

Seed of the Church

Jeremiah Burroughs

The power of God is glorious, not only in preserving His church, in raising the spirits of His servants in their greatest affliction, but in increasing His church by them. If it is a wonder to be upheld in them, it is much more a wonder to be increased by them. “The more we are cut down, the more we persist,” says Tertullian. The church never grew so fast as when it was under the most affliction. Sulpitius says of the Christians in the primitive times, that they were then as greedy of martyrdom, as in his time men were greedy of the bishopric. The blood of martyrs was the seed of the church. Pliny reports of the lily, that it is increased by its own juice that drops from it, and so is the church, which is the lily that grows among the thorns; the very blood that drops from it, multiplies it; the sufferings of one beget many to the love of the truth. John Knox . . . reports of a gentleman, one John Lindsay, familiar to Bishop James Bettoune, that he said to the Bishop upon the occasion of the burning of Patrick Hamilton: “My Lord, if you burn any more, you will destroy yourselves; if you will burn them, let them be burnt in hollow cellars, for the smoke of Mr. Patrick Hamilton has infected as many as it blew upon.” It is reported of one Cecilia . . . that her constancy and exhortations, before and after her martyrdom, were the means to convert four hundred people. “By blood and prayer the church converts the whole world,” says Luther.

And I say also unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 16:18

The sufferings of
one beget many
to the love of the
truth.

Precious Promises

William Spurstowe

*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 Peter 1:4

Meditate thoroughly and frequently upon the promises, and . . . deal with them as the Virgin Mary did with the things that were spoken concerning Christ: “She kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). The distiller does not put any virtue into the herbs, but it distills and extracts whatever is efficacious and useful from them. The bee does not provide any sweetness to the flower, but by its industry it sucks the latent honey from it. Meditation conveys nothing of worth unto the promise, but it draws forth the sweetness, and discovers the beauty of it, which otherwise would be little crafted and discerned. I have sometimes thought that a believer’s looking upon a promise is not unlike a person’s beholding of the heavens in a full and serene evening, who when he first casts up his eye, sees happily a star or two only to peep, and with difficulty to put forth a feeble and disappearing light; but by and by he looks up again, and both their number and luster are increased. A while later he views the heavens again, and then the whole firmament, from every quarter, full of a numberless multitude of stars, is richly enameled as with so many golden studs. So when Christians first turn their thoughts towards the promises, the appearances of light and comfort which shine from them, do oft-times seem to be as weak and imperfect rays which neither scatter fears nor darkness; when again they set themselves to ripen and improve their thoughts upon them, then the evidence and comfort which they yield to the soul, is both more clear and distinct. But when the heart and affections are fully fixed in the meditation of a promise, Oh! What a bright mirror is the promise then to the eye of faith? What legions of beauties do then appear from every part of it, which both ravish and fill the soul of a believer with delight? . . . One promise thoroughly ruminated and meditated upon, is like to a morsel of meat well chewed and digested, which distributes more nourishment and strength to the body, than great quantities taken down whole.

Helps to Prayer

Gervase Babington

Have an eye to the sweet promises of God, concerning the suits of His children to Him, which are so many and so entire, as no heart, if it be not flint or steel, but must receive comfort and courage to speak unto such a Lord. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you” (Matt. 7:11; John 16:23), and a thousand such like. Muse upon them until the fire kindle within you, and then speak with a spirit to so sweet a God as so cheers His children to pray heartily. And remember it often what once was said: “I will come into thy house even upon the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple” (Ps. 5:7). The multitude of God’s mercies make a sweet entrance into the house of prayer: yes, say you with David joyfully and comfortably, “In God’s word will I rejoice, in the Lord’s word will I comfort myself, in God have I put my trust, I will not fear what man can do unto me” (Ps. 56:10–11). Sometimes our weakness is great and our minds begin to strap from our prayer conceived in silence, and then it shall be good to speak out, yes even to cry out that which we but thought before, to the end that so we may stay a straying mind and bring it to the sound of the tongue. This has been the wisdom of the godly ever, and a means as we read to help them. The prophet David says, “I cried to the Lord with my voice, and I said, thou art my hope and my portion in the land of the living” (Ps. 142:1, 5). So that he uses the pronunciation of words happily even for this cause that we speak of. Augustine says, “Our devotion and affection is stirred up and quickened by the voice.” And experience serves for longer proof in this matter. The gestures of body, as kneeling, lying prostrate upon the earth, knocking of the breast, and covering the face, or turning to the wall, lifting up the eyes, and such like, they are helps also of affection. Yea, then are they lawful, and right in deed, when they serve to this purpose in sincerity, and not to any outward show in hypocrisy.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.
Psalm 23:6

The Saint's Life

John Durant

*And to know the love
of Christ which
passeth knowledge.
Ephesians 3:19*

Christ's love is the saint's life. Paul tells you he was dead to the law that he might live to God. And the ground thereof was this, that he lived by faith in Christ, who loved him (Gal. 2:20). As the life, so likewise the comfort of the saints is wrapped up in the love of Christ. A believer can neither live nor rejoice if the Lord Jesus smiles not upon the soul. But if Jesus Christ will but smile, and shine in the light of His love, believers know, not only how to live, but also how to rejoice, in all, even the worst of times. Hence it was, that this apostle, praying to the Father of our Lord Jesus, for the Ephesians, that they might not faint at his tribulations, he entreats that to this purpose they might know the love of Christ which passes knowledge . . . the love of Christ to believers is transcendent, it being above expression. Those who enjoy Christ's love, they know not how to express it, such is the transcendence of the love, that it passes their knowledge how to express it in any language. The Scripture sets out the height of things by this, that they are unspeakable; so when it would heighten, and declare the transcendence of the rapture in which Paul was (when wrapped up on the third heaven) and the glory of that which he then heard, it sets it down by this, that it was unutterable. He heard unutterable words (which may be a Hebraism for things, *word* and *thing* being in the Hebrew changeable) which it was not possible for a man to utter (2 Cor. 12:14) . . . the transcendence of Christ's love to believers is such that no one (no, though they had the tongues of men and angels) knows how to express it . . . The most spiritual mathematician is not able to commensurate Christ's love in all its dimensions. It is as possible for that little crevice of the body (the eye) to let in all the light of the sun, as it is for that great eye of the soul (knowledge) to let in the luster of Christ's love.

Godly Sorrow

Thomas Doolittle

Leave not the reins loose upon your affections, lest they carry you to sin in your sorrow. Lavish not those tears in washing your dead, which should be kept for lamenting your sins. Let there be a difference between your sorrow and the sorrow of others, as there should be between those that have hope and those that have no hope of a joyful resurrection to eternal, glorious life. . . . “I would not have you to be ignorant.” Others are, and therefore mourn to excess; but I would not have you to be, that you may not sorrow as they do. Did you know, think, and believe, that their death is but a sleep, out of which they shall certainly awake; their graves . . . out of which, when the morning of the resurrection shall come, they shall arise, and that their souls in the mean time are with God, and Christ, and the Eternal Spirit, admitted into that glorious society of angels and saints above, perfectly loving, constantly delighting, perpetually praising and triumphing in that God that did choose them, in that Jesus that did redeem them with His blood, in that Holy Spirit that made them meet to be partakers of that inheritance of yonder saints in light, and life, and love. Would you groan while they rejoice? Would you mourn while they sing songs of praise? Are you grieved because they are exalted? . . . Could you hear them speak to you, they would say, “you are in daily trouble, we in everlasting rest, and peace, and triumph; you are in the field, we have got the victory; you are in danger of sin and Satan, we are freed from them forever; your love unto our Lord and yours, is imperfect love, while ours wants no degree; you know not what we do know of God, and Christ, and Glory; you see not what we do see, nor enjoy so much as we enjoy, therefore spend your tears upon yourselves, and not for us; weep for yourselves, and not for us. . . . You pray, and wait, and hope to be where we are, but we have no desire to be where you are. We have a better house than you live in, better company, and better work, and sweeter employment; therefore, sorrow for your selves, and not for us.”

I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:13

Christ's Scepter

Obadiah Sedgwick

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.
Hebrews 1:8

True faith . . . takes Christ and Him only to be its Lord. . . . Many will come to Christ to find a feast, but few come to Christ to bear His scepter. Some would come under the safety of His blood, but disdain the authority and dominion of His sword; they like Christ the Priest, but not Christ the Lord. I will briefly show you two things . . . unbelievers will not accept Christ to be their Lord only, because their heart has another Lord. . . . He is our Lord to whom we give service, and we His servants *who obey him*. . . . Let the commands of profit or pleasure and Christ come into competition and you shall see that the unbelieving heart will go after its Lord; it will not hearken to Christ, for it prefers sin before Him. The unbelieving heart will easily adventure Christ's displeasure to fulfill its own lusts. Again, the unbelieving heart cannot choose Christ; it cannot like Him for a Lord. Why? Because the dominion of Christ is holy and heavenly; it is directly opposite to the sordid principles and affections, and ways of an unbelieving heart. Secondly, every believer admits Christ to be their Lord as Thomas said, "My Lord, and my God" (John 20:28) . . . and so 1. Faith sets up the scepter of Christ, and sweetly frames the soul to a willing subjection, 2. Again, faith takes the whole Christ, and therefore Christ is the only King and Lord to faith, 3. Again, faith knows that the whole person is Christ's purchase, His blood has bought us, and so passed us into the entire dominion of Christ: "ye are bought with a price; ye are not your own," said the apostle, 1 Cor. 6:19–20. Now then try yourself in this: who is your Lord? If by faith you have sworn fidelity to Christ, then though all temptations beset you, to captivate, or to alienate your heart from the service of Christ, yet amidst all oppressions, yes, under all the knocks and buffetings, and interruptions by sin, the heart cries out, I acknowledge no Lord but Christ; Him I would obey; Him I honor, I love; His I am, and I yet hate those sins which yet I cannot conquer.

Meeting God

Samuel Bolton

To have to do with any matter which concerns the worship and service of God is to draw near to God. And in other places it is called a coming before God, a treading His courts, an approaching to God, a meeting of God, all which languages imply thus much: that who ever has to do with God in any ordinance, draws near to God. You tread His courts, you come into His presence, you approach unto God, you meet God, you have communion with God; no, you have to do with God's Name. God's ordinances are part of His Name. No, you have to do with God Himself. He that has to do with any ordinance, with any part of His worship, has to do with God Himself. When you have to do with the Word, when you go to prayer, when you have to do with the sacraments, you have to do with God Himself in them. What could the Word do, either in commands to engage us, in promises to comfort us, in threatening to terrify us, if we had not to do with God in them? What is prayer, but a distracted seriousness, a religious madness, if we had not to do with God in it? What were the sacraments, but gaudy pageants, no, empty fancies, beggarly elements, if we had not to do with God in them? It is God that we have to do with in the ordinances, that sheds a glory, casts a majesty, and puts an efficacy into all the ordinances we have to do withal. It is God who makes the promises of the Word rocks of stay and support, that makes the commands of the Word full of authority, that makes the threatening of the Word exceeding terrible. It is God that makes a little handful of water, a little bit of bread, and sup of wine, exceeding glorious and efficacious. What empty, what poor, what contemptible things would these be (and are to unbelieving men) if we had not to do with God in them?

I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.

Leviticus 10:3

**It is God that
sheds a glory
into all the
ordinances we
have to do
withal.**

A Tender Heart

Timothy Cruso

When they heard this they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?
Acts 2:37

Tenderness of heart supposes deep conviction, as that which must go before, in order to the producing of such a frame. The sword in Christ's mouth must pierce (as it were) between the joints and marrow, divide the soul and spirit asunder, and make such kind of wounds as the regardless sinner never felt before. . . . Where the word does not enter thus, the heart will remain hard still, and wonderfully insensible both of sin and duty. A sound which only passes by the ear signifies nothing more than a feather drawn over the skin, until the commandment comes with power, for the raising of men's stupid faculties out of their deep sleep. Christ told Judas that he had a devil, and would betray Him, yet conscience never stirred, so as to execute its office to any purpose. So long as people are alive and vigorous, cheerful and confident (as Paul was once in his natural condition [Rom. 7:9]) without the law, this disposition of holy tenderness is not likely to spring up in them, and they may be truly said to be without the law, though they have the outward dispensation of it, so long as they are not thoroughly convinced and humbled by it. . . . Such high mountains, as our hearts natural are, like vast heaps of filth cast up in the way of the Lord, will not slow down at any presence but His. None is able of these stones to rise up believing children, spiritual seed, to Abraham, but only He. He against whom sin is committed, must give saving repentance for sin; He that pressed under us metaphorically must also cause us to feel the load of our own defilements really; the God in whose sight we are most abominable, must bring us to loath ourselves. He fashioned the heart at first and He can turn it which way He pleases. It was formed by His hand originally, and it is in His hand still, that is, it is under His sovereign power, which He can successfully exert in any case.

The Perfect Path

Richard Alleine

You should level at perfection of holiness, and no mark short of perfection should limit or bound your aims: "Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from (all) filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). Though perfect holiness cannot be attained, yet it must be aimed at; though we cannot reach into it, yet we must be reaching towards it; though we cannot obtain, yet we must be still following after. Because we cannot obtain all that is desirable, but there will be still while we live, something that is before, which we are yet short of; therefore our motion in religion must be constantly a progressive motion; we must still be going forward, and reaching out to that which is before, that our works may be more, and our hearts may be better at last than at first (Prov. 4:18). The path of the just must shine more and more unto perfect day; grace must be growing up till it be swallowed up of glory.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. Genesis 17:1

Though perfect holiness cannot be attained, yet it must be aimed at.

Holy Fidelity

Richard Vines

*A bundle of myrrh is
my well-beloved unto
me; he shall lie all
night betwixt my
breasts.*

Song of Solomon
1:13

If you are married to Jesus Christ, you like Him and His love better than all the world. Therefore, it is said, “His love is better than wine,” that is, than all the excellency of the creature; that there is not any other grape that yields such sweetness and comfort as His love; no grape of pleasure, or credit, or profit, in all the vineyard of the world that is like it, to your spouse-like taste. Jesus Christ is better than all, even as wine exceeds all other liquors whatsoever. What then is it that fills up your heart, which takes up the chief place and room there? What is it that sits highest and possesses the first room of your liking, the top of your love? Is it the world or is it Jesus Christ . . . If you are near unto Christ, as the wife to the husband, then you take Him for better or for worse, and you keep Him for better or for worse . . . that is, not only for His crown, but also for His cross; not only for health and wealth, and good report, but for sickness, and poverty, and evil report; not only for what He has, but for what He wants, to share with Him alike in all conditions.

Jesus Christ is
better than all,
even as wine
exceeds all other
liquors.

Better Things

William Jenkyn

It should be the Christian's chief care to obtain from God the choicest mercies. The worldly are indeed easily put off with the meanest, because their inquiry is only who will show them any good. But O Christian! Let nothing please or satisfy you, but the light of God's countenance and do so receive from God here, as that you may be received to God hereafter. Desire not gifts, but mercies from God; not pebbles but pearls, and always labor for that which God never bestows but in love. Luther, when he had a rich present sent to him, professed with a holy boldness to God that such things should not serve his turn. Always desire the favor of God rather than outward felicity. O desire from God that your portion may not be in this life, but that what you enjoy here may be a pledge of better things hereafter.

And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

John 14:13

Let nothing
please or satisfy
you, but the light
of God's
countenance.

Always Near

Richard Vines

*Thou art near, O
LORD; and all thy
commandments are
truth.*

Psalm 119:151

Though God stands far off, yet He is near, though not sensibly, yet really and truly; the essence of the nearness remains still, though the sense and influence is somewhat cut off. Even as it is with the sun, when it is covered with a cloud, the body of the sun is as near as when the cloud was not before it, though the heat and light, its influence, are somewhat cut off. A man is still as near the sun in a cloudy day as in a clear day; so, too, a man is as near God, that once is truly near Him, even when He hides Himself under a cloud of trial . . . The relation to the substance holds firm, as a son is as much a son when he is a thousand miles off from his father, as when he is in the same room, in his father's presence; so, too, a son of God is as much a son, for the essence and truth of the relation, and as much a spouse, when God is hidden from him under the distance of affliction, as when He was joyous and at peace.

When it is
covered with a
cloud, the sun is
as near as when
the cloud was
not before it.

False Anticipations

Daniel Dyke

Our hearts deceive us in promising I know not what contentment and happiness in the fruition of these outward blessings, when yet the event answers not our expectation. O says the deceitful heart, “If I might have this or that which I desire, so much living, such or such an office, or preferment, how comfortable and salacious a life should I lead?” Well, when it has its wish, it fares with it almost, as with the Israelites in their quails: it finds more vanity and vexation of spirit in its presence than it did before in the want of this its so much desired good. Hence also that phrase of the “deceitfulness of riches,” because they do not perform that which our hearts promise us concerning them. In the same regard all worldly honors are called “lies” by David: “O ye sons of men, how long will ye follow after lies?” (Ps. 4:2). The lie indeed is in our own false hearts. We make them liars, in that we promise such great matters to ourselves of them. . . . The rich fool promised himself a little heaven in his riches: “Soul, take thine ease” (Luke 12:19), but alas how soon did God disease him? “O fool, this night shall they take away thy soul,” and then where is thy ease? The reason of this deceit is that we, in our expectation of these outward things, before they come, apprehend only the good and the sweet, abstracted from the sour, the pleasure divided from the pain, but in the fruition we feel both, yes, more of the sour than of the sweet, and hence it comes to pass that nothing pleases us so well in the fruition, as in the expectation. Nay, almost nothing pleases us as much when had as when hoped for. Nothing, I mean, of these temporal things; as for eternal things, they are more loved by us when possessed than when desired.

And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

Mark 4:19

God Will Deliver

John Dod and Robert Cleaver

*I sought the LORD,
and he heard me, and
delivered me from all
my fears.*
Psalm 34:4

Whatever misery God's children are in, yet in the best time God will deliver them. . . . The Israelites were under a long and strong affliction for many years, under tyrants that whipped their bodies, and scourged them, and put them to labor above their strength, and (which was a most intolerable vexation) made the parents drown their own children. No one ever treated any so spitefully as they were used; yet we see that God delivered them. So in the Psalm He says, "Many are the troubles of the righteous, but God delivers them out of all" (34:19). It is not their wealth, nor money, for of that they are often bare enough; nor friends, for sometimes they have none; nor their strength, for they are often weak and brought low. But God will deliver them. Let them get righteousness, and faith, and the spirit of prayer, and though they were in an iron furnace under Pharaoh, in a house of bondage, let them but cry, and

from thence God will deliver them. So in Esther's time, a wonderful affliction it was, that the day of execution was appointed, when all the godly should be put to the sword, not one to be left alive. But now, when they could cry to God, and had no one else to go to but only to Him, and Him they would go to, and stay upon, knowing that He could help them if He would, and would also for His promise's sake deliver them, then we see, the day that was appointed for their sorrow, turned to their joy; that which was purposed to bring destruction upon them, brought destruction upon their enemies; and the day of their most extreme misery, proved to be a day of their most joyful deliverance.

**No one ever
treated any so
spitefully; yet we
see that God
delivered them.**

Desiring God

Samuel Annesley

Were phylacteries in use among Christians, I would recommend this Scripture to be bound about your necks, or written upon the table of your hearts. This is a Scripture whereon we may well say “Amen” to Augustine’s *Confessions*: “O, the wonderful depth, my God, the wonderful depth of thy Word! Though there be an outside sweetness, tempting us to taste it, there is an inside excellency forcing us to admire it.” “Whom have I in heaven but thee,” that is, who is there in heaven for me to trust in, or call upon besides God? Or this, what is there, that is precious in heaven, which I desire without thee, or before thee? “And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee,” that is, so much as I can wish, I will not dote upon any thing on earth; nothing less, my acquiescence in God renders all things without Him worth nothing.

Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.

Psalm 73:25

An outside
sweetness,
tempting us to
taste it — an
inside excellency
forcing us to
admire it.

Trace God's Mercies

Richard Steele

*With an upright man
thou wilt shew thyself
upright.*

Psalm 18:25

**Write a modest
memorial of His
mercies, for the
comfort of
yourselves and
posterity.**

Whoever would be wise should read the Proverbs; whoever would be holy should read the Psalms. Every line in this book breathes peculiar sanctity. Psalm 18, though placed among the first, was penned among the last (as the preface assures us) and is left as the epitome of the general history of David's life. It is twice recorded in the Scriptures (2 Sam. 22, and in this book of Psalms) for the excellence and sweetness thereof; surely, we should take notice of it. Holy David, being near the shore, here looks on his former dangers and deliverances with a thankful heart, and writes this psalm to bless the Lord. As if each of you that are grown in years should review your lives and observe the wonderful goodness and providence of God towards you, and then sit down and write a modest memorial of His most remarkable mercies, for the comfort of yourselves and posterity. An excellent practice: what a comfort would it be for you to read how good your God was to your father, or grandfather, that is dead and gone? So would your children rejoice in the Lord, upon the reading of His goodness to you, and you cannot have a better pattern for this, than holy David who wrote this psalm when he was threescore and seven years old, when he had outlived most of his troubles and almost ready for his journey to his Father in heaven, he resolves to leave this good report of Him on earth.

The Easy Yoke

Nathanael Vincent

Since Christ is so compassionate, surely it is unreasonable to quarrel at and refuse to submit unto His yoke? The yoke of such a merciful one must be an easy yoke, and his burden a light burden (Matt. 11:30). The kingdom of heaven is like a marriage and as the wife's subjection unto a tender and indulgent husband is sweet and pleasant, so, and much more pleasant, is the believer's subjection unto Christ. Ungodly ones are strangely prejudiced against the scepter and government of Jesus; but indeed it is without cause. They say, "We will not have this Lord to reign over us." It is a mercy to be translated into the kingdom, for then you are freed from other lords, which are so imperious, so cruel, and will reward with death all the service which you do for them. All the precepts of Christ are for your profit and He forbids you nothing, but what He sees will harm you. I think that at the reading of this, the most stubborn should yield and say, "We stood outside against the Lord of life, but it was upon a mistake; we did not think His service was so near a kin to freedom; we once imagined His commands grievous, therefore we cast them behind our backs, but now they are to be esteemed above gold, nay, the finest gold, and are sweeter than the honey and the honeycomb."

*For my yoke is easy,
and my burden is
light.*

Matthew 11:30

**It is a mercy to
be translated into
the kingdom, for
then you are
freed from other
lords.**

The Best Duty

Christopher Nesse

*Then shall ye call
upon me, and ye shall
go and pray unto me,
and I will hearken
unto you.
Jeremiah 29:12*

As faith is called the best of graces, so prayer is called the best of duties. If other duties are pennies, this is a pound in many respects. First, it gives God the glory of His three great attributes. 1. It gives Him the glory of His omniscience, that He knows all your wants, that He, whose throne is in heaven, yet hears all your petitions presented to Him upon earth, yes, even when you pray only heart prayer (which man hears not, and knows not) as Moses in Exod. 14:15. The Lord said, wherefore do you cry unto me, when Hannah spoke not a word (1 Sam. 1:13). And David said, “all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee” (Ps. 38:9). 2. It gives Him the glory of His omnipotence; it presupposes that God is able to supply all your wants, which you spread before Him (Eph. 3:20). The very act of prayer says to God as Job, “I know that thou canst do every thing” (Job 42:2). 3. It gives Him the glory of His merciful goodness, or bountiful benevolence, that He is willing as well as able to supply your wants. Divine might and divine mercy are the two pillars that the house of prayer stands upon, as the temple of Solomon stood upon Joachim and Boaz, which signified stability and strength.

**The very act of
prayer says to
God, “I know
that thou canst
do every thing.”**

The All-Sufficient

Jeremiah Burroughs

God is a being that is all-sufficient. He stands in no need of any creature. He has need of nothing, of none of us. He has enough within Himself before the world was; God was as blessed in Himself as now He is. There can be nothing added to Him; there is such an excellency even in God's being itself, that there can be nothing added to Him. We are poor creatures that stand in need of a thousand things continually, the air to breathe in, the earth to bear us, fire to warm us, clothes to cover us, meat and drink, a thousand things; we stand in need of the meanest creature, and if God should take away the use of it, our lives would be made miserable to us. But that is the excellency of God's being that He has need of nothing; He has all within Himself; all the creatures in heaven and earth cannot add to Him; no, if there were then thousand worlds more, although God did possess them all, yet they would not add one whit to what is in God Himself; therefore, though the Lord has made the heaven and earth, and all things therein, yet we must not think that God is ever a whit the better for these things, or has the more glory. He had as much glory and blessedness as now He has, or can have. When all the angels and saints shall be eternally blessing God in heaven, yet they can add nothing to God's glory. We say the sun is a glorious creature, but does that add any light to the sun? So for saints and angels to be praising and blessing God, what does that add to God? And in this the Name of God is excellent.

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands. Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

Acts 17:24–25

**All the creatures
in heaven and
earth cannot add
to Him.**

Little Faith

John Rogers

If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.
Matthew 17:20b

Little faith is true faith, as well as great. A little man is a man as well as a great man; a little water is as truly water as the ocean sea. The disciples had true faith, and yet very weak, weak in knowledge, though they believed that Jesus was the Messiah that should save the world, yet how, they could not tell. They were ignorant of His death, for when He told them of His sufferings, it is said they understood not that word. And Peter took his Master aside and counseled Him not to go to Jerusalem to die. They were ignorant also of His resurrection. For when Mary told them of it, they believed it not. Of His ascension, when He spoke of a little tarrying with them, and then of His going away, they understood it not, they knew not where He went, they said, and knew not the way. Now how weak was this their knowledge, to be ignorant of such main articles? . . . But weak faith may prove strong in time: the most learned clerk was in his grammar book, the greatest giant was in swaddling clothes, the tallest oak was a twig, and faith grows from a grain of mustard seed to a tall tree. As from a child to a man, so corn grows from a weak blade to a stalk and ear, and ripe corn therein. The disciples, so weak before, afterwards when the Holy Spirit was sent upon them, they were exceedingly strong, and feared not the face of tyrants.

**But weak faith
may prove
strong in time.**

Forgotten Sins

John Shower

There are many sins that we have forgotten, for which we were never humbled in particular. And yet if we truly repent of those we do know, and call to mind, our forgotten sins shall be forgiven. For God will pardon us like Himself; He will forgive us like a God, not according to our knowledge, but according to His own. And as He is greater than our hearts, to know much more against us, than we can remember against ourselves, yet He is greater than our hearts, to forgive even those faults which our hearts and consciences do not recollect. He knows the value of Christ's blood and merits, to forgive all our sins. And by unfeigned faith, we are interested in the virtue of it. God has more thoughts of mercy in Him than we have had of rebellion against Him. His thoughts have been from everlasting, and reach to everlasting; whereas, it is but as of yesterday that the oldest sinner began to rebel against God.

Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Psalm 40:5

God has more
thoughts of
mercy in Him
than we have
of rebellion
against Him.

The Saint's Beauty

Thomas Watson

*Deck thyself now with
majesty and excel-
lency; and array thy-
self with glory and
beauty.*

Job 40:10

How worldly beauty is courted by all, and what is it? "Beauty is vain" (Prov. 31:30). The bravest features of the body and the loveliest complexion are no other than well-colored earth. But a righteous person has a celestial beauty shining in him. He is embellished with knowledge, love, and meekness, which are of such oriental splendor as to allure the very angels. A good Christian has some idea and resemblance of that sparkling holiness which is the Deity. Christ is infinitely taken with the spiritual beauty of His church. "Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem" (Song 6:4). Tirzah was a map of pleasure; Jerusalem was the metropolis of Judea, the star and light of all the eastern world. This was symbolic, to set forth the radiance of the church's glory. "Turn away thine eyes from me for they have overcome me" (v. 5). It is as if Christ had said, "Oh, My spouse, such a resplendent luster is in your visage that I can hardly bear it. I am wounded with the delightful darts of your beauty!" One eye of a believer draws Christ's heart to it: "Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes," (Song 4:9). A saint's beauty never withers; it outlives death. True grace is like colors laid in oil which cannot be washed off.

**Christ is
infinitely taken
with the spiritual
beauty of His
church.**

Table Blessings

Thomas Gouge

Forget not to pray unto God for a blessing on the things you are to partake. For as the apostle says, “Every creature of God is good, being sanctified by the Word of God, and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:4–5). By the Word, as it does show, and warrant our right thereunto; and by prayer, as it is a means appointed by God for obtaining His blessing upon our food, without which it will do us little good. “For man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:1); that is, bread does not nourish by its own power, but by the appointment and blessing of God. And therefore it was the usual practice of our Savior to lift up His eyes and crave a blessing upon the creatures, before He did partake of them, which has been the usual practice of the saints and people of God, before and since Christ’s time (1 Sam. 9:13; Acts 27:30). Having therefore such worthy patterns and precedents, follow them, not daring to partake of any of God’s good creatures, until you have lifted up your heart to God and craved His blessing upon them, for otherwise how justly might you expect from God a curse rather than a blessing? The things on your table are God’s things, and therefore you must need be more bold than welcome, if you make use of them without asking His blessing.

*What shall I render
unto the LORD for all
his benefits toward
me?*

Psalm 116:12

**Bread does not
nourish by its
own power, but
by the
appointment and
blessing of God.**

The Saint's Pastime

Robert Dingley

*I will meditate also of
all thy work, and talk
of thy doings.*
Psalm 77:12

Meditation . . . is a saint's pastime. It recreates and perfumes the tired spirits. It is a ladder by which the soul climbs to heaven. It is a duty ever at hand (Prov. 6:22), when you are alone, nay, in the dark, when traveling, and so on. On all occasions you may let out your soul in meditation, when other duties cannot be performed. Nay, when you sleep you may be meddling with this duty. For having communion with God in the day, and closing your eyes with some meditation, even your dreams may be of the love of God, and the glory of heaven, as the experiences of the saints can witness. Meditation brings us to the first degrees of those heavenly joys, and imparts to us some beginnings of the vision and fruition of God. It enables us with Moses to discern, as we are able, some glimpses of God, that our faces shine with purity and divine splendor. By this we are ravished with Paul, and are caught up into paradise, and in the twinkling of an eye are driven (as in a fiery chariot) into heaven. By this with holy Stephen we see the heavens opened, and Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. Indeed admirable are the effects of divine meditation. It confirms our knowledge (Ps. 119:99). It strengthens our memory (Ps. 63:6). It enflames our love (Ps. 119:97). It cherishes time with God (Ps. 119:148). It maintains a true and childlike fear of God (Ps. 4:4). It hushes and quiets the soul in afflictions (Ps. 119:23). . . . It promotes prayer (Ps. 143:5–6). . . . What shall I say? Meditation is the very life of our life, as a heathen could say and see by the light of nature. It is the food of our souls, the fuel of our zeal, the spur of our devotion; the soul that can meditate on God is never less alone than when alone, for its fellowship is then with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Room for Babes

John Collinges

For all Christians, especially those that are most sensible of the weakness of their faith, there have been and are more dwarfs besides you. Perfection is a white that was never hit; the best archers prove a handful short. It is indeed the mark at which every one sets out to level his arrows, but all the souls of Christians, like the arrows of Jonathan, have flown, some over into glory, some short, some on this hand, some on that, but none have hit the mark. Be of good comfort, weak faith is faith; little ones are true children of the Father, who casts none away that comes (though creeping) to Him. Heaven has room for babes as well as adults. A child may pull the latch of heaven's door, and go in, and be welcome to the knee of the King of Glory, to His bosom, "Who feeds His flock like a shepherd" (Isa. 40:11) and carries the lambs in His bosom. Jesus Christ has His arms full of tender sucking lambs, or at least, that were so upon the earth. The youngest Christian, if an heir, is of age to take land in heaven; youth is no bar. The garden of God has more slips than old stocks in it. Now indeed they are to become stocks in heaven, but here on earth they were but tender slips when Christ took them up to the land of grace and transplanted them.

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

Luke 10:21

Be of good
comfort. Weak
faith is faith.

Enduring Adversity

Samuel Shaw

Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

Psalm 39:5

I do not know of any one temptation that in all ages has more solicited and perplexed the minds of good men, than that which springs from the prosperity of the wicked; a scandal that the best of men have been ever apt to take against the dispensations of God Himself. It has therefore pleased God, in compassion to the suffering, frequently to obviate this temptation, by causing many parts of holy Scripture to be written purposely upon this argument, among which the thirty-ninth Psalm is one, the main proposition of which is an exhortation that we, beholding the prosperity of the wicked, do not doubt of the divine care and providence. We must not be broken in our minds, nor murmur against God, or fall away from Him, but patiently endure adversity, and hold fast our profession.

We, beholding
the prosperity of
the wicked, do
not doubt of the
divine care and
providence.

The Most Beautiful

Thomas Vincent

Christ is the most amiable person and the most suitable object for your love. If you ask of the days which are past, which were before you since the day that God created man upon the earth; if you seek from one side of heaven to the other; if you make enquiry into all the parts of the earth, you will never find that there ever was or is to be found any person so lovely, so beautiful and so in every way deserving of your love, as the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a matchless, transcendent, and incomparable beauty and excellency in Him. How passionately are some foolish men in love with the external beauty which they see in some women . . . the lovely mixture of colors in the face, the beauty of the eyes, their spirit, their quick and graceful motions, and amorous glances; how this ravishes the hearts of some fond lovers! Although, the most beautiful body in the world is no better than painted clay, dirt and corruption, enclosed in fair skin, which sickness will cause to look pale, and death will mar and spoil. But the amiableness and beauty of Christ is more transcendent and permanent, and therefore a more fit object for your love. Christ is fairer than the children of men; He is all fair, without any spot, altogether lovely, without any blemish or deformity.

One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

Psalm 27:4

**Christ is fairer
than the children
of men.**

Work Made Light

William Gurnall

*Whatsoever thy hand
findeth to do, do it
with thy might; for
there is no work, nor
device, nor knowledge,
nor wisdom, in the
grave, whither thou
goest.*

Ecclesiastes 9:10

The divine assistance which Christians have in their work alleviates the labor of it. Consider the Christian's work without this help. It is heavy indeed, yes, too heavy to stand under. But God's helping hand put to it makes this heavy work light. The ship, which when lying on ground, all the teams in the country could not draw off, how easily is it set afloat when the tide comes in? Thus the heart can rise out of its dullness and indisposition to duty. Oh how soon is it elevated and inspired when God flows in with His secret aspirations and excitations of His blessed Spirit and grace! He who confessed that he could do nothing of himself, not so much as think a good thought, tells us that he is able to do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Now this help from the Lord is promised, but it comes not till the Christian's hand is put to work. Let us be up and doing, and then God will not fail to be with us. . . . It is easy working while God

holds our hand, yes, and puts strength into it. Are you tempted? While you are fighting in the valley below, Christ's hands are lifted up in heaven above for your victory. "I have prayed that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:32); yes, He does not only pray above for you, but will be in the field with you, and in you, by the secret succors of His Spirit. "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9), which is not meant of grace inherent in us, that indeed is insufficient of itself, but the auxiliary grace, which He sends in to assist us in a time of need.

**It is easy
working while
God holds our
hand.**

Walk in Humility

Thomas Gataker

Walk in humility . . . take heed of pride. It is a deadly poison that spoils and kills all where it comes; so dangerous that another poison was used as a counter-poison to preserve St. Paul from it. And we are never more in danger of it than when we have done most, and made greatest progress in the profession and practice of piety. For it is as the spleen in the body, that grows most when the other parts waste. It grows fast often, when other evils decay, and out of the decay of them, sucks matter to feed and foster itself with. This therefore must be carefully cast out and avoided. When we have done well, we must take heed how in that regard we begin to think highly of ourselves. If we do so, all is gone; we are undone. Be affected rather as Paul was. After he had gone so far, and done so much, "I make account, that I come not short," says he, "of the very chief apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5). Yea, "I have labored more than them all" (1 Cor. 15:10). For, "from Jerusalem round about, even unto Illyricum (that is, from Syria to Slovenia) have I plentifully preached the gospel" (Rom. 15:19). Yet, "I forget what is past" (Phil. 3:13). That is, I regard no more what I have done than as if yet I had done nothing, or had clean forgotten what I did. "And I put on toward to what is before, pressing on toward the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (v. 14). He did as men in a race that look not back to see how many they have passed, or how far they have progressed, but have their eyes fixed on those that have gained ground on them, and on the ground before them, that they are to measure, ere they can come to the mark. Let us not consider so much how far we have gone, and how many others come short of us, but how far we are to go, and how far we come short of that Christian perfection that we should all strive and contend to attain unto.

By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life.

Proverbs 22:4

He did as men in a race that look not back to see how many they have passed.

Cause of Discontent

Edward Lawrence

*And having food and
raiment let us be
therewith content.*

1 Timothy 6:8

Discontent arises from being so very sensible of the evil of affliction and senseless of the evil of sin. People's bodies are tender, and their senses quick, and therefore even the biting of a flea or the scratching of a pen is presently felt. People are so tender of their reputation, profits and delights, that the least touch in these is a cross to them. Their hearts are so hard, and consciences seared, that they can lie securely under all the curses of God's book, have mountains of wrath abide on them, and feel nothing. Therefore afflictions lie so heavy because sin lies so easy. Whereas, if a person knew what sin is, and saw at night what wrath he had treasured up all day, he would rather wonder why he was out of hell than murmur that he was in trouble.

If a person knew
what sin is, he
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wonder why he
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The Sin of Atheism

Richard Capel

We are much assaulted to atheism and blasphemy; to atheism, as the greatest sin that is, in that it smites at the root of all; for to say the truth, all sin comes from atheism (for who would sin, did he then verily think that there were a God that saw all, and would punish all) and such a God, God must be, or no God. And all sin tends to atheism (for when we have sinned, sin draws us towards atheism exceedingly, and wipes out all notions of a deity as much as it can); and when we are in sin, we must be either willing to get out of it by repentance, or else we shall be willing to become atheists; the best of our play then, being to feed ourselves with a conceit, that all is but talk to hold men in awe, and that there is indeed neither heaven nor hell; no place of torment, that when we die all is gone, that it is with us not otherwise than with a beast. Thus when the conscience will not get quiet by turning to God by repentance, then it will seek to quiet itself by unbelief bearing itself in hand, that there is no such place as hell to torment people in. Consider, however, that Satan does all he can to make people atheists, because when there is no fear of God before their eyes, they will sin all manner of sins that the devil would have them sin. So Ps. 14, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." What follows? "They are corrupt," they have done abominable works; thus then, when once men take to atheism, they grow most corrupt and do abominable works. There is no restraint in sinning then, for what should or can keep the wit and will of man, when once he conceives that there is no such thing as God? The devil cannot be a flat atheist, for he believes and trembles; and were it nothing but the sense he has of the wrath of God tormenting, why that is enough to prove that Satan does fully and undoubtedly acknowledge a divine power. He is not an atheist because he cannot, because he shall not, but yet he bears good will to atheism, because that sin does much advantage his kingdom.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

Psalm 14:1a