter*.

“‘Dost thou believe on the Son of God?’ This question concerns us, and admits of solution. Indeed, the inquiry would be absurd, if an answer were impossible.

“How then is an answer to be returned? Three evidences may be adduced of our believing on the Son of God. First. Much anxiousness and uneasiness concerning it, in distinction from the temper of those who can readily and easily take it for granted. It is not true, as it is often said, that it is easy to believe what we wish. In proportion as we love and value a thing, we become the more apprehensive, and require every kind of proof and assurance concern-

ing its safety. And here the case is interesting beyond all comparison. It is to ascertain my claims to everlasting life. What if I should be mistaken! And what if I am informed, but not enlightened! convinced, but not converted! almost, but not altogether a Christian!

“Secondly. The estimation in which we hold the Saviour. Hence, says the apostle, ‘To you, therefore, that believe, he is precious.’ He does not say how precious—this would have been impossible. But faith makes him more precious to the soul than sight is to the eye, or melody to the ear, or food to the hungry, or health and life to the sick and the dying. ‘Oh!’ says the believer, ‘when I see him as he is revealed in the word; when I see in him all I want; when I see how he becomes my Saviour; that when he was rich, for my sake he became poor, and died, that I might live; when I know that he is remembering me still, now he is come into his kingdom, appearing in the presence of God for me, and making all things to work together for my good, how can I but exclaim, Thou art fairer than the children of men! His name must be as ointment poured forth.’

“Thirdly. A life of obedience. Without this, an orthodox creed, clear knowledge, high confidence, much talking of divine things, great zeal for a party, will all in vain be called in to denominate you believers in Christ. He is not wise who calls himself so, while all his conduct proclaims him a fool. He is not a benefactor who never does acts of kindness. So he is not a believer who thinks and professes himself to be such, but he who acts and lives as such. ‘As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.’ Though faith can alone justify the soul, works can alone justify faith, and prove it to be of the operation of God.”—*Rev. W. Jay.*

And what am I?—My soul awake,
And an impartial survey take;
Does no dark sign, no ground of fear,
In practice or in heart appear?

28 HOW STANDS MY CASE WITH GOD?

What image does my spirit bear?
Is Jesus formed, and living there?
Say, do his lineaments divine
In thought, and word, and action shine?

Searcher of hearts, O! search me still;
The secrets of my soul reveal;
My fears remove; let me appear
To God, and my own conscience clear.

May I, consistent with thy word,
Approach thy table, O my Lord?
May I among thy saints appear?
Shall I a welcome guest be there?

Have I the wedding garment on?
Or do I naked, stand alone?
O! quicken, clothe and feed my soul;
Forgive my sins, and make me whole.