

# Ways and Means of Recovery From Spiritual Decays

By John Owen

Meditations and Discourses Concerning the Glory of Christ Chapter 1 Application of the Foregoing Meditations Concerning the Glory of Christ First, an exhortation unto such as are not yet partakers of him. That which remains is, to make some application of the glorious truth insisted on to the souls of them that are concerned, and what I have to offer to that end I shall distribute under two heads. The first shall be with respect to them who are yet strangers from this holy and glorious one, who are not yet made partakers of him, nor have any special interest in him.

And the second shall be directed to believers as a guide and assistance to their recovery from spiritual decays, and the revival of a spring of vigorous grace, holiness, and obedience in them. For the first of these, although it seems not directly to lie in our way, yet is it suited to the method of the gospel, that whenever there is a declaration of the excellencies of Christ in his person, grace, or office, it should be accompanied with an invitation and exhortation to sinners to come to him. This method he first himself made use of, Matthew 11, 27-30, John 7, 37-38, and consecrated it to ourselves also.

For who can dwell on the consideration of the glory of Christ, being called therewith to the declaration of it, but his own mind will engage him to invite lost sinners to a participation of him? But I shall at present proceed no further in this exhortation, but only to the proposal of some of those considerations which may prepare, incline, and dispose their minds to a closure with him, as he is tendered in the gospel as number one. Let them consider well what is their present state with respect to God and eternity. This Moses wishes for the Israelites, Deuteronomy 32, 29, O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.

It is the greatest folly in the world to leave the issues of these things to an uncertain hazard, and that man who cannot prevail with himself strictly to examine what is his state and condition with respect to eternity, does never do any good, nor abstain from any evil in a due manner. Remember therefore that many are called, but few are chosen. To be called is to enjoy all the outward privileges of the gospel, which is all you to whom I speak can pretend to, yet this you may do and not be chosen.

Even among those to whom the word is preached, they are but few that shall be saved. In a distribution made by our Lord Jesus Christ of the hearers of the word into four sorts of ground, it was but one of them that received real benefit by it. And if our congregations are no better than were his hearers, there is not above a fourth part of them that will be saved, it may be a far less number.

And is it not strange that every one of them is not jealous over himself and his own condition? Many of this deceive themselves until they fall under woeful surprisals. And this is represented in the account of the final judgment. For the generality of those who will profess the gospel are introduced as complaining of their disappointments, Matthew 25, 41-44.

For what is there spoken is only a declaration of what befell them here in the close of their lives, and then their personal judgment thereon. Number Two Take heed of being deluded by common presumptions. Most men have some thoughts in general about what their state is and what it will be in the issue, but they make no diligent search into this matter, because a number of common presumptions do immediately insinuate themselves into their minds for their relief.

And they are such as all whose force and efficacy to this end lies in this, that they differ from others, and are better than they, as that they are Christians, that they are in the right way of religion, that they are partakers of the outward privileges of the gospel, hearing the word and participating of the sacraments, that they have light and convictions, that they abstain from sin and perform duties so as others do not, and the like. All those with whom it is not so, who are behind them in these things, they judge to be in an ill state and condition, whence they entertain good hopes concerning themselves. And this is all that most trust to.

It is not my present business to discourse a vanity of presumptions. It has been done by many. I give only this warning in general to those who have the least design or purpose to come to Christ, and to be made partakers of Him, that they put no trust in them, that they rely not on them, for if they do so, they will eternally deceive their souls.

This is a great part of the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, Matthew 3, 9. Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father. This was their great comprehensive privilege, containing all the outward church and covenant advantages. These they rested in and trusted to, to their ruin.

Herein he designed to undeceive them. 3. Consider aright what it is to live and die without an interest in Christ. Without a participation of Him.

Where this is not stated in the mind, where thoughts of it are not continually prevalent, there can be no one's stop taken in the way towards Him. Unless we are thoroughly convinced that without Him we are in a state of apostasy from God, under the curse, obnoxious to eternal wrath, as some of the worst of God's enemies, we shall never flee to Him for refuge in a due manner. The whole have no need of a physician but the sick.

Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance, and the conviction intended is a principal end of the ministry of the law. The miseries of the state have been the subject of innumerable sermons and discourses. But there is a general misery in the whole, that few take themselves to be concerned therein, or apply these things to themselves.

Let us tell men of it a thousand times, yet they either take no notice of it, or don't believe it, or look on it as that which belongs to the way and course of preaching in which they are not concerned. The things it seems preachers must say, and they may believe them who of a mind thereunto. It is a rare thing that any one shall as much as say to himself, Is it so with me? And if we now, together with this caution, tell the same men again, that while they are uninterested in Christ, not engrafted into Him by faith, that they run in vain, that all their labor in religion is lost, that their duties are all rejected, that they are under the displeasure and curse of God, that their end is eternal destruction, which are all unquestionably certain, yet will they let all these things pass by without any further consideration.

But here I must fix with them, to whom I speak at present, unless there be a full conviction in them of the woeful, deplorable condition of every soul, of whatever quality, profession, religion, outward state it be, who has not yet made partaker of Christ, all that I have further to add will be of no signification. Remember, then, that the due consideration hereof is to you, in your state, your chiefest concernment in this world, and be not afraid to take in a full and deep sense of it. For if you are really delivered from it, and have good evidence of it, it is nothing to you but matter of eternal praise and thanksgiving.

And if you are not so, it is highly necessary that your mind should be possessed with due apprehension of it. The work of this conviction is a first effect of true religion, and the great abuse of religion in the world is, that a pretense of it deludes the minds of men to apprehend that it is not necessary. For to be of this or that religion, of this or that way in religion, is supposed sufficient to secure the eternal state of men, though they are never convinced of their lost estate by nature.

4. Hereon consider the infinite condescension and love of Christ in his invitations and calls of you to come to him for life, deliverance, mercy, grace, peace, and eternal salvation. Multitudes of these invitations and calls are recorded in the Scripture, as they are all of them filled up with those blessed encouragements which divine wisdom knows to be suited to lost, convinced sinners in their present state and condition. It were a blessed contemplation to dwell on the consideration of the infinite condescension, grace and love of Christ in his invitations of sinners to come to him, that they may be saved of that mixture of wisdom and persuasive grace that is in them, of the force and efficacy of the pleading and argument that they are accompanied with, as they are recorded in the Scripture.

But that belongs not to my present design. This I shall only say, that in the declaration and preaching of them, Jesus Christ yet stands before sinners, calling, inviting, encouraging them to come to him. This is somewhat of the word which he now speaks to you.

Why will you die? Why will you perish? Why will you not have compassion on your own souls? Can your hearts endure, or can your hands be strong in the day of wrath that is approaching? It is but a little while before all your hopes, your reliefs and presumptions will forsake you and leave you eternally miserable. Look to me and be saved. Come unto me and I will ease you of all sins, sorrows, fears, burdens, and give rest to your souls.

Come, I entreat you. Lay aside all procrastinations, all delays. Put me off no more.

Eternity lies at the door. Cast out all curses, self-deceiving reserves. Do not so hate me as that you will rather perish than accept of deliverance by me.

These and the like things does the Lord Christ continually declare, proclaim, plead, and urge on the souls of sinners, as it is fully declared, Proverbs 1, 20-33. He does it in the preaching of the word, as if he were present with you, stood amongst you, and spake personally to every one of you. And because this would not suit his present state of glory, he has appointed the ministers of the gospel to appear before you, and to deal with you in his stead, avowing as his own the invitations that are given you in his name, 2 Corinthians 5, 19-20.

Consider therefore his infinite condescension, grace, and lovingness. Why all this towards you? Does he stand in need of you? Have you deserved it at his hands? Did you love him first? Cannot he be happy and blessed without you? Has he any design upon you that he is so earnest in calling you to him? Alas, it is nothing but the overflowing of mercy, compassion, and grace that moves and acts him herein. Here lies the entrance of innumerable souls into a death and condemnation far more severe than those contained in the curse of the law, 2 Corinthians 2, 15-16.

In the contempt of this infinite condescension of Christ and this holy invitation of sinners to himself, lies the sting and poison of unbelief, which unavoidably gives over the souls of men to eternal ruin. And who shall once pity them to eternity who are guilty of it? Yea, bud, perhaps if you should on his invitation begin to look to him, and resolve to come to him, you are greatly afraid that when it comes to the trial he will not receive you. For no heart can conceive, no tongue can express what wretched, vile, and provoking sinners you have been, that the Lord Christ will receive to him such as we are.

We have no hopes, or that ever we shall find acceptance with him. I say, it is not amiss when persons come so far as to be sensible of what discouragements they have to conflict with, what difficulties lie in their way, and what objections do arise against them. For the most do perish in a senseless stupidity.

They will not consider how it is with them, what is required of them, nor how it will be in the latter end. They doubt not, but that either they do believe already, or can do so when they please. But when any come so far as to charge the failure of their acceptance with Christ on their way of unworthiness, and so are discouraged from coming to him, there are arguments for their conviction and persuasion, which nothing but the devil and unbelief can defeat.

Wherefore that which is now professed to consideration and answer to this, is the readiness of Christ to receive every sinner. Be he who, or what he will, that shall come to him. And hereof we have the highest evidences that divine wisdom and grace can give to us.

This is the language of the gospel, of all that the Lord Christ did or suffered which is recorded therein. This is the divine testimony of the three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and of the three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, all give their joint testimony that the Lord Christ is ready to receive all sinners that come to him. They who receive not this testimony make God a liar, both Father, Son, and Spirit.

Whatever the Lord Christ is, and the constitution of his person, and the representation of the Father in his office, and what he did on the earth, and what he does in heaven, proclaims the same truth. Nothing but cursed obstinacy in sin and unbelief can suggest a thought to our minds that he is not willing to receive us when we come to him. In this we are to bear testimony against the unbelief of all to whom the gospel is preached that come not unto him.

Unbelief acting itself herein includes a contempt of the wisdom of God, a denial of his truth or faithfulness, an impeachment of the sincerity of Christ in his invitations, making him a deceiver, and will issue in an express hatred of his person and office, and of the wisdom of God in him. Here then you are shut up. You cannot from hence take any countenance to your unbelief.

Number six. Consider that as he is able to save us, as he is ready and willing to receive us, the testimonies which he has given us unto his goodness and love are uncontrollable, and none dare directly to call and question or deny his power. Generally this is taken for granted by all, that Christ is able to save us if he will, who shall question his ability to save us, though we live in sin and unbelief.

And many expect that he will do so because they believe he can if he will. But indeed Christ has no such power, no such ability. He cannot save unbelieving, impenitent sinners, for this cannot be done without denying himself, acting contrary to his word and destroying his own glory.

Let none please themselves with such vain imaginations. Christ is able to save all them and only them who come to God by him. Whilst you live in sin and unbelief, Christ himself cannot save you.

But when it comes to the trial in particular, some are apt to think that although they will not conclude that Christ cannot save them, yet they do on various accounts that they cannot be saved by him. This therefore we also give testimony to in our exhortation to come to him, namely that his power to save those that shall comply with his call is sovereign, uncontrollable, almighty, that nothing can stand in the way of. All things in heaven and earth are committed to him.

All power is his and he will use it to this end, namely the assured salvation of all that come unto him. Seven, consider greatly what has been spoken of in the representation of God and all the holy properties of his nature in him. Nothing can possibly give us more encouragement to come to him, for we have manifested that God, who is infinitely wise and glorious, has designed to exert all the holy properties of his nature, his mercy, love, grace, goodness, righteousness, wisdom and power in him, in and unto the salvation of them that do believe.

Whoever therefore comes to Christ by faith on this representation of the glory of God in him, he ascribes and gives to God all that glory and honor which he aims at from his creatures, and we can do nothing in which he is pleased equal to it. Every poor soul that comes by faith to Christ gives to God all that glory which it is his design to manifest and be exalted in. And what can we do more? There is more glory given to God by coming to Christ and believing than in keeping the whole law, and as much as he has more eminently manifested the holy properties of his nature and the way of salvation by Christ than in giving of the law.

There is therefore no man who, under gospel invitations, refuses to come to and close with Christ by believing, but secretly, through the power of darkness, blindness and unbelief, he hates God, dislikes all his ways, would not have his glory exalted or manifested, choosing rather to die in enmity against him than to give glory to him. Do not deceive yourselves. It is not an indifferent thing whether you will come to Christ upon his invitations or not, a thing that you may put off from one season to another.

Your present refusal of it is as high an act of enmity against God as your nature is capable of. Number eight, consider that by coming unto Christ, you shall have an interest in all that glory which we have proposed to you, for Christ will become yours more intimately than your wives and children are yours, and so all his glory is yours also. All are apt to be affected with the good things of their relations, their grace, their riches, their beauty, their power, for they judge themselves to have an interest in them by reason of their relation unto them.

Christ is nearer to believers than any natural relations are to us whatever. They have therefore an interest in all his glory. And is this a small thing in your eyes, that Christ shall be yours and all his glory shall be yours, and you shall have the advantage of it to your eternal blessedness? Is it nothing to you to continue strangers from and uninterested in all this glory, to be left to take your portion in this world in lusts and sins and pleasures and a few perishing trifles with eternal ruin in the close, whilst such durable substance, such riches of glory are tendered to you? Lastly, consider the horrible ingratitude there is in a neglect or refusal to come into Christ upon his invitation with the doleful eternal ruin that will ensue thereon.

How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? Impenitent unbelievers, under the preaching of the gospel, are the vilest and most ungrateful of all God's creation. The devils themselves, as wicked as they are, are not guilty of this sin. For Christ has never tendered to them.

They never had an offer of salvation on faith and repentance. This is their peculiar sin, and will be the peculiar aggravation of their misery to eternity. Here ye despisers wander and perish.

The sin of the devil is in malice and opposition to knowledge, above what the nature of man is in this world. Man therefore must sin in some instance above the devil, or God would not give them their eternal portion with the devil and his angels. This is unbelief.

Some it may be will say, What then shall we do? What shall we apply ourselves unto? What is it that is required of us? 1. Take the advice of the apostle, in Hebrews 3, 7, 8, and 13. Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

This day, even this, is unto you in the tenderer of grace the acceptable time. This is the day of salvation. Others have had this day as well as you, and have missed their opportunity.

Take heed, lest it should be so with you also. Now if any one should write it down, or peculiarly commit it to remembrance, this day there was a tenderer of Christ and salvation in him made unto my soul. From this time I will resolve to give up myself to him.

And if you form your resolutions, charge your consciences with what you have engaged, and make yourselves to know that if you go back from it, it is a token that you are going to ruin. 2. Consider that it is high time for you to make somewhat of religion. Do not hang always in suspense.

Let it not be a question with yourselves whether you have a mind to be saved or not. This is as good a time and season for a resolution as ever you are like to have while in this world. Some things, nay, many things, may fall in between this and the next opportunity, that shall put you backward, and make your entrance into the kingdom of heaven far more difficult than ever it was.

And the living in that uncertainty at best which you do of what will become of you to eternity is the most miserable kind of life in the world. Those who put far from them the evil day, and live in the pursuit of lusts and pleasures, have some what that gives them present satisfaction, and they say not. There is no hope, because they find the life of the hand.

Isaiah 57.10 But you have nothing that gives you any prevalent refreshment, neither will your latter end be better than theirs, if you die without an interest in Christ Jesus. Come therefore at length to a determinate resolution what you will do in this matter. Christ has waited long for you, and who knows how soon he may withdraw, never to look after you any more.

Upon occasion of the preceding discourse concerning the glory of Christ, I thought it necessary to add to it this brief exhortation of faith in him, aiming to suit it to the capacity of the meanest sinner that is capable of any self-consideration as to his eternal welfare. But yet a little further, to give efficacy to this exhortation, it will be necessary to remove some of those common and obvious turgiversations that convince sinners to usually betake themselves to, to put off a present compliance with the calls of Christ to come to him. For although it is unbelief alone, acting in the darkness of men's minds, in the obstinacy of their wills, that effectually keeps off sinners from come to Christ upon his call, yet it shrouds itself under various pretenses, that it may not appear in its own ugly form.

For no sin in which men can be guilty in this world is of so horrible a nature, and so dreadful an aspect, as is this unbelief, where a clear view of it is obtained in evangelical light. Therefore by the aid of Satan it suggests other pleas and pretenses to the minds of sinners, under which they may countenance themselves in a refusal to come to Christ. See 2 Corinthians 4.4, anything else it shall be, but not unbelief, that they all disavow.

I shall therefore speak to a few of those excuses in this case which are obvious and which are exemplified in the gospel itself. First, some do say on such exhortations, what is it that you would have us to do? We hear the word preached. We believe it as well as we can.

We do many things willingly, and abstain from any evils diligently. What is more required of us? This is the language of the hearts of the most with whom in this case we have to do. And I say, number one, it is usual with them who do something in the ways of God, but not all they should, and so nothing in a due manner, to expostulate about requiring of them more than they do.

So the people dispute with God himself, Malachi 1.6, 3, 8, and 13. So they in the gospel, who esteem themselves to have done their duty, be impressed to faith by Christ Jesus, ask him with some indignation, what shall we do that we might work the works of God, John 6.28? If what we do be not enough, what is it that you require more of us? So was it with the young man, Matthew 19.20, what lack I yet? Be advised, therefore, not to be too confident of your state, lest you should yet lack that one thing, the lack thereof might prove your eternal ruin. Number two, do things mentioned, with all of the like nature, which may be multiplied, may be where there is no one spark of saving faith.

Simon Magus heard the word, and believed as well as he could. Herod heard it, and did many things gladly, and all sorts of hypocrites do upon their convictions perform many duties, and abstain from many sins. So as that, notwithstanding this plea, you may perish for ever.

Number three, where these things are sincere, they belong to the exercise of faith. They may be after a sort without faith, but faith cannot be without them. But there is a fundamental act of faith, in which we close with Christ, in which we receive him, that is in order of nature, before its actings in all other duties and occasions.

It is laying the foundation. Other things belong to the building. This is it you are called on to secure, and you may know it by these two properties.

Number one, it is singular. So our Savior tells the Jews, John 6, 29, this is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent. The act, work, or duty of faith, in the receiving of Christ, is a peculiar singular work, in which the soul yields special obedience to God.

It is not to be reckoned to such common duties as those mentioned, but the soul must find out wherein it has, in a singular manner, closed with Christ, upon the command of God. Number two, it is accompanied with a universal spiritual change in the whole soul. Second Corinthians 5, 17.

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. O things are passed away. Behold, all things are become new.

Therefore if you would not choose rather to deceive and ruin your own souls, come to the trial, whether indeed you have received Christ in such a singular transforming act of faith. Do not, on such pretenses, lack a compliance with the word of exhortation proposed to you. But secondly, some will say, they don't know how to proceed in this work.

They can make nothing of it. They have tried to come to this believing, but do still fail in what they design. They go on and off, but can make no progress, can come to no satisfaction.

Therefore they think it best to let things go in general as they are, without putting themselves to further trouble, as to any special act of faith in the receiving of Christ. This is the language of men's hearts, though not of their mouths, another shelter of unbelief. And they act accordingly.

They have a secret despondency, which keeps them safe from attempting a real closure with Christ on the tender of the gospel. Something may be offered to this distempered frame of mind, number one, remember the disciples that were fishing and had toiled all night, but caught nothing, Luke 5, 3 and 4. Upon the coming of Christ to them, he requires that they should cast out their nets once more. Peter makes some excuse from the labor which they had taken in vain all night.

However, he would venture once more on the command of Christ and had an astonishing drought of fishes, verses 5 to 9. Have you been worried with disappointments in your attempts and resolutions? Yet cast in your net this once more upon the command of Christ. Venture this once more to come to him on his call and invitation. You know not what success he may give to you.

Number two, consider that it is not failing in this or that attempt of coming to Christ, but a giving over your endeavors that will be your ruin. The woman of Canaan in her great outcry to Christ for mercy, Matthew 15, 22, had many a repulse. First, it is said, he answered her not a word.

Then his disciples desired that he would send her away, that she might not trouble him any more. Whereon he gives a reason why he would not regard her, or why he could justly pass her by. She was not an Israelite to whom he was sent, yet she gives not over, but presseth into his presence, cries out for mercy, verse 25.

Being come to that issue, to try and draw out her faith to the utmost, which was his design from the beginning, he reckons her among dogs, that were not to have children's bread given to them. Had she now at last given over upon the severe rebuke, she had never obtained mercy. But persisting in her request, she at last prevailed, verses 27 and 28.

It may be you have prayed and cried and resolved and vowed, but all without success, as you suppose, and has broken through all. However, if you give not over, you shall prevail at last. You know not at what time God will come in with his grace, and Christ will manifest his love to you, as unto the poor woman, after many a rebuke.

It may be, after all, he will do it this day, and if not, he may do it another. Do not despond. Take that word of Christ himself for your encouragement.

Proverbs 8, 34 Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. If you hear him and wait, though you have not yet admission, but are kept at the gates and posts of the doors, yet in the issue you shall be blessed. Number 3 To rule in this case is Hosea 6, 3. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know.

Are you in the way of knowing Christ and the use of means, hearing the word, and sincere endeavors and holy duties? Though you cannot yet attain to any evidence that you have received him, have closed with him, nothing can ruin you but giving over the way in which you are. For then shall you know, if you follow on to know the Lord. Many can give you their experiences, that if they had been discouraged by present overwhelming difficulties arising from their disappointments, breaking of vows, relapses into folly, they had been utterly ruined, whereas now they are at rest in peace in the bosom of Christ.

On a great surprise Christ lost at once many disciples, and they lost their souls. John 6, 66 They went back and walked no more with him. Take heed of the like discouragements.

Thirdly, some may say, yea practically they do say, that these things indeed are necessary. They must come to Christ by believing, or they are undone. But this is not the season of it.

There will be time enough to apply themselves to it when other occasions are past. At present they have not leisure to enter upon and go through with this duty. Therefore they will abide in their present state for a while, hearing and doing many things, and when the time serves, will apply themselves to this duty also.

Number one, this is an uncontrollable evidence of that soddishness and folly which has come upon our nature by sin, a deprivation that the apostle places in the head of the evils of corrupted nature. Titus 3, 1-3 Can any thing be more foolish, soddish, and stupid, than for men to put off the consideration of the eternal concernment of their souls for one hour, being altogether uncertain whether they shall live another or not? To prefer present trifles before the blessedness or misery of an immortal state? For those who never heard of these things, who never had any conviction of sin and judgment, to put the evil days far from them is not much to be admired. But for you, who have Christ preached to you, who own a necessity of coming to Him, to put it off from day to day upon such slight pretenses is an astonishing folly.

May you not be spoken to in the language of the wisdom of God, Proverbs 6, 9-11. You come to hear the word, and when you go away, the language of your hearts is, yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. We will abide a little while in our present state, and afterward we will rouse up ourselves.

Under this deceit do multitudes perish every day. This is a dark shade in which cursed unbelief lies hid. Consider that this is the greatest engine that Satan makes use of in the world among them that hear the word preached to them, for the ruin of their souls.

He has other arts and ways and methods of dealing with other men, as by sensual and worldly lusts. But as to them who, through their convictions, do attend to the preaching of the word, this is great and almost only engine for their ruin. There needs no haste in this manner.

Another time will be more seasonable. You may be sure not to fell of it before you die. However, this present day and time is most unfit for it.

You have other things to do. You cannot part with your present frame. You may come again to hear the word, the next opportunity.

Know assuredly that if your minds are influenced to delays of coming to Christ by such insinuation you are under the power of Satan, and he is like enough to hold you fast to destruction. This is as evil and dangerous a posture or frame of mind as you can well fall under. If you have learned to put off God and Christ and the word for the present season, and yet relieve yourselves in this, that you do not intend, like others, always to reject them, but will have a time to hearken to their calls, you are secured and fortified against all convictions and persuasions, all fears.

One answer will serve for all. Within a little while you will do all that can be required of you. This is that which ruins the souls of multitudes every day.

It is better dealing with men openly profligate than with such a trifling promisor. Number 4 Remember that the Scripture confines you to the present day without the least intimation that you shall have either another day, or another tender of grace and mercy, in any day. 2 Corinthians 6.2 Hebrews 3.7,13 Hebrews 12.15 Take care, lest you come short of the grace of God.

Miss of it by missing your opportunity. Redeem the time, or you are lost forever. Number 5 As unto the pretense of your occasions and business, there is a ready way to disappoint the craft of Satan in that pretense, namely, to mix thoughts of Christ in the renovation of your resolutions, either to come or to cleave to him with all your occasions.

Let nothing put it utterly out of your minds. Make it familiar to you, and you will beat Satan out of that stronghold. Proverbs 7.4 However, shake yourselves out of this dust, or destruction lies at the door.

4 It is the language of the hearts of some, that if they give up themselves to a compliance with this exhortation, and go seriously about this duty, they must relinquish and renounce all their lusts and pleasures, yea, much of their converse in society, in which they find so much present satisfaction, as that they know not how to part with them. If they might retain their old ways, at least some of them, it were another manner. But this total relinquishment of all is very severe.

Answer 1. The Jesuits, preaching and painting of Christ among some of the Indians, concealed from them His cross and sufferings, telling them only of His present glory and power, so as they pretended to win them over to faith in Him, hiding from them that in which they might be discouraged, and so preached a false Christ to them, one of their own framing. We dare do no such thing for all the world. We can here use no condescension, no compliance, no composition with respect to any sin or lust.

We have no commission to grant that request of lot. Is it not a little one? Let it be spared. Nor to come to Naaman's terms.

God be merciful to me in this thing, and all others I will be obedient. Therefore, number 2, we must here be peremptory with you, whatever be the event. If you are discouraged by it, we cannot help it.

Cursed be the man that shall encourage you to come to Christ with hopes of indulgence to any one sin whatever. I don't speak this as though you could at once absolutely and perfectly leave all sin in the root and branches of it, but only you were to do it in heart and resolution, engaging to a universal mortification of all sin, as by grace from above you shall be enabled. But your choice must be absolute, without reserves, as to love, interest, and desire, God or the world, Christ or Belial, holiness or sin.

There is no middle ground, no terms of composition, 2 Corinthians 6, 15-18. And to what you pretend of your pleasures, the truth is, you never yet had any real pleasure, nor do know what it is. How easy were it to declare the folly, vanity, bitterness, poison of those things which you have esteemed your pleasures! Here alone, namely in Christ, and a participation of Him, are true pleasures and durable riches to be obtained.

Pleasures of the same nature with, and such as, like pleasant streams, flow down into the ocean of eternal pleasures above. A few moments in these joys are to be preferred above the longest continuance in the cursed pleasures of this world. Proverbs 3, 13-18.

Fifthly, it will be said by some that they do not see those who profess themselves to be believers to be so much better than they are, is that you need to press us so earnestly to so great a change. We know not why we should not be accounted believers already, as well as they. I shall in a few words, as well as I am able, lay this stumbling block out of the way, though I confess at this day it is weighty and cumbersome.

I say, number one, among them that profess themselves to be believers there are many false, corrupt hypocrites, and it is no wonder that on various occasions they lay the stumbling block of their iniquities before the faces of others. But they shall bear their own burden and judgment. Number two, it is acknowledged, it must be bewailed, that some whom we have reason to judge to be true believers, yet through their unmortified pride or covetousness or carelessness in their conversation or vain attire and conformity to the world or forwardness do give justification of offense.

We confess that God is displeased herewith, Christ in the gospel dishonored, and many that are weak, are wounded, and others discouraged. But as for you, this is not your rule, this is not proposed to you, but that word only is so that we'll never fail you. Number three, the world does not know, nor is able to make a right judgment of believers, nor do you so, for it is a spiritual man alone that discerns the things of God.

Their infirmities are visible to all, their grace is invisible, the king's daughter is glorious within, and when you are able to make a right judgment of them, you will desire no greater advancement than to be of their society. Psalm 16.3 These few instances of the pretenses in which unbelief covers its deformity and hides that destruction in which it is to be accompanied may suffice to our present purpose. They are multiplied in the minds of men, impregnated by the suggestions of Satan on their darkness and folly.

A little spiritual wisdom will rend the veil of them all, and expose unbelief acting in enmity against Christ under them. But what has been spoken may suffice to answer the necessity of the preceding exhortation on this occasion. Chapter 2 The Ways and Means of the Recovery of Spiritual Decays and of Obtaining Fresh Springs of Grace The application of the same truth in the second place belongs to believers, especially such as have made any long profession of walking in the ways of God and the gospel, and that which I design in this is to manifest that a steady spiritual view of the glory of Christ by faith will give them a gracious revival from inward decays and fresh springs of grace even in their latter days.

A truth this is, as we shall see confirmed by scripture, with the joyful experience of multitudes of believers, and is of great importance to all that are so. There are two things which those who, after a long profession of the gospel, are entering into the confines of eternity, do long for and desire. The one is that all their breaches may be repaired, their decays recovered, their backslidings healed, for to these things they have been less or more obnoxious in the course of their walking before God.

The other is that they may have fresh springs of spiritual life, and vigorous actings of all divine graces in spiritual mindedness, holiness, and fruitfulness, to the praise of God, the honor of the gospel, and the increase of their own peace and joy. These things they value more than all the world and all that is in it. About these things are their thoughts, contrivances, exercised night and day.

Those with whom it is otherwise, whatever they pretend, are in the dark to themselves and their own condition. For it is in the nature of this grace to grow and increase to the end. As rivers, the nearer they come to the ocean, where they tend, the more they increase their waters and speed their streams.

So will grace flow more freely and fully in its nearer approaches to the ocean of glory. That is not saving which does not sow. An experience of this, I mean of the thriving of grace towards the end of our course, is that alone which can support us under the troubles and temptations of life, which we have to conflict with.

So the apostle tells us that this is our great relief in all our distresses and afflictions, for which cause we faint not. But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day, 2 Corinthians 4.16. If it be so, that in the daily decays of the outward man, and all the approaches of its dissolution, we have inward spiritual revivals and renovation, we shall not faint in what we undergo. And without such continual renovations, we shall faint in our distresses, whatever other things we may have, or whatever we pretend to the contrary.

And ordinarily it is so, in the holy, wise providence of God, that afflictions and troubles increase with age. It is so, and in a special manner, with ministers of the gospel. They have many of them a share in the lot of Peter, which our Lord Jesus Christ declared to him, John 21.18. When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest, whither thou wouldest.

But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee, whither thou wouldest not. Besides those natural distempers and infirmities, which accompany the decays of life, troubles of life, and their affairs, do usually grow upon them, when they look for nothing less. But we're ready to say with Job, we shall die in our nest.

Job 29.18. So it was with Jacob. After all his hard labor and travail to provide for his family, such things fell out in it in his old age as it almost broke in his heart. And oft times, both persecutions and public dangers do befall them at the same season.

While the outward man is thus perishing, we need great supportment that we faint not. And this is only to be had in an experience of daily spiritual renovations in the inner man. The excellent sea of this mercy the psalmist expresses in a heavenly manner.

Psalm 92.12.15. The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree. He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing, to show that the Lord is upright. He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

The promise in the twelfth verse respects the times of the Messiah, or of the New Testament, for so it is prophesied of Him. In His days a righteous shall flourish. Psalm 72.7. Namely, through the abundance of grace that shall be administered from His fullness, is John 1.16, Colossians 1.19, and in this consists the glory of the gospel, and not in outward prosperity or external ornaments of divine worship.

The flourishing of the righteous, I say, in grace and holiness, is the glory of the office of Christ and of the gospel. Where this is not, there is no glory in the profession of our religion. The glory of kings is in the wealth and peace of their subjects, and the glory of Christ is in the grace and holiness of His subjects.

This flourishing is compared to the palm tree and the growth of the cedar. The palm tree is of the greatest verdure, beauty and fruitfulness, and the cedar of the greatest and longest growth of any trees. So are the righteous compared to the palm tree for the beauty of profession and fruitfulness and obedience, and to the cedar for continual, constant growth and increase in grace.

Thus it is with all that are righteous, unless it be from their own sinful neglect, as it is with many in this day. They are hereon rather like the shrubs and heaths in the wilderness, which see not when good comes, than like the palm tree or the cedars of Lebanon. And by this men do what lies in them to obscure the glory of Christ and His kingdom, as well as disquiet their own souls.

The words that follow, verse 13, those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God, are not distinctive of some from other, as though some only of the flourishing righteous were so planted. But they are descriptive of them all, with an addition of the ways and means in which they are caused so to grow and flourish. And this is their implantation in the house of the Lord, that is, in the church, which is the seed of all the means of spiritual life, both as to growth and flourishing, which God is pleased to grant to believers.

To be planted in the house of the Lord is to be fixed and rooted in the grace communicated by the ordinances of divine worship. Unless we are planted in the house of the Lord, we cannot flourish in His courts. Psalm 1 3 Unless we are partakers of the grace administered in the ordinances, we cannot flourish in a fruitful profession.

The outward participation of them is common to hypocrites, that bear some leaves, but neither grow like the cedar, nor bear fruit like the palm tree. So the apostle prays for believers, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, that they may be rooted and grounded in love, Ephesians 3 17, rooted, built up, and established, Colossians 2 7. The lack, hereof, is a cause that we have so many fruitless professors, that have entered the courts of God by profession, but were never planted in His house by faith and love. Let us not deceive ourselves in this.

We may be entered into the church, and may partakers of the outward privileges of it, and not be so planted in it as to flourish in grace and fruitfulness. That which on this occasion I principally intend is the grace and privilege expressed, verse 14, they shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing. There be three things which constitute a spiritual state, or belong to the life of God.

Number one, that believers be fat, that is, by the heavenly juice, sap, or fatness of the true olive of Christ Himself, is Romans 11 17. This is the principle of spiritual life and grace derived from Him. When this abounds in them, so as to give them strength and vigor in the exercise of grace, to keep them from decays and withering, they are said to be fat, which in the scripture phrase is strong and healthy.

Number two, that they flourish in the greenness, as the word is, and verdure of profession, for vigorous grace will produce a flourishing profession. Number three, that they still bring forth fruit in all duties of holy obedience. All these are promised to them even in old age.

Even trees, when they grow old, the palm and the cedar, are apt to lose of their juice and verdure, and men in old age are subject to all sorts of decays, both outward and inward. It is a rare thing to see a man in old age naturally vigorous, healthy, and strong, and would it were not more rare to see any spiritually so at the same season. But this is here promised to believers, as in a special grace and privilege, beyond what can be represented in the growth or fruit bearing of plants and trees.

The grace intended is, that when believers are under all sorts of bodily and natural decays, and it may be have been overtaken with spiritual decays also, there is provision made in the covenant to render them fat, flourishing, and fruitful, vigorous in the power of internal grace, and flourishing in the expression of it in all duties of obedience, which is that which we now inquire after. Blessed be God for this good word of His grace, that He has given us such encouragement against all the decays and temptations of old age, which we have to conflict with. And a psalmist, in the next words, declares the greatness of this privilege, to show that the Lord is upright, He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Consider the oppositions that lie against the flourishing of believers in old age, the difficulties of it, the temptations that must be conquered, the actings of the mind above its natural abilities which are decayed, the weariness that is apt to befall us in a long spiritual conflict, the cries of the flesh to be spared, and we shall see it to be an evidence of the faithfulness, power, and righteousness of God in the covenant. Nothing else could produce this mighty effect. So the prophet, treating of the same promise, Hosea 14, 4-8, closes his discourse with that blessed remark, verse 9, Who is wise, and he shall understand these things, prudent, and he shall know them.

For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them. Spiritual wisdom will make us to see that the faithfulness and power of God are exerted in this work of preserving believers, flourishing and fruitful to the end. Having laid the foundation of this illustrious testimony, I shall further declare and confirm my intention, so to make way for the application of the truth under consideration to this case, manifesting that the way in which we may be made partakers of this grace is by a steady view of the glory of Christ as proposed to us in the gospel.

There is a latter spring in the year, a spring in autumn. It is, indeed, for the most part but faint and weak. Yet is it such as a husbandman cannot spare, and it is an evident sign of bearing ground when it does not put forth afresh towards the end of the year.

God, the good husbandman, looks for the same from us, especially if we had a summer's drought in spiritual decays. As a psalmist complained, Psalm 32, 4, Had we not had a latter spring the last year, the land had greatly suffered under the drought of the summer. And if we had such a drought in the course of our profession by spiritual decays, as God, the good husbandman, looks for a latter spring in us, even in old age, in the vigorous acting of grace and fruitful obedience, so without it we can neither have peace nor joy in our own souls.

If a man, therefore, has made a great appearance of religion in his former or younger days, and when he is growing into old age, becomes dead, cold, worldly, selfish, if we have no fresh springs of spiritual life in him, it is an evidence that he hath a barren heart that was never really fruitful to God. I know that many stand in need of being excited by such a warning to a diligent consideration of their state and condition. It is true that the latter spring does not bring forth the same fruit with the former.

There is no more required in it but that the ground evidence itself to be in good heart, and put forth that which is proper to the season. It may be such graces as were active and vigorous a minute their first conversion to God, as were carried in a stream of warm, natural affections, may not so imminently abound in the latter spring of old age, but those which are proper for the season, as namely spirituality, heavenly mindedness, windedness from the world, readiness for the cross and death, are necessary even in old age to evidence that we have a living principle of grace, and to show by this that God is upright, he is our rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. What is further to be insisted on shall be reduced to these four heads, that the constitution of spiritual life is such as is meet to thrive, grow and increase to the end, and will do so unless it be from the default of them in whom it is, that notwithstanding this nature and constitution of spiritual life, yet believers are subject to many decays, partly gradual, and partly by surprisals and temptation, in which the growth of it is obstructed to the dishonor of the gospel and the loss of their own peace with joy.

Number three. I shall show that such a present is a condition of many professors, namely that they are visibly fallen under spiritual decays, and do not evidence any interest in the blessed promises insisted on. Number four.

On the confirmation of these things, our inquiry will be how such persons may be delivered from such decays, and by what means they may obtain the grace here promised, of spiritual flourishing in old age, both in the strengthening of the inward principle of life, and abounding in fruits of obedience which are to the praise of God by Jesus Christ. And then we shall make application to this case of that truth, which is the subject of the preceding discourse. Number one.

The constitution of spiritual life is such as is meet to grow and increase to the end. By this it does distinguish itself from that faith which is temporary. For there is a temporary faith, which will both flourish for a season and bring forth some fruit.

But it is not in its nature and constitution to abide, to grow and increase, but rather to decay and wither. It is described by our Lord Jesus Christ, Matthew 13, 20 and 21. Either some great temptation extinguishes it, or it decays insensibly, until the mind in which it was do manifest itself to be utterly barren.

And therefore, whoever is sensible of any spiritual decays, he is called to a severe trial and examination of himself, as to the nature of the principle of his profession and obedience. For such decays do rather argue a principle of temporary faith only, on which they are proper and natural, than that whose nature it is to thrive and grow to the end, on which those that have it shall, as it is in the promise, still bring forth fruit, and, without their own great guilt, be always freed from such decays. That the spiritual life is in its nature and constitution such as will abide, thrive and grow to the end, is three ways testified to in the Scripture, and that it is compared to things of the most infallible increase and progress.

For besides that, its growth is frequently likened to that of plants and trees well watered, and in a fruitful soil, which fell not to spring, unless it be from some external violence, it is likewise compared to such things as whose progress is absolutely infallible. Proverbs 4, 18. The path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more to the perfect day.

The path of the just is as covenant walk before God, as it is frequently called in the Scripture Psalm 119, 35, 105, Isaiah 26, 7, Psalm 23, 3, Matthew 3, 3, Hebrews 12, 3, and it comprises the principle, profession, and fruits of it. This says the wise man is as a shining light, that is, the morning light, and wherein is it so? Why? Is that goeth on by degrees, and shines more and more to the high noon? Though it may be interrupted sometimes by clouds and storms, so is this path of the just. It goes on and increases to the high noon, the perfect day of glory.

It is in its nature so to do, though it may sometimes meet with obstructions, as we shall see afterwards, and so does the morning light also. There is no visible difference as to light between the light of the morning and the light of the evening. Yea, this latter sometimes, from gleams of the setting sun, seems to be more glorious than the other, but in this they differ.

The first goes on gradually to more and more light, until it comes to perfection. The other gradually gives place to darkness, until it comes to be midnight. So is it as to the light of the just and of the hypocrite.

So is it as to their paths. At first setting out, they may seem alike and equal. Yea, convictions and spiritual gifts acted with corrupt ends in some hypocrites, may for a time give a greater lust or a profession than the grace of others sincerely converted to God may attain to.

But in this they discover their different natures. The one increases and goes on constantly, though it may sometimes, but faintly, the other decays, grows dim, gives place to darkness and crooked walking. This then is the nature of the path of the just, and where it is otherwise with us in our walk before God, we can have no evidence that we are in that path, or that we have a living, growing principle of spiritual life in us.

And it is fit that professors of all sorts should be minded of these things, for we may see not a few of them under visible decays, without any sincere endeavors after recovery, who yet please themselves that the root of the matter is in them. It is so, if love of the world, conformity to it, negligence in holy duties, and coldness in spiritual love, be an evidence of such decays. But let none deceive their own souls.

Wherever there is a saving principle of grace, it will be thriving and growing to the end. And if it fall under obstructions, and by this into decays for a season, it will give no rest or quietness to the soul in which it is, but will labor continually for a recovery. Peace in a spiritually decaying condition is a soul-ruining security.

Better be under terror, on account of surprisal into some sin, than be in peace under evident decays of spiritual life. And by the way, this comparing of the path of the just to the morning light reminds me of what I have seen more than once. That light has sometimes cheerfully appeared to the world, when, after a little season, by reason of clouds, tempests, and storms, it has given place again to darkness, like that of the night, but it has not so been lost and buried, like the evening light.

After a while it has recovered itself to a greater luster than before, manifesting that it is increased in itself while it was eclipsed as to us. So has it been with not a few at their first conversion to God. Great darkness and trouble have, by the efficacy of temptation and injections of Satan, possessed their minds.

But the grace which they have received, being as a morning light, has after a while disentangled itself, and given evidence that it was so far from being extinguished, is that it grew and thrived under all those clouds and darkness. For the light of the just doth in the issue always increase by temptations, as that of the hypocrite is constantly impaired by them. Again, as it is as a morning light, then, which nothing hath a more assured progress, so it is called by our Saviour, living water, John 4.10, yea, a well of water springing up into everlasting life, verse 14.

It is an indeficient spring, not a pool or pond, though never so large, which may be dried up. Many such pools of light, gifts, and profession have we seen utterly dried up, when they have come into age, or been ensnared by the temptations of the world. And we may see others every day, under dangerous decays, their countenances are changed, and they have lost that oil which makes the face of a believer to shine, namely, the oil of love, meekness, self-denial, and spirituality of converse.

Instead, thereof, there is spread upon them fulsome ointment of pride, self-love, earthly mindedness, which increases on them more and more. But where this principle of spiritual life is, it is as the morning light, as an indeficient spring that never fails, nor can do so until it issue an eternal life. And a number of other ways there are in which the same truth is asserted in the Scripture.

2. There are a number of divine promises given to believers that so it shall be, or to secure them of such supplies of grace as shall cause their spiritual life to grow, increase, and flourish to the end, such as that in the psalm which we have considered. For these promises are the means in which the spiritual life is originally communicated to us, and by this it is preserved in us. By them are we made partakers of this divine nature, 2 Peter 1.4. And through them is it continued in us.

Now as to promises of this nature, namely, that by the dispensation of the Spirit of Christ and supplies of His grace, our spiritual life shall flourish and be made fruitful to the end. I shall briefly call over one of them only at present, which is recorded Isaiah 44.3.4. I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.

And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the watercourses. Although this promise may have respect to the gracious dealing of God with the people of the Jews after their return from the captivity, yet hath it so only as it was typical of the redemption of the church by Jesus Christ. But it belongs properly to the times of the gospel, when the righteous were to flourish.

And it is the promise of the new covenant, as is manifest in that it is not only given to believers, but is also extended to their seed and offspring, which is an assured signature of new covenant promises. And here is number one, a supposition of what we are in ourselves, both before and after our conversion to God, namely a thirsty, dry, and bearing ground. We have nothing in ourselves, no radical moisture to make us flourishing and fruitful.

And as it is before, so it is after conversion. We are not sufficient of ourselves. Our sufficiency is of God, 2 Corinthians 3.5. Being left to ourselves, we should utterly wither and perish.

But number two, here is the blessed relief which God in this case has provided. He will pour the sanctifying water of His Spirit and the blessing of His grace upon us. And this He will so do as to cause us to spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.

There is nothing of a more imminent and almost visible growth than willows by the water courses. Such shall be the spiritual growth of believers under the influences of these promises. That is, they shall be fat and flourishing and still bring forth fruit.

And other promises of the same nature there are many. But we must observe three things concerning them, that we may be satisfied in their accomplishment. As number one, the promises of the new covenant as to the first communication of grace to the elect are absolute and unconditional.

They are the executive conveyances of God's immutable purposes and decrees. And what should be the condition of the communication of the first grace to us? Nothing that is not grace can be so. If it be said that this also is of God in us, which is the condition of the communication of the first saving grace to us, then I would know whether they be bestowed upon us without any condition.

If it be, then that is the first grace, as being absolutely free. If it be not, then what is the condition on which it is bestowed, concerning which the same inquiry must be made, and so forever? But this is the glory of covenant promises, that as to the communication of the grace of conversion and sanctification to the elect, they are absolutely free and unconditional. But number two, the promises which respect the growth, degrees, and measures of this grace in believers are not so.

There are many duties required of us that these promises may be accomplished toward us and in us. Yea, watchful diligence and universal gospel obedience is expected from us to the end. See 2 Peter 1, 4 and 10.

This is the ordinary method of the communication of all supplies of grace to make us spiritually flourish and be fruitful, namely, that we be found in the diligent exercise of what we have received. God does sometimes deal otherwise in a way of sovereignty, and surprises men with healing grace in the midst of their decays and backslidings, as Isaiah 57, 17 and 18. So has many a poor soul been delivered from going down into the pit.

The good shepherd will go out of his way to save a wandering sheep. But this is the ordinary method. Number three, notwithstanding these blessed promises of growth, flourishing, and fruitfulness, if we are negligent in the due improvement of the grace which we have received, and the discharge of the duties required of us, we may fall into decays and be kept in a low, unthrifty state all our days.

And this is the principal ground of the discrepancy between the glory and beauty of the church, as represented in the promises of the gospel, and as exemplified in the lives and walking of professors. They do not live up to the condition of their accomplishment in them, albeit in God's way and time they shall be all fulfilled. We have, therefore, innumerable blessed promises concerning the thriving, growing, and flourishing of the principle of spiritual life in us, even in old age, and until death.

But the grace promised to this end will not befall us while we are asleep in spiritual sloth and security. Fervent prayer, the exercise of all grace received, with watchfulness to all holy duties are required hereunto. God secured the growth of the spiritual life by the provision of food for it, in which it may be strengthened and increased.

For life must be preserved by food. And this, in our case, is the word of God with all other ordinances of divine worship which depend thereon. 1 Peter 2, 2 and 3. Whatever the state of this life be, whether in its beginning, its progress, its decays, there is suitable nourishment provided for it in the good word of God's grace.

If men will neglect their daily food that is provided for them, it is no wonder if they be weak and thrifless. And if believers are not earnest in their desires after this food, if they are not diligent in providing of it, attending to it, much more if, through corruptions and temptations they count it in the preaching of it, light and common food, which they do not value, it is no wonder if they fall into spiritual decays. But God has herein provided for our growth even to old age.

And this was the first thing which was proposed to confirmation, namely, that the constitution and nature of spiritual life is such as to be indeficient, so as to thrive and grow even in old age, and to the end. 2. The second thing proposed is, that notwithstanding all this provision for the growth of spiritual life in us, believers, especially in a long course of profession, are subject to decays such as may cast them into great perplexities and endanger their eternal ruin. And these spiritual decays are of two sorts, 1. Such as are gradual and universal in the loss of the vigour and life of grace, both in its principle and in its exercise, 2. Such as are occasioned by surprisal into sin through the power of temptation, I mean such sins as do waste the spiritual powers of the soul and deprive it of all solid peace.

As for temporary believers, give them but time enough in this world, especially if it be accompanied with outward prosperity or persecution, and for the most part their decays are of one sort or another and will make a discovery of their hypocrisy. Though they retain a form of godliness, they deny the power of it, Proverbs 1.31, 2 Timothy 3.5. And if they do not openly relinquish all duties of religion, yet they will grow so lifeless and savourless in them as shall evidence their condition. For so it is with them who are lukewarm, who are neither hot nor cold, who have a name to live, but are dead.

And herein lies a signal difference in this manner between sincere believers and those who believe only for a time, for those of the latter sort do either not perceive their sickness and decays, their minds being taken up and possessed with other things, or if they do find that it is not with them as it has been formerly, they are not much concerned, and on any occasional new conviction may cry, yet a little more slumber, a little more sleep, a little more folding of the hands to sleep. But when the other do find anything of this nature, it makes them restless for a recovery. And although through the many snares, temptations, and deceits of sin, or through their ignorance of the right way for their healing, they do not, many of them, obtain a speedy recovery, yet none of them do approve themselves in such a condition or turn to any undue reliefs.

Now that believers are subject to decays in both the ways mentioned, we have full testimony in Scripture. For as to that general, gradual decay in the loss of our first faith, love, and works, in the weakening of the internal principle of spiritual life, with the loss thereon of delight, joy, and consolation, and the abatement of the fruits of obedience, our Lord Jesus Christ does expressly charge it on five of the seven churches of Asia, Revelations 2 and 3. And in some of them, as Sardis and Laodicea, those decays had proceeded to such a degree as that they were in danger of utter rejection. And this answers the experience of all churches and all believers in the world.

Those who are otherwise minded are dead in sin, and have got pretenses to countenance themselves in their miserable condition. So is it with the church of Rome, and I wish others did not, in some measure, follow them in this. And as to those of the second sort, wherein two men are cast by surprisals and temptations, producing great spiritual distress and anguish of soul, under a sense of God's displeasure, we have an instance in David, as he gives us an account of himself, Psalm 38, 1-10.

O Lord, thy narrow stick fast in me, and thy hand presses me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head, as in heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness, and so on. It is certain that here is a description of a very woeful state and condition. And a psalmist, knowing that he was called of God to be a teacher and instructor of the church in all ages, records his own experience to that end.

Hence the title of it is, A Psalm to Bring to Remembrance. Some judge that David had respect to some great and sore disease that he was then visited with. But if it were so, it was only an occasion of his complaint.

The cause of it was sin alone. And four things he does represent. Number one, that he had departed from God, and fallen into provoking sins, which had produced great distresses in his mind, verses three and four.

Number two, that he had foolishly continued in that state, not making timely application to grace and mercy for healing, in which it was grown deplorable. Verse five, and his folly is that alone which makes such a condition dangerous, namely, when men, on their surprisals in sin, do not speedily apply themselves to healing remedies. Number three, that he had in this a continual sense of the displeasure of God by reason of sin, verses two to four.

Number four, that he was altogether restless in this state, mourning, groaning, laboring continually for deliverance. This is a clearer delineation of the condition of believers when, either by the greatness of any sin, or by a long continuance in an evil and careless frame, they are cast under a sense of divine displeasure. This opens their minds and their hearts, declaring how all things are within which they cannot deny.

It is not so with many, in the same measures and degrees, as it was with David, whose falls were very great, but the substance of it is found in them all. And in this a heart knows its own bitterness, a stranger inner meddles not with it. None knows the groaning and laboring of a soul, convinced of such spiritual decays, but he alone in whom they are.

On this is it cast down to the earth, going mourning all the day long, though others know nothing of its sorrows. But it is of a far more sad consideration to see men manifesting their inward decays by their outward fruits, and yet are little or not at all concerned in it. The former are in ways of recovery, these in the paths that go down to the chambers of death.

I suppose, therefore, I may take it for granted, that there are few professors of religion who have had any long continuance in the ways of it, having withal been exposed to the temptations of life, and much exercised with the occasions of it. But they have been asleep in their days, as the spouse complains of herself in Kenticles 5.2. That is, they have been overtaken with decays of one sort or another, either with respect to spiritual or moral duties, in their relation to churches or families, in their judgments or their affections, in their inward frames or outward actions. They have been overtaken with the effects of sloth, negligence, or the lack of a continual watch in the life of faith.

I wish it were otherwise. I principally hear and intend those gradual declensions in the life and power of grace which men in a long course of profession are subject to. And these, for the most part, proceed from formality and holy duties, under the constant outward performance of them, vehement engagement in the affairs of life, an overvaluation of sinful enjoyments, growth in carnal wisdom, neglect of daily mortification, of such sins as men are naturally disposed to, with a secret influence from the prevalent temptations of the days in which we live, which things are not now to be spoken to.

That was a reading from *How to Recover from Spiritual Decay and Grow in Grace* by John Owen. Narrated December 3rd and 4th, 2008.