

Christian Cautions

or

The Necessity of Self-Examination

A Sermon by Jonathan Edwards

PSALM cxxxix. 23, 24. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

This psalm is a meditation on the omniscience of God, or upon his perfect view and knowledge of everything, which the psalmist represents by that perfect knowledge which God had of all his actions, his down sitting and his uprising; and of his thoughts, so that he knew his thoughts afar off; and of his words, "There is not a word in my tongue," says the psalmist, "but thou knowest it altogether." Then he represents it by the impossibility of fleeing from the divine presence, or of hiding from him; so that if he should go into heaven, or hide himself in hell, or fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, yet he would not be hid from God; or if he should endeavour to hide himself in darkness, yet that would not cover him; but the darkness and light are both alike to him. Then he represents it by the knowledge which God had of him while in his mother's womb, ver. 15, 16.

"My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret; thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written."

After this the psalmist observes what must be inferred as a necessary consequence of this omniscience of God, viz. that he will slay the wicked, since he seeth all their wickedness, and nothing of it is hid from him. And last of all, the psalmist improves this meditation upon God's all-seeing eye, in begging of God that he would search and try him, to see if there were any wicked way in him, and lead him in the way everlasting.

Three things may be noted in the words.

1. The act of mercy which the psalmist implores of God towards himself, viz. that God would search him. "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts."

2. In what respect he desires to be searched, viz. “to see if there were any wicked way in him.”

We are not to understand by it, that the psalmist means that God should search him for his own information. What he had said before, of God’s knowing all things, implies that he hath no need of that. The psalmist had said, in the second verse, that God understood his thought afar off; i.e. it was all plain before him, he saw it without difficulty, or without being forced to come nigh, and diligently to observe. That which is plain to be seen, may be seen at a distance.

Therefore, when the psalmist prays that God would search him, to see if there were any wicked way in him, he cannot mean, that he should search that he himself might see or be informed, but that the psalmist might see and be informed. He prays that God would search him by his discovering light; that he would lead him thoroughly to discern himself, and see whether there were any wicked way in him. Such figurative expressions are often used in Scripture. The word of God is said to be a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Not that the word itself discerns, but it searches and opens our hearts to view; so that it enables us to discern the temper and desires of our hearts.

So God is often said to try men. He doth not try them for his own information, but for the discovery and manifestation of them to themselves or others.

3. Observe to what end he thus desires God to search him, viz. “That he might be led in the way everlasting;” i.e. not only in a way which may have a specious show, and appear right to him for a while, and in which he may have peace and quietness for the present; but in the way which will hold, which will stand the test, which he may confidently abide by for ever, and always approve of as good and right, and in which he may always have peace and joy. It is said, that “the way of the ungodly shall perish,” Psal. i. 6. In opposition to this, the way of the righteous is in the text said to last for ever.

Sect. I.

All men should be much concerned to know whether they do not live in some way of sin.

David was much concerned to know this concerning himself: he searched himself, he examined his own heart and ways; but he did not trust to that; he was still afraid lest there might be some wicked way in him, which had escaped his notice: therefore he cries to God to search him. And his earnestness appears in the frequent repetition of the same request in different words: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts." He was very earnest to know whether there were not some evil way or other in him, in which he went on, and did not take notice of.

1. We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in a state of sin. All unregenerate men live in sin. We are born under the power and dominion of sin, are sold under sin; every unconverted sinner is a devoted servant to sin and Satan. We should look upon it as of the greatest importance to us, to know in what state we are, whether we ever had any change made in our hearts from sin to holiness, or whether we be not still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; whether ever sin were truly mortified in us; whether we do not live in the sin of unbelief, and in the rejection of the Saviour. This is what the apostle insists upon with the Corinthians, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" Those who entertain the opinion and hope of themselves, that they are godly, should take great care to see that their foundation be right. Those that are in doubt should not give themselves rest till the matter be resolved.

Every unconverted person lives in a sinful way. He not only lives in a particular evil practice, but the whole course of his life is sinful. The imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually. He not only doth evil, but he doth no good, Psal. xiv. 3. "They are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one." Sin is an unconverted man's trade; it is the work and business of his life; for he is the servant of sin. And ordinarily hypocrites or those who are wicked men, and yet think themselves godly, and make a profession accordingly, are especially odious and abominable to God.

2. We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some particular way which is offensive and displeasing to God: this is what I principally intend. We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in the gratification of some lust, either in practice or in our thoughts: whether we do not live in the omission of some duty, something which God expects we should do; whether we do not go into some practice or manner of

behaviour, which is not warrantable. We should inquire whether we do not live in some practice which is against our light, and whether we do not allow ourselves in known sins.

We should be strict to inquire whether or no we have not hitherto allowed ourselves in some or other sinful way, through wrong principles and mistaken notions of our duty: whether we have not lived in the practice of some things offensive to God, through want of care and watchfulness, and observation of ourselves. We should be concerned to know whether we live not in some way which doth not become the profession we make; and whether our practice in some things be not unbecoming Christians, contrary to Christian rules, not suitable for the disciples and followers of the holy Jesus, the Lamb of God. We ought to be concerned to know this, because,

(1.) God requires of us, that we exercise the utmost watchfulness and diligence in his service.

Reason teaches, that it is our duty to exercise the utmost care, that we may know the mind and will of God, and our duty in all the branches of it, and to use our utmost diligence in everything to do it; because the service of God is the great business of our lives, it is that work which is the end of our beings; and God is worthy, that we should serve him to the utmost of our power in all things.

This is what God often expressly requires of us; Deut. iv. 9. "Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things that thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life." And v. 15, 16. "Take ye therefore good heed to yourselves, lest ye corrupt yourselves." And Deut. vi. 17. "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes which he hath commanded thee." And Prov. iv. 23.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." So we are commanded by Christ to "watch and pray;" Matt. xxvi. 41. and Luke xxi. 34, 36. "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life." Eph. v. 15. "See that ye walk circumspectly." So that if we be found in any evil way whatsoever, it will not excuse us, that it was through inadvertence, or that we were not aware of it; as long as it is through want of that care and watchfulness in us, which we ought to have maintained.

(2.) If we live in any way of sin, we live in a way whereby God is dishonoured; but the honour of God ought to be supremely regarded by all. If everyone would make it his great care in all things to obey God, to live justly and holily, to walk in everything according to Christian rules; and would maintain a strict, watchful, and scrupulous eye over himself, to see if there were no wicked way in him; would give diligence to amend whatsoever is amiss; would avoid every unholy, unChristian, and sinful way; and if the practice of all were universally as becometh Christians; how greatly would this be to the glory of God, and of Jesus Christ! How greatly would it be to the credit and honour of religion! How would it tend to excite a high esteem of religion in spectators, and to recommend a holy life! How would it stop the mouths of objectors and opposers! How beautiful and amiable would religion then appear, when exemplified in the lives of Christians, not maimed and mutilated, but whole and entire, as it were in its true shape, having all its parts and its proper beauty! Religion would then appear to be an amiable thing indeed.

If those who call themselves Christians, thus walked in all the paths of virtue and holiness, it would tend more to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in the world, the conviction of sinners, and the propagation of religion among unbelievers, than all the sermons in the world, so long as the lives of those who are called Christians continue as they are now. For want of this concern and watchfulness in the degree in which it ought to take place, many truly godly persons adorn not their profession as they ought to do, and, on the contrary, in some things dishonour it.

For want of being so much concerned as they ought to be, to know whether they do not walk in some way that is unbecoming a Christian, and offensive to God; their behaviour in some things is very unlovely, and such as is an offence and stumbling-block to others, and gives occasion to the enemy to blaspheme.

(3.) We should be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin, as we would regard our own interest. If we live in any way of sin, it will be exceedingly to our hurt. Sin, as it is the most hateful evil, is that which is most prejudicial to our interest, and tends most to our hurt of anything in the world. If we live in any way that is displeasing to God, it may be the ruin of our souls. Though men reform all other wicked practices, yet if they live in but one sinful way, which they do not forsake, it may prove their everlasting undoing.

If we live in any way of sin, we shall thereby provoke God to anger, and bring guilt upon our own souls. Neither will it excuse us that we were not sensible how evil that way was in which we walked; that we did not consider it; that we were blind as to any evil in it. We contract guilt not only by living in those ways which we know, but in those which we might know to be sinful, if we were but sufficiently concerned to know what is sinful and what not, and to examine ourselves, and search our own hearts and ways. If we walk in some evil way, and know it not for want of watchfulness and consideration that will not excuse us; for we ought to have watched and considered, and made the most diligent inquiry.

If we walk in some evil way, it will be a great prejudice to us in this world. We shall thereby be deprived of that comfort which we otherwise might enjoy, and shall expose ourselves to a great deal of soul trouble, and sorrow, and darkness, which otherwise we might have been free from. A wicked way is the original way of pain or grief. In it we shall expose ourselves to the judgments of God, even in this world; and we shall be great losers by it, in respect to our eternal interest; and that though we may not live in a way of sin wilfully, and with a deliberate resolution, but carelessly, and through the deceitfulness of our corruptions. However, we shall offend God, and prevent the flourishing of grace in our hearts, if not the very being of it.

Many are very careful that they do not proceed in mistakes, where their temporal interest is concerned. They will be strictly careful that they be not led on blindfold in the bargains which they make; in their traffic one with another, they are careful to have their eyes about them, and to see that they go safely in these cases; and why not, where the interest of their souls is concerned?

(4.) We should be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin, because we are exceedingly prone to walk in some such way.—The heart of man is naturally prone to sin; the weight of the soul is naturally that way, as the stone by its weight tendeth downwards. And there is very much of a remaining proneness to sin in the saints. Though sin be mortified in them, yet there is a body of sin and death remaining; there are all manner of lusts and corrupt inclinations.

We are exceeding apt to get into some ill path or other. Man is so prone to sinful ways, that without maintaining a constant strict watch over himself, no other can be expected than that he will walk in some way of sin.

Our hearts are so full of sin, that they are ready to betray us. That to which men are prone, they are apt to get into before they are aware. Sin is apt to steal in upon us unawares. Besides this, we live in a world where we continually meet with temptations; we walk in the midst of snares; and the devil, a subtle adversary, is continually watching over us, endeavouring, by all manner of wiles and devices, to lead us astray into by-paths, 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3. "I am jealous over you. I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety; so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." 1 Pet. v. 8. "Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."—These things should make us the more jealous of ourselves.

(5.) We ought to be concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin; because there are many who live in such ways, and do not consider it, or are not sensible of it. It is a thing of great importance that we should know it, and yet the knowledge is not to be acquired without difficulty. Many live in ways which are offensive to God, who are not sensible of it. They are strangely blinded in this case. Psal. xix. 12. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." By secret faults, the psalmist means those which are secret to himself, those sins which were in him, or which he was guilty of, and yet was not aware of.

Sect. II.

Why many live in sin, and yet not know it.

That the knowing whether we do not live in some way of sin is attended with difficulty, is not because the rules of judging in such a case are not plain or plentiful. God hath abundantly taught us what we ought, and what we ought not, to do; and the rules by which we are to walk are often set before us in the preaching of the word. So that the difficulty of knowing whether there be any wicked way in us, is not for want of external light, or for want of God's having told us plainly and abundantly what are wicked ways. But that many persons live in ways which are displeasing to God, and yet are not sensible of it, may arise from the following things.

1. From the blinding deceitful nature of sin. The heart of man is full of sin and corruption, and that corruption is of an exceedingly darkening, blinding nature. Sin always carries a degree of darkness with it; and the more it prevails, the more it darkens and deludes the mind.—It is from hence that the knowing whether there be any wicked way in us is a difficult thing. The difficulty is not at all for want of light without us, not at all because the word of God is not plain, or the rules not clear; but it is because of the darkness within us. The light shines clear enough around us, but the fault is in our eyes; they are darkened and blinded by a pernicious distemper.

Sin is of a deceitful nature, because, so far as it prevails, so far it gains the inclination and will, and that sways and biases the judgment. So far as any lust prevails, so far it biases the mind to approve of it. So far as any sin sways the inclination or will, so far that sin seems pleasing and good to the man; and that which is pleasing, the mind is prejudiced to think is right.—Hence when any lust hath so gained upon a man, as to get him into a sinful way or practice; it having gained his will, also prejudices his understanding. And the more irregular a man walks, the more will his mind probably be darkened and blinded; because by so much the more doth sin prevail.

Hence many men who live in ways which are not agreeable to the rules of God's word, yet are not sensible of it; and it is a difficult thing to make them so; because the same lust that leads them into that evil way, blinds them in it.—Thus, if a man live a way of malice or envy, the more malice or envy prevails, the more will it blind his understanding to approve of it. The more a man hates his neighbour, the more will he be disposed to think that he has just cause to hate him, and that his neighbour is hateful, and deserves to be hated, and that it is not his duty to love him. So if a man live in any way of lasciviousness, the more his impure lust prevails, the more sweet and pleasant will it make the sin appear, and so the more will he be disposed and prejudiced to think there is no evil in it.

So the more a man lives in a way of covetousness, or the more inordinately he desires the profits of the world, the more will he think himself excusable in so doing, and the more will he think that he has a necessity of those things, and cannot do without them. And if they be necessary, then he is excusable for eagerly desiring them. The same might be shown of all the lusts which are in men's hearts. By how much the more they prevail, by so much the more do they blind the mind, and dispose the judgment to approve of them. All lusts are

deceitful lusts. Eph. iv. 22. "That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts."

And even godly men may for a time be blinded and deluded by a lust, so far as to live in a way which is displeasing to God.

The lusts of men's hearts—prejudicing them in favour of sinful practices, to which those lusts tend, and in which they delight—stir up carnal reason, and put men, with all the subtlety of which they are capable, to invent pleas and arguments to justify such practices. When men are very strongly inclined and tempted to any wicked practice, and conscience troubles them about it, they will rack their brains to find out arguments to stop the mouth of conscience, and to make themselves believe that they may lawfully proceed in that practice.

When men have entered upon an ill practice, and proceeded in it, then their self-love prejudices them to approve of it. Men do not love to condemn themselves; they are prejudiced in their own favour, and in favour of whatever is found in themselves. Hence they will find out good names, by which to call their evil dispositions and practices; they will make them virtuous, or at least will make them innocent. Their covetousness they will call prudence and diligence in business. If they rejoice at another's calamity, they pretend it is because they hope it will do him good, and will humble him. If they indulge in excessive drinking, it is because their constitutions require it. If they talk against and backbite their neighbour, they call it zeal against sin; it is because they would bear a testimony against such wickedness. If they set up their wills to oppose others in public affairs, then they call their wilfulness conscience, or respect to the public good.—Thus they find good names for all their evil ways.

Men are very apt to bring their principles to their practices, and not their practices to their principles, as they ought to do. They, in their practice, comply not with their consciences; but all their strife is to bring their consciences to comply with their practice.

On the account of this deceitfulness of sin, and because we have so much sin dwelling in our hearts, it is a difficult thing to pass a true judgment on our own ways and practices. On this account we should make diligent search, and be much concerned to know whether there be not some wicked way in us. Heb. iii. 12, 13. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you

an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Men can more easily see faults in others than they can in themselves. When they see others out of the way, they will presently condemn them, when perhaps they do, or have done, the same, or the like, themselves, and in themselves justify it. Men can discern motes in others’ eyes, better than they can beams in their own. Prov. xxi. 2. “Every way of man is right in his own eyes.” The heart in this matter is exceedingly deceitful. Jer. xvii. 9. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” We ought not therefore to trust in our own hearts in this matter, but to keep a jealous eye on ourselves, to pry into our own hearts and ways, and to cry to God that he would search us. Prov. xxviii. 26. “He that trusteth his own heart is a fool.”

Satan also sets in with our deceitful lusts, and labours to blind us in this matter. He is continually endeavouring to lead us into sinful ways, and sets in with carnal reason to flatter us in such ways, and to blind the conscience. He is the prince of darkness; he labours to blind and deceive; it hath been his work ever since he began it with our first parents.

3. Sometimes men are not sensible, because they are stupefied through custom. Custom in an evil practice stupefies the mind, so that it makes any way of sin, which at first was offensive to conscience, after a while, to seem harmless.

4. Sometimes persons live in ways of sin, and are not sensible of it, because they are blinded by common custom, and the examples of others. There are so many who go into the practice, and it is so common a custom, that it is esteemed little or no discredit to a man; it is little testified against. This causes some things to appear innocent, which are very displeasing to God, and abominable in his sight. Perhaps we see them practised by those of whom we have a high esteem, by our superiors, and those who are accounted wise men. This greatly prepossesses the mind in favour of them, and takes off the sense of their evil. Or if they be observed to be commonly practised by those who are accounted godly men, men of experience in religion, this tends greatly to harden the heart, and blind the mind with respect to any evil practice.

5. Persons are in great danger of living in ways of sin and not being sensible of it, for want of duly regarding and considering their duty in the full extent of it. There are some who hear of

the necessity of reforming from all sins, and attending all duties, and will set themselves to perform some particular duties, at the same time neglecting others. Perhaps their thoughts will be wholly taken up about religious duties, such as prayer in secret, reading the Scriptures and other good books, going to public worship and giving diligent attention, keeping the Sabbath, and serious meditation. They seem to regard these things, as though they comprised their duty in its full extent, and as if this were their whole work; and moral duties towards their neighbours, their duties in the relations in which they stand, their duties as husbands or wives, as brethren or sisters, or their duties as neighbours, seem not to be considered by them.

They consider not the necessity of those things: and when they hear of earnestly seeking salvation in a way of diligent attendance on all duties, they seem to leave those out of their thoughts, as if they were not meant; nor any other duties, except reading, and praying, and keeping the Sabbath, and the like. Or, if they do regard some parts of their moral duty, it may be other branches of it are not considered. Thus if they be just in their dealings, yet perhaps they neglect deeds of charity.

They know they must not defraud their neighbour; they must not lie; they must not commit uncleanness; but seem not to consider what an evil it is to talk against others lightly, or to take up a reproach against them, or to contend and quarrel with them, or to live contrary to the rules of the gospel in their family-relations, or not to instruct their children or servants.

Many men seem to be very conscientious in some things, in some branches of their duty on which they keep their eye, when other important branches are entirely neglected, and seem not to be noticed by them. They regard not their duty in the full extent of it.

Sect. III.

What method we ought to take, in order to find out whether we do not live in some way of sin. This, as hath been observed, is a difficult thing to be known; but it is not a matter of so much difficulty, but that if persons were sufficiently concerned about it, and strict and thorough in inquiring and searching, it might, for the most part, be discovered; men might know whether they live in any way of sin, or not. Persons who are deeply concerned to

please and obey God, need not, under the light we enjoy, go on in the ways of sin through ignorance.

It is true, that our hearts are exceedingly deceitful; but God, in his holy word, hath given that light with respect to our duty, which is accommodated to the state of darkness in which we are so that by thorough care and inquiry, we may know our duty, and know whether or no we live in any sinful way. And every one who hath any true love to God and his duty will be glad of assistance in this inquiry. It is with such persons a concern which lies with much weight upon their spirits, in all things to walk as God would have them, and so as to please and honour him. If they live in any way which is offensive to God, they will be glad to know it, and do by no means choose to have it concealed from them.

All those also, who in good earnest make the inquiry, what shall I do to be saved? will be glad to know whether they do not live in some sinful way of behaviour; for if they live in any such way, it is a great disadvantage to them with respect to that great concern. It behoves everyone who is seeking salvation, to know and avoid every sinful way in which he lives. The means by which we must come to the knowledge of this, are two; viz. the knowledge of the rule, and the knowledge of ourselves.

1st, If we would know whether we do not live in some way of sin, we should take a great deal of pains to be thoroughly acquainted with the rule.—God hath given us a true and perfect rule, by which we ought to walk. And that we might be able, notwithstanding our darkness, and the disadvantages which attend us, to know our duty, he hath laid the rule before us abundantly. What a full and abundant revelation of the mind of God have we in the Scriptures! And how plain is it in what relates to practice! How often are rules repeated! In how many various forms are they revealed, that we might the more fully understand them!

But to what purpose will all this care of God to inform us be, if we neglect the revelation which God hath made of his mind, and take no care to become acquainted with it? It is impossible that we should know whether we do not live in a way of sin, unless we know the rule by which we are to walk. The sinfulness of any way consists in its disagreement from the rule; and we cannot know whether it agree with the rule or not, unless we be acquainted with the rule. Rom. iii. 20. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.”

Therefore, lest we go in ways displeasing to God, we ought with the greatest diligence to study, the rules which God hath given us. We ought to read and search the Holy Scriptures much, and do it with the design to know the whole of our duty, and in order that the word of God may be “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths.” Psal. cxix. 105. Every one ought to strive to get knowledge in divine things, and to grow in such knowledge, to the end that he may know his duty, and know what God would have him to do.

These things being so, are not the greater part of men very much to blame in that they take no more pains or care to acquire the knowledge of divine things? in that they no more study the Holy Scriptures, and other books which might inform them? as if it were the work of ministers only, to take pains to acquire this knowledge. But why is it so much a minister’s work to strive after knowledge, unless it be, that others may acquire knowledge by him?—Will not many be found inexcusable in the sinful ways in which they live through ignorance and mistake, because their ignorance is a wilful, allowed ignorance? They are ignorant of their duty, but it is their own fault they are so; they have advantages enough to know, and may know it if they will; but they take pains to acquire knowledge, and to be well skilled in their outward affairs, upon which their temporal interest depends; but will not take pains to know their duty.

We ought to take great pains to be well informed, especially in those things which immediately concern us, or which relate to our particular cases.

2dly, The other mean is the knowledge of ourselves, as subject to the rule.—If we would know whether we do not live in some way of sin, we should take the utmost care to be well acquainted with ourselves, as well as with the rule, that we may be able to compare ourselves with the rule.

When we have found what the rule is, then we should be strict in examining ourselves, whether or no we be conformed to the rule. This is the direct way in which our characters are to be discovered.

It is one thing wherein man differs from brute creatures, that he is capable of self-reflection, or of reflecting upon his own actions, and what passes in his own mind, and considering the nature and quality of them. And doubtless it was partly for this end that God gave us this

power, which is denied to other creatures, that we might know ourselves, and consider our own ways.

We should examine our hearts and ways, until we have satisfactorily discovered either their agreement or disagreement with the rules of Scripture. This is a matter that requires the utmost diligence, lest we overlook our own irregularities, lest some evil way in us should lie hid under disguise, and pass unobserved. One would think we are under greater advantages to be acquainted with ourselves, than with anything else; for we are always present with ourselves, and have an immediate consciousness of our own actions: all that passeth in us, or is done by us, is immediately under our eye. Yet really in some respects the knowledge of nothing is so difficult to be obtained, as the knowledge of ourselves. We should therefore use great diligence in prying into the secrets of our hearts, and in examining all our ways and practices. That you may the more successfully use those means to know whether you do not live in some way of sin; be advised,

1. Evermore to join self-reflection with reading and hearing the word of God. When you read or hear, reflect on yourselves as you go along, comparing yourselves and your own ways with what you read or hear. Reflect and consider what agreement or disagreement there is between the word and your ways. The Scriptures testify against all manner of sin, and contain directions for every duty; as the apostle saith, 2 Tim. iii. 16. "And is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Therefore when you there read the rules given us by Christ and his apostles, reflect and consider, each one of you with himself, Do I live according to this rule? Or do I live in any respect contrary to it?

When you read in the historical parts of Scripture an account of the sins of which others have been guilty, reflect on yourselves as you go along, and inquire whether you do not in some degree live in the same or like practices. When you there read accounts how God reproved the sins of others, and executed judgments upon them for their sins, examine whether you be not guilty of things of the same nature. When you read the examples of Christ, and of the saints recorded in Scripture, inquire whether you do not live in ways contrary to those examples. When you read there how God commended and rewarded any persons for their virtues and good deeds, inquire whether you perform those duties for which they were commended and rewarded, or whether you do not live in the contrary sins

or vices. Let me further direct you, particularly to read the Scriptures to these ends, that you may compare and examine yourselves in the manner now mentioned.

So if you would know whether you do not live in some way of sin, whenever you hear any sin testified against, or any duty urged, in the preaching of the word, be careful to look back upon yourselves, to compare yourselves and your own ways with what you hear, and strictly examine yourselves, whether you live in this or the other sinful way which you hear testified against; and whether you do this duty which you hear urged. Make use of the word as a glass, wherein you may behold yourselves.

How few are there who do this as they ought to do! who, while the minister is testifying against sin, are busy with themselves in examining their own hearts and ways! The generality rather think of others, how this or that person lives in a manner contrary to what is preached; so that there may be hundreds of things delivered in the preaching of the word, which properly belong to them, and are well suited to their cases; yet it never so much as comes into their minds, that what is delivered any way concerns them. Their minds readily fix upon others, and they can charge them, but never think whether or no they themselves be the persons.

2. If you live in any ways which are generally condemned by the better, and more sober, sort of men, be especially careful to inquire concerning these, whether they be not ways of sin. Perhaps you have argued with yourselves, that such or such a practice is lawful; you cannot see any evil in it. However, if it be generally condemned by godly ministers, and the better and more pious sort of people, it certainly looks suspicious, whether or no there be not some evil in it; so that you may well be put upon inquiring with the utmost strictness, whether it be not sinful. The practice being so generally disapproved of by those who in such cases are most likely to be in the right, may reasonably put you upon more than ordinarily nice and diligent inquiry concerning the lawfulness or unlawfulness of it.

3. Examine yourselves, whether all the ways in which you live, are likely to be pleasant to think of upon a death-bed. Persons often in health allow and plead for those things, which they would not dare to do, if they looked upon themselves as shortly about to go out of the world. They in a great measure still their consciences as to ways in which they walk, and keep them pretty easy, while death is thought of as at a distance: yet reflections on these

same ways are very uncomfortable when they are going out of the world. Conscience is not so easily blinded and muffled then as at other times.

Consider therefore, and inquire diligently, whether or no you do not live in some practice or other, as to the lawfulness of which, when it shall come into your minds upon your death-bed, you will choose to have some further satisfaction, and some better argument than you now have, to prove that it is not sinful, in order to your being easy about it. Think over your particular ways, and try yourselves, with the awful expectation of soon going out of the world into eternity, and earnestly endeavour impartially to judge what ways you will on a death-bed approve of and rejoice in, and what you will disapprove of, and wish you had let alone.

4. Be advised to consider what others say of you, and improve it to this end, to know whether you do not live in some way of sin. Although men are blind to their own faults, yet they easily discover the faults of others, and are apt enough to speak of them. Sometimes persons live in ways which do not at all become them, yet are blind to it themselves, not seeing the deformity of their own ways, while it is most plain and evident to others. They themselves cannot see it, yet others cannot shut their eyes against it, cannot avoid seeing it.

For instance, some persons are of a very proud behaviour, and are not sensible of it; but it appears notorious to others. Some are of a very worldly spirit they are set after the world, so as to be noted for it, so as to have a name for it; yet they seem not to be sensible of it themselves. Some are of a very malicious and envious spirit; and others see it, and to them it appears very hateful; yet they themselves do not reflect upon it. Therefore since there is no trusting to our own hearts and our own eyes in such cases, we should make our improvement of what others say of us, observe what they charge us with, and what fault they find with us, and strictly examine whether there be not foundation for it.

If others charge us with being proud; or worldly, close, and niggardly; or spiteful and malicious; or with any other ill temper or practice; we should improve it in self-reflection, to inquire whether it be not so, and though the imputation may seem to us to be very groundless, and we think that they, in charging us so and so, are influenced by no good spirit; yet if we act prudently, we shall take so much notice of it as to make it an occasion of examining ourselves.

Thus we should improve what our friends say to us and of us, when they from friendship tell us of anything which they observe amiss in us. It is most imprudent, as well as most unChristian, to take it amiss, and resent it, when we are thus told of our faults: we should rather rejoice in it, that we are shown our spots. Thus also we should improve what our enemies say of us. If they from an ill spirit reproach and revile us to our faces, we should consider it, so far as to reflect inward upon ourselves, and inquire whether it be not so, as they charge us. For though what is said, be said in a reproachful, reviling manner; yet there may be too much truth in it. When men revile others even from an ill spirit towards them; yet they are likely to fix upon real faults; they are likely to fall upon us where we are weakest and most defective, and where we have given them most occasion.

An enemy will soonest attack us where we can least defend ourselves: and a man that reviles us, though he do it from an unchristian spirit, and in an unchristian manner, yet will be most likely to speak of that, for which we are really most to blame, and are most blamed by others.

So when we hear of others talking against us behind our backs, though they do very ill in so doing, yet the right improvement of it will be, to reflect upon ourselves, and consider whether we indeed have not those faults which they lay to our charge. This will be a more Christian and a more wise improvement of it, than to be in a rage, to revile again, and to entertain an ill-will towards them for their evil-speaking. This is the most wise and prudent improvement of such things. Hereby we may get good out of evil; and this is the surest way to defeat the designs of our enemies in reviling and backbiting us. They do it from ill will, and to do us an injury; but in this way we may turn it to our own good.

5. Be advised, when you see others' faults, to examine whether there be not the same in yourselves. This is not done by many, as is evident from this, that they are so ready to speak of others' faults, and aggravate them, when they have the very same themselves. Thus, nothing is more common than for proud men to accuse others of pride, and to declaim against them upon that account. So it is common for dishonest men to complain of being wronged by others. When a person seeth ill dispositions and practices in others, he is not under the same disadvantage in seeing their odiousness and deformity, as when he looks upon any ill disposition or practice in himself. He can see how odious these and those things are in others; he can easily see what a hateful thing pride is in another; and so of malice,

and other evil dispositions or practices. In others he can easily see their deformity; for he doth not look through such a deceitful glass, as when he sees the same things in himself.

Therefore, when you see others' faults; when you take notice, how such an one acts amiss, what an ill spirit he shows, and how unsuitable his behaviour is; when you hear others speak of it, and when you yourselves find fault with others in their dealings with you, or in things wherein you are any way concerned with them; then reflect, and consider, whether there be nothing of the same nature in yourselves. Consider that these things are just as deformed and hateful in you as they are in others. Pride, a haughty spirit and carriage, are as odious in you as they are in your neighbour.

Your malicious and revengeful spirit towards your neighbour, is just as hateful as a malicious and revengeful spirit in him towards you. It is as unreasonable for you to wrong, and to be dishonest with your neighbour, as it is for him to wrong, and be dishonest with you. It is as injurious and unchristian for you to talk against others behind their backs, as it is for others to do the same with respect to you.

6. Consider the ways in which others are blinded as to sins in which they live, and strictly inquire whether you be not blinded in the same ways. You are sensible that others are blinded by their lusts; consider whether the prevalence of some carnal appetite or lust of the mind have not blinded you. You see how others are blinded by their temporal interest; inquire whether your temporal interests do not blind you also in some things, so as to make you allow yourselves in things which are not right. You are as liable to be blinded through inclination and interest, and have the same deceitful and wicked hearts as other men, Prov. xxvii. 12. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."

Sect. IV.

Particular subjects of self-examination—The Lord's day—God's house.

I desire all those would strictly examine themselves in the following particulars, who are concerned not to live in any way of sin, as I hope there are a considerable number of such now present; and this certainly will be the case with all who are godly, and all who are duly concerned for their own salvation.

1. Examine yourselves with respect to the Sabbath-day, whether you do not live in some way of breaking or profaning God's holy Sabbath. Do you strictly in all things keep this day, as sacred to God, in governing your thoughts, words, and actions, as the word of God requires on this holy day? Inquire whether you do not only fail in particulars, but whether you do not live in some way whereby this day is profaned; and particularly inquire concerning three things.

(1.) Whether it be not a frequent thing with you to encroach upon the Sabbath at its beginning, and after the Sabbath is begun to be out at your work, or following that worldly business which is proper to be done only in our own time. If this be a thing in which you allow yourselves, you live in a way of sin; for it is a thing which can by no means be justified. You have no more warrant to be out with your team, or to be cutting wood, or doing any other worldly business, immediately after the Sabbath is begun, than you have to do it in the middle of the day. The time is as holy near the beginning of the Sabbath as it is in the middle; it is the whole that we are to rest, and to keep holy, and devote to God; we have no licence to take any part of it to ourselves.

When men often thus encroach upon the Sabbath, it cannot be from any necessity which can justify them: it can only be for want of due care, and due regard to holy time. They can with due care get their work finished, so that they can leave it by a certain hour. This is evident, for when they are under a natural necessity of finishing their work by a certain time, then they do take that care as to have done before that time comes: as, for instance, when they are aware that at such a time it will be dark, and they will not be able to follow their work any longer, but will be under a natural necessity of leaving off; why, then, they will and do take care ordinarily to have finished their work before that time; and this although the darkness sometimes begins sooner, and sometimes later.

This shows that with due care men can ordinarily have done their work by a limited time. If proper care will finish their work by a limited time when they are under a natural necessity of it, the same care would as well finish it by a certain time when we are only under a moral necessity.

If men knew that as soon as ever the Sabbath should begin, it would be perfectly dark, so that they would be under a natural necessity of leaving off their work abroad by that time, then we should see that they would generally have their work done before the time. This

shows that it is only for want of care, and of regard to the holy command of God, that men so frequently have some of their work abroad to do after the Sabbath is begun.

Nehemiah took great care that no burden should be borne after the beginning of the Sabbath, Nehem. xiii. 19. "And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath," i.e. began to be darkened by the shade of the mountains before sun-set, "I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath; and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should be no burden brought in on the Sabbath-day."

(2.) Examine whether it be not your manner to talk on the Sabbath of things unsuitable for holy time. If you do not move such talk yourselves, yet when you fall into company that set you the example, are you not wont to join in diverting talk, or in talk of worldly affairs, quite wide from any relation to the business of the day? There is as much reason that you should keep the Sabbath holy with your tongues, as with your hands. If it be unsuitable for you to employ your hands about common and worldly things, why is it not as unsuitable for you to employ your tongues about them?

(3.) Inquire whether it be not your manner to loiter away the time of the Sabbath, and to spend it in a great measure in idleness, in doing nothing. Do you not spend more time on Sabbath-day, than on other days, on your beds, or otherwise idling away the time, not improving it as a precious opportunity of seeking God, and your own salvation?

2. Examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin with respect to the institutions of God's house. Here I shall mention several instances.

(1.) Do you not wholly neglect some of those institutions, as particularly the sacrament of the Lords supper? Perhaps you pretend scruples of conscience that you are not fit to come to that ordinance, and question whether you be commanded to come. But are your scruples the result of a serious and careful inquiry? Are they not rather a cloak for your own negligence, indolence, and thoughtlessness concerning your duty? Are you satisfied, have you thoroughly inquired and looked into this matter? If not, do you not live in sin, in that you do not more thoroughly inquire? are you excusable in neglecting a positive institution, when you are scrupulous about your duty, and yet do not thoroughly inquire what it is?

But be it so, that you are unprepared; is not this your own sin, your own fault? and can sin excuse you from attending on a positive institution of Christ? When persons are like to have children to be baptized, they can be convinced that it is their duty to come. If it be only conscience that detained them, why doth it not detain them as well now as heretofore? or if they now be more thorough in their inquiries concerning their duty, ought they not to have been thorough in their inquiries before as well as now?

(2.) Do you not live in sin, in living in the neglect of singing God's praises? If singing praise to God be an ordinance of God's public worship, as doubtless it is, then it ought to be performed by the whole worshipping assembly. If it be a command that we should worship God in this way, then all ought to obey this command, not only by joining with others in singing, but in singing themselves. For if we suppose it answers the command of God for us only to join in our hearts with others, it will run us into this absurdity, that all may do so; and then there would be none to sing, none for others to join with.

If it be an appointment of God, that Christian congregations should sing praises to him, then doubtless it is the duty of all; if there be no exception in the rule, then all ought to comply with it, unless they be incapable of it, or unless it would be a hindrance to the other work of God's house, as the case may be with ministers, who sometimes may be in great need of that respite and intermission after public prayers, to recover their breath and strength, so that they may be fit to speak the word. But if persons be now not capable, because they know not how to sing, that doth not excuse them, unless they have been incapable of learning. As it is the command of God, that all should sing, so all should make conscience of learning to sing, as it is a thing which cannot be decently performed at all without learning. Those, therefore, who neglect to learn to sing, live in sin, as they neglect what is necessary in order to their attending one of the ordinances of God's worship. Not only should persons make conscience of learning to sing themselves, but parents should conscientiously see to it, that their children are taught this among other things, as their education and instruction belongs to them.

(3.) Are you not guilty of allowing yourselves in sin, in neglecting to do your part towards the removal of scandals from among us? All persons that are in the church, and the children of the church, are under the watch of the church; and it is one of those duties to which we are bound by the covenant which we either actually or virtually make, in uniting ourselves to a

particular church, that we will watch over our brethren, and do our part to uphold the ordinances of God in their purity.

This is the end of the institution of particular churches, viz. the maintaining of the ordinances of divine worship there, in the manner which God hath appointed.

Examine whether you have not allowed yourselves in sin with respect to this matter, through fear of offending your neighbours. Have you not allowedly neglected the proper steps for removing scandals, when you have seen them; the steps of reproving them privately, where the case would allow of it, and of telling them to the church, where the case required it? Instead of watching over your brother, have you not rather hid yourselves, that ye might not be witnesses against him? And when you have seen scandal in him, have you not avoided the taking of proper steps according to the case?

(4.) Art not thou one whose manner it is, to come late to the public worship of God, and especially in winter, when the weather is cold? and dost thou not live in sin in so doing? Consider whether it be a way which can be justified; whether it be a practice which doth honour to God and religion; whether it have not the appearance of setting light by the public worship and ordinances of God's house. Doth it not show that thou dost not prize such opportunities, and that thou art willing to have as little of them as thou canst? Is it not a disorderly practice? and if all should do as thou dost, what confusion would it occasion?

(5.) Art thou not one whose manner it commonly is to sleep in the time of public service? And is not this to live in a way of sin? Consider the matter rationally; is it a thing to be justified, for thee to lay thyself down to sleep, while thou art present in the time of divine service, and pretendest to be one of the worshipping assembly, and to be hearing a message from God? Would it not be looked upon as a high affront, an odious behaviour, if thou shouldst do so in the presence of a king, while a message was delivering to thee, in his name, by one of his servants? Canst thou put a greater contempt on the message which the King of kings sendeth to thee, concerning things of the greatest importance, than from time to time to lay thyself down, and compose thyself to sleep, while the messenger is delivering his message to thee?

(6.) Art thou not one who is not careful to keep his mind intent upon what is said and done in public worship? Dost thou not, in the midst of the most solemn acts of worship, suffer thy

thoughts to rove after worldly objects, worldly cares and concerns, or perhaps the objects of thy wicked lusts and desires? and dost thou not herein live in a way of sin?

Sect. V.

Self-examination concerning secret sins.

I shall now propose to you to examine yourselves, Whether you do not live in some secret sin; whether you do not live in the neglect of some secret duty, or secretly live in some practice which is offensive to the pure and all-seeing eye of God. Here you should examine yourselves concerning all secret duties, as reading, meditation, secret prayer; whether you attend those at all, or if you do, whether you do not attend them in an unsteady and careless manner. You should also examine yourselves concerning all secret sins. Strictly inquire what your behaviour is, when you are hid from the eye of the world, when you are under no other restraints than those of conscience, when you are not afraid of the eye of man, and have nothing to fear but the all-seeing eye of God.—Here, among many other things which might be mentioned, I shall particularly mention two.

(1.) Inquire whether you do not live in the neglect of the duty of reading the Holy Scriptures. The Holy Scriptures were surely written to be read; and unless we be popish in our principles, we shall maintain, that they were not only given to be read by ministers, but by the people too. It doth not answer the design for which they were given, that we have once read them, and that we once in a great while read something in them. They were given to be always with us, to be continually conversed with, as a rule of life. As the artificer must always have his rule with him in his work; and the blind man that walks must always have his guide by him; and he that walks in darkness must have his light with him; so the Scriptures were given to be a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.

That we may continually use the Scriptures as our rule of life, we should make them our daily companion, and keep them with us continually; Josh. i. 8. “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night.” See also Deut. vi. 6-9. So Christ commands us to search the Scriptures, John v. 39. These are the mines wherein we are to dig for wisdom as for hidden treasures. Inquire, therefore, whether you

do not live in the neglect of this duty, or neglect it so far, that you may be said to live in a way of sin.

(2.) Inquire whether you do not live in some way of secretly gratifying some sensual lust. There are many ways and degrees, wherein a carnal lust may be indulged; but every way is provoking to a holy God. Consider whether, although you restrain yourselves from more gross indulgences, you do not, in some way or other, and in some degree or other, secretly from time to time gratify your lusts, and allow yourselves to taste the sweets of unlawful delight.

Persons may greatly provoke God, by only allowedly gratifying their lusts in their thoughts and imaginations. They may also greatly provoke God by excess and intemperance in gratifying their animal appetites in those things which are in themselves lawful. Inquire, therefore, whether you do not live in some sinful way or other, in secretly gratifying a sinful appetite.

Sect. VI.

Self-examination concerning our temper of mind towards our neighbours—and our dealings with them.

I would propose to you to examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin,—1. In the spirit and temper of mind which you allow towards your neighbour.

(1.) Do you not allow and indulge a passionate, furious disposition? If your natural temper be hasty and passionate, do you truly strive against such a temper, and labour to govern your spirit?

Do you lament it, and watch over yourselves to prevent it? or do you allow yourselves in a fiery temper? Such a disposition doth not become a Christian, or a man. It doth not become a man, because it unmans him; it turns a man from a rational creature, to be like a wild beast. When men are under the prevalence of a furious passion, they have not much of the exercise of reason. We are warned to avoid such men, as being dangerous creatures, Prov.

xxii. 24, 25. "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."

(2.) Do not you live in hatred towards some or other of your neighbours? Do you not hate him for real or supposed injuries that you have received from him? Do you not hate him, because he is not friendly towards you, and because you judge that he hath an ill spirit against you, and hates you, and because he opposes you, and doth not show you that respect which you think belongs to you, or doth not show himself forward to promote your interest or honour? Do you not hate him, because you think he despises you, has mean thoughts of you, and takes occasion to show it? Do you not hate him, because he is of the opposite party to that which is in your interest, and because he has considerable influence in that party.

Doubtless you will be loath to call it by so harsh a name as hatred; but inquire seriously and impartially, whether it be anything better. Do you not feel ill towards him? Do you not feel a prevailing disposition within you to be pleased when you hear him talked against and run down, and to be glad when you hear of any dishonour put upon him, or of any disappointments which happen to him? Would you not be glad of an opportunity to be even with him for the injuries which he hath done you? And wherein doth hatred work but in such ways as these?

(3.) Inquire whether you do not live in envy towards someone at least of your neighbours. Is not his prosperity, his riches, or his advancement in honour, uncomfortable to you? Have you not, therefore, an ill will, or at least less good will to him, because you look upon him as standing in your way, you look upon yourself as depressed by his advancement? And would it not be pleasing to you now, if he should be deprived of his riches, or of his honours, not from pure respect to the public good, but because you reckon he stands in your way? Is it not merely from a selfish spirit that you are so uneasy at his prosperity?

2. I shall propose to your consideration, whether you do not live in some way of sin, and wrong in your dealings with your neighbours.

(1.) Inquire whether you do not from time to time injure and defraud those with whom you deal. Are your ways with your neighbour altogether just, such as will bear a trial by the strict rules of the word of God, or such as you can justify before God? Are you a faithful person?

may your neighbours depend on your word? Are you strictly and firmly true to your trust, or anything with which you are entrusted, and which you undertake? Or do you not by your conduct plainly show, that you are not conscientious in such things?

Do you not live in a careless sinful neglect of paying your debts? Do you not, to the detriment of your neighbour, sinfully withhold that which is not your own, but his? Are you not wont to oppress your neighbour? When you see another in necessity, do you not thence take advantage to screw upon him? When you see a person ignorant, and perceive that you have an opportunity to make your gains of it, are you not wont to take such an opportunity? Will you not deceive in buying and selling, and labour to blind the eyes of him of whom you buy, or to whom you sell, with deceitful words, hiding the faults of what you sell, and denying the good qualities of what you buy, and not strictly keeping to the truth, when you see that falsehood will be an advantage to you in your bargain?

(2.) Do you not live in some wrong which you have formerly done your neighbour without repairing it? Are you not conscious that you have formerly, at some time or other, wronged your neighbour, and yet you live in it, have never repaired the injury which you have done him? If so, you live in a way of sin.

Sect. VII.

Self-examination respecting charity towards our neighbours, and conversation with them. I desire you would examine yourselves, 1. Whether you do not live in the neglect of the duties of charity towards your neighbour, you may live in sin towards your neighbour, though you cannot charge yourselves with living in any injustice in your dealings. Here also I would mention two things.

(1.) Whether you are guilty of sinfully withholding from your neighbour who is in want. Giving to the poor, and giving liberally and bountifully, is a duty absolutely required of us. It is not a thing left to persons' choice to do as they please; nor is it merely a thing commendable in persons to be liberal to others in want; but it is a duty as strictly and absolutely required and commanded as any other duty whatsoever, a duty from which God will not acquit us; as you may see in Deut. xv. 7, 8,. &c. and the neglect of this duty is very

provoking to God, Prov. xxi. 13. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also himself shall cry, and not be heard."

Inquire, therefore, whether you have not lived in a way of sin in this regard. Do you not see your neighbour suffer, and pinched with want, and you, although sensible of it, harden your hearts against him, and are careless about it? Do you not in such a case, neglect to inquire into his necessities, and to do something for his relief? Is it not your manner to hide your eyes in such cases, and to be so far from devising liberal things, and endeavouring to find out the proper objects and occasions of charity, that you rather contrive to avoid the knowledge of them? Are you not apt to make objections to such duties, and to excuse yourselves? And are you not sorry for such occasions, on which you are forced to give something, or expose your reputation?—Are not such things grievous to you? If these things be so, surely you live in sin, and in great sin, and have need to inquire, whether your spot be not such as is not the spot of God's children.

(2.) Do you not live in the neglect of reproving your neighbour, when you see him going on in a way of sin? This is required of us by the command of God, as a duty of love and charity which we owe our neighbour: Lev. xix. 17. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." When we see our neighbour going on in sin, we ought to go, and in a Christian way deal with him about it. Nor will it excuse us, that we fear it will have no good effect; we cannot certainly tell what effect it will have. This is past doubt, that if Christians generally performed this duty as they ought to do, it would prevent abundance of sin and wickedness, and would deliver many a soul from the ways of death.

If a man going on in the ways of sin, saw that it was generally disliked and discountenanced, and testified against by others, it would have a strong tendency to reform him. His regard for his own reputation would strongly persuade him to reform; for hereby he would see that the way in which he lives makes him odious in the eyes of others. When persons go on in sin, and no one saith anything to them in testimony against it, they know not but that their ways are approved, and are not sensible that it is much to their dishonour to do as they do. The approbation of others tends to blind men's eyes, and harden their hearts in sin; whereas, if they saw that others utterly disapprove of their ways, it would tend to open their eyes and convince them.

If others neglect their duty in this respect, and our reproof alone will not be so likely to be effectual; yet that doth not excuse us: for if one singly may be excused, then everyone may be excused, and so we shall make it no duty at all.

Persons often need the reproofs and admonitions of others, to make them sensible that the ways in which they live are sinful; for, as hath been already observed, men are often blinded as to their own sins.

2. Examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin in your conversation with your neighbours. Men commit abundance of sin, not only in the business and dealings which they have with their neighbours, but in their talk and converse with them.

(1.) Inquire whether you do not keep company with persons of a lewd and immoral behaviour, with persons who do not make conscience of their ways, are not of sober lives, but on the contrary, are profane and extravagant, and unclean in their communication. This is what the word of God forbids, and testifies against: Prov. xiv. 7. "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." Prov. xiii. 20. "A companion of fools shall be destroyed." The psalmist professes himself clear of this sin, Psalm xxvi. 4, 5. "I have not sat with vain persons; neither will I go with dissemblers: I have hated the congregation of evil doers, and will not sit with the wicked."

Do you not live in this sin? Do you not keep company with such persons? and have you not found them a snare to your souls? If you have any serious thoughts about the great concerns of your souls, have you not found this a great hindrance to you? Have you not found that it hath been a great temptation to you? Have you not been from time to time led into sin thereby? Perhaps it may seem difficult wholly to forsake your old wicked companions. You are afraid they will deride you, and make game of you; therefore you have not courage enough to do it. But whether it be difficult or not, yet know this, that if you continue in such connexions, you live in a way of sin, and, as the Scripture saith, you shall be destroyed. You must either cut off your right hands, and pluck out your right eyes, or else even go with them into the fire that never shall be quenched.

(2.) Consider whether, in your conversation with others, you do not accustom yourselves to evil speaking. How common is it for persons, when they meet together, to sit and spend their time in talking against others, judging this or that of them, spreading ill and uncertain

reports which they have heard of them, running down one and another, and ridiculing their infirmities! How much is such sort of talk as this the entertainment of companies when they meet together! and what talk is there which seems to be more entertaining, to which persons will more listen, and in which they will seem to be more engaged, than such talk! You cannot but know how common this is.

Therefore examine whether you be not guilty of this—And can you justify it? Do you not know it to be a way of sin, a way which is condemned by many rules in the word of God? Are you not guilty of eagerly taking up any ill report which you hear of your neighbour, seeming to be glad that you have some news to talk of, with which you think others will be entertained? Do you not often spread ill reports which you hear of others, before you know what ground there is for them? Do you not take a pleasure in being the reporter of such news? Are you not wont to pass a judgment concerning others, or their behaviour, without talking to them, and hearing what they have to say for themselves? Doth not that folly and shame belong to you which is spoken of in Prov. xviii. 13.

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” This is utterly an inquiry, a very unChristian practice, which commonly prevails, that men, when they hear or know of any ill of others, will not do a Christian part, in going to talk with them about it, to reprove them for it, but will get behind their backs before they open their mouths, and there are very forward to speak, and to judge, to the hurt of their neighbour’s good name. Consider whether you be not guilty of this. Consider also how apt you are to be displeased when you hear that others have been talking against you! how forward are you to apply the rules, and to think and tell how they ought first to have come and talked with you about it, and not to have gone and spread an ill report of you, before they knew what you had to say in your vindication! How ready are persons to resent it, when others meddle with their private affairs, and busy themselves, and judge, and find fault, and declaim against them! How ready are they to say, it is no business of theirs! Yet are you not guilty of the same?

(3.) Is it not your manner to seem to countenance and fall in with the talk of the company in which you are, in that which is evil? When the company is vain in its talk, and falls into lewd discourse, or vain jesting, is it not your manner, in such a case, to comply and fall in with the company, to seem pleased with its talk, if not to join with it, and help to carry on such

discourse, out of compliance with your company, though indeed you disapprove of it in your hearts? So inquire, whether it be not your manner to fall in with your companions, when they are talking against others. Do you not help forward the discourse, or at least seem to fall in with their censures, the aspersions they cast on others, and the reflections they make upon their neighbours' characters?

There are some persons, who, in case of difference between persons or parties, are double-tongued, will seem to fall in with both parties. When they are with those on one side, they will seem to be on their side, and to fall in with them in their talk against their antagonists. At another time, when they are with those of the other side, they will seem to comply with them, and will condemn the other party; which is a very vile and deceitful practice. Seeming to be friendly to both before their faces, they are enemies to both behind their backs; and that upon so mean a motive as the pleasing of the party with which they are in company. They injure both parties, and do what in them lies to establish the difference between them. Inquire whether or no this be your manner.

(4.) Is it not your manner, not to confine yourselves to strict truth in your conversation with your neighbours? Lying is accounted ignominious and reproachful among men; and they take it in high disdain to be called liars; yet how many are there that do not so govern their tongues, as strictly to confine them to the truth! There are various degrees of transgressing in this kind. Some, who may be cautious of transgressing in one degree, may allow themselves in another. Some, who commonly avoid speaking directly and wholly contrary to truth, in a plain matter of fact; yet perhaps are not strictly true in speaking of their own thoughts, desires, affections, and designs, and are not exact to the truth, in the relations which they give of things in conversation; scruple not to vary in circumstances, to add some things, to make their story the more entertaining; will magnify and enlarge things, to make their relation the more wonderful; and in things wherein their interest or credit is concerned, will make false representations of things: will be guilty of an unwarrantable equivocation, and a guileful way of speaking, wherein they are chargeable with a great abuse of language. In order to save their veracity, words and sentences must be wrested to a meaning quite beside their natural and established signification. Whatever interpretation such men put on their own words, they do not save themselves from the guilt of lying in the sight of God. Inquire whether you be not guilty of living in sin in this particular.

Sect. VIII.

Self-examination respecting the families to which we belong.

Examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way of sin in the families to which you belong. There are many persons who appear well among their neighbours, and seem to be of an honest, civil behaviour in their dealings and conversation abroad; yet if you follow them to their own houses, and to the families to which they belong, there you will find them very perverse in their ways; there they live in ways which are very displeasing to the pure all-searching eyes of God.

You have already been directed to examine your conversation abroad; you have been directed to search the house of God, and to see if you have brought no defilement into it; you have been directed to search your closets, to see if there be no pollution or provocation there; be advised now to search your houses, examine your behaviour in the families to which you belong, and see what your ways and manners are there.

The houses to which we belong are the places where the generality of us spend the greater part of our time. If we respect the world as a man's sphere of action, a man's own house is the greater part of the world to him; i.e. the greater part of his actions and behaviour in the world is limited within this sphere. We should therefore be very critical in examining our behaviour, not only abroad, but at home. A great proportion of the wickedness of which men are guilty, and that will be brought out at the day of judgment, will be the sin which they shall have committed in the families to which they belong.

Therefore inquire how you behave yourselves in the family relations in which you stand. As those relative duties which we owe towards the members of the same family belong to the second table of the law, so love is the general duty which comprises them all. Therefore,

(1.) Examine yourselves, whether you do not live in some way which is contrary to that love which is due to those who belong to the same family. Love, implying a hearty good will, and a behaviour agreeable to it, is a duty which we owe to all mankind. We owe it to our neighbours, to whom we are no otherwise related than as they are our neighbours; yea, we owe it to those who stand in no relation to us, except that they are of mankind, are reasonable creatures, the sons and daughters of Adam. It is a duty that we owe to our

enemies; how much more then do we owe it to those who stand in so near a relation to us as a husband or wife, parents or children, brethren or sisters!

There are the same obligations on us to love such relatives as to love the rest of mankind. We are to love them as men; we are to love them as our neighbours; we are to love them as belonging to the same Christian church; and not only so, but here is an additional obligation, arising from that near relation in which they stand to us. This is over and above the other. The nearer the relation, the greater is the obligation to love. To live in hatred, or in a way that is contrary to love, towards any man, is very displeasing to God; but how much more towards one of the same family! Love is the uniting band of all societies, Col. iii. 14. "And above all these things, put on charity which is the bond of perfectness."

The union in love in our own family should be so much the stronger, as that society is more peculiarly our own, and is more appropriated to ourselves, or is a society in which we are more especially interested. Christ saith, Matt. vii. 22. "I say unto you, whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire."

If this be true concerning those who are our brethren only as men, or professing Christians, how much more concerning those who are of the same family! If contention be so evil a thing in a town among neighbours, how much more hateful is it between members of the same family! If hatred, envy, or revenge, be so displeasing to God, towards those who are only our fellow-creatures, how much more provoking must it be between those that are our natural brothers and sisters, and are one bone and flesh! If only being angry with a neighbour without a cause be so evil, how much sin must needs be committed in those broils and quarrels between the nearest relations on earth!

Let everyone inquire how it is with himself. Do you not in this respect allow yourselves in some way of sin? Are you not often jarring and contending with those who dwell under the same roof? Is not your spirit often ruffled with anger towards some of the same family? Do you not often go so far as to wish evil to them in your hearts, wish that some calamity would befall them? Are you not guilty of reproachful language towards them, if not of revengeful acts? Do you not neglect and refuse those offices of kindness and mutual helpfulness which become those who are of one family? Yea, are there not some who really go so far, as in

some degree to entertain a settled hatred or malice against some of their nearest relations?—But here I would particularly apply myself,

[1.] To husbands and wives. Inquire whether you do not live in some way of sin in this relation. Do you make conscience of performing all those duties which God in his word requires of persons in this relation? or do you allow yourselves in some ways which are directly opposite thereto? Do you not live in ways that are contrary to the obligations into which you entered in your marriage-covenant? The promises which you then made are not only binding as promises which are ordinarily made between man and man, but they have the nature of vows or promissory oaths; they are made in the presence of God, because they respect him as a witness to them; and therefore the marriage-covenant is called the covenant of God; Prov. ii. 17.; “which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God.” When you have vowed that you will behave towards those to whom you are thus united, as the word of God directs in such a relation, are you careless about it, no more thinking what you have promised and vowed, regardless how you perform those vows?

Particularly, are you not commonly guilty of bitterness of spirit towards one another, and of unkindness in your language and behaviour? If wrath, and contention, and unkind and reproachful language, be provoking to God, when only between neighbours; what is it then between those whom God hath joined together to be one flesh, and between whom he hath commanded so great and dear a friendship to be maintained? Eph. v. 28, 29. “So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife, loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.” Eph. v. 25. “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”

It is no excuse at all for either party to indulge bitterness and contention in this relation, that the other party is to blame; for when was there ever one of fallen mankind to be found who had no faults? When God commanded such an entire friendship between man and wife, he knew that the greater part of mankind would have faults; yet he made no exception. And if you think your yoke-fellows have faults, you should consider whether you yourselves have not some too. There never will be any such thing as persons living in peace one with another, in this relation, if this be esteemed a sufficient and justifiable cause of the

contrary. It becomes good friends to cover one another's faults: Love covers a multitude of faults: Prov. x. 1. "Hatred stirreth up strife; but love covereth all sins." But are not you rather quick to spy faults, and ready to make the most of them.

Are not very little things often the occasion of contention between you? Will not a little thing often ruffle your spirits towards your companions? and when any misunderstanding is begun, are you not guilty of exasperating one another's spirits by unkind language, until you blow up a spark into a flame?

Do you endeavour to accommodate yourselves to each other's tempers? Do you study to suit each other? or do you set up your own wills, to have your own ways, in opposition to each other, in the management of your family concerns? Do you make it your study to render each other's lives comfortable? or is there not, on the contrary, very often subsisting between you a spirit of ill will, a disposition to vex and cross one another?

Husbands do sometimes greatly sin against God, in being of an unkind imperious behaviour towards their wives, treating them as if they were servants; and (to mention one instance of such treatment in particular) laying them under unjust and unreasonable restraints in the use and disposal of their common property; forbidding them so much as to dispose of anything in charity, as of their own judgment and prudence. This is directly contrary to the word of God, where it is said of the virtuous wife, Prov. xxxi. 20. that "she stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." If God hath made this her duty, then he hath given her this right and power, because the duty supposes the right. It cannot be the duty of her who hath no right to dispose of anything, to stretch forth her hand to the poor, and to reach forth her hands to the needy.

On the other hand, are not the commands of God, the rules of his word, and the solemn vows of the marriage-covenant, with respect to the subordination which there ought to be in this relation, made light of by many? "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord:" so Col. iii. 18. What is commanded by God, and what hath been solemnly vowed and sworn in his presence, certainly ought not to be made a jest of; and the person who lightly violates these obligations, will doubtless be treated as one who slights the authority of God, and takes his name in vain.

[2.] I shall apply myself to parents and heads of families. Inquire whether you do not live in some way of sin with respect to your children, or others committed to your care: and particularly inquire,

1. Whether you do not live in sin, by living in the neglect of instructing them. Do you not wholly neglect the duty of instructing your children and servants? or if you do not wholly neglect it, yet do you not afford them so little instruction, and are you not so unsteady, and do you not take so little pains in it, that you live in a sinful neglect? Do you take pains in any measure proportionate to the importance of the matter? You cannot but own that it is a matter of vast importance, that your children be fitted for death, and saved from hell; and that all possible care be taken that it be done speedily; for you know not how soon your children may die. Are you as careful about the welfare of their souls as you are of their bodies? Do you labour as much that they may have eternal life, as you do to provide estates for them to live on in this world?

Let every parent inquire, whether he do not live in a way of sin in this respect: and let masters inquire, whether they do not live in a way of sin, in neglecting the poor souls of their servants; whether their only care be not to make their servants subservient to their worldly interest, without any concern what becomes of them to all eternity.

2. Do you not live in a sinful neglect of the government of your families? Do you not live in the sin of Eli? who indeed counselled and reprov'd his children, but did not exercise government over them. He reprov'd them very solemnly, as 1 Sam. ii. 23, 24, 25. but he did not restrain them; by which he greatly provoked God, and brought an everlasting curse upon his house: 1 Sam. iii. 12. "In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house.

When I begin, I will also make an end. I will judge his house for ever; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." If you say you cannot restrain your children, this is no excuse; for it is a sign that you have brought up your children without government, that your children regard not your authority. When parents lose their government over their children, their reproofs and counsel signify but little. How many parents are there who are exceedingly faulty on this account! How few are there who are thorough in maintaining

order and government in their families! How is family-government in a great measure vanished! and how many are as likely to bring a curse upon their families, as Eli!

This is one principal ground of the corruptions which prevail in the land. This is the foundation of so much debauchery, and of such corrupt practices among young people: family-government is in a great measure extinct. By neglect in this particular, parents bring the guilt of their children's sins upon their own souls, and the blood of their children will be required at their hands.

Parents sometimes weaken one another's hands in this work; one parent disapproving what the other doth; one smiling upon a child, while the other frowns; one protecting, while the other corrects. When things in a family are thus, children are like to be undone. Therefore let everyone examine whether he do not live in some way of sin with respect to this matter.

[3.] I shall now apply myself to children. Let them examine themselves, whether they do not live in some way of sin towards their parents. Are you not guilty of some undutifulness towards them, in which you allow yourselves? Are you not guilty of despising your parents for infirmities which you see in them? Undutiful children are ready to condemn their parents for their infirmities.

Are not you sons of Ham, who saw and made derision of his father's nakedness, whereby he entailed a curse on himself and his posterity to this day; and not the sons of Shem and Japheth, who covered the nakedness of their father? Are you not guilty of dishonouring and despising your parents for natural infirmities, or those of old age? Prov. xxiii. 22. "Despise not thy mother when she is old."

Doth not that curse belong to you, in Deut. xxvii. 16. "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother?"

Are you not wont to despise the counsels and reproofs of your parents? When they warn you against any sin, and reprove you for any misconduct, are you not wont to set light by it, and to be impatient under it? Do you honour your parents for it? on the contrary, do you not receive it with resentment, proudly rejecting it? Doth it not stir up corruption, and a stubborn and perverse spirit in you, and rather make you to have an ill-will to your parents, than to love and honour them? Are you not to be reckoned among the fools mentioned Prov. xv. 5. "A fool despiseth his father's instruction?" and doth not that curse belong to

you, Prov. xxx. 17. "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it?"

Do you not allow a fretful disposition towards your parents, when they cross you in anything? Are you not apt to find fault with your parents, and to be out of temper with them? Consider, that if you live in such ways as these, you not only live in sin, but in that sin, than which there is scarcely any one oftener threatened with a curse in the word of God.

Sect. IX.

Awakening considerations for self-examination.

We come now to mention some things, in order to convince those who, upon examination, find that they do live in some way of sin, of the importance of their knowing and amending their manner of life. You have had directions laid before you, how to find out whether you do live in any way of sin or not; and you have heard many particulars mentioned as proper subjects for your examination of yourselves. How then do you find things? Do you find yourselves clear of living in any way of sin? I mean not whether you find yourself clear of sin; that is not expected of any of you; for there is not a man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not, 1 Kings viii. 46. But is there not some way of sin in which you live, which is your stated way or practice? There are doubtless some who are clear in this matter, some "who are undefiled in the way, and do no iniquity," Psal. cxix. 1, 2, 3.

Let your own consciences answer how you find with respect to yourselves, by those things which have been proposed to you. Do you not find that you are guilty? that you live in a way of sin, and have allowed yourselves in it? If this be the case, then consider the following things.

If you have been long seeking salvation, and have not yet succeeded, it may be this hath been the cause. You have perhaps wondered what hath been the matter, that you have been so long a time under concern about your salvation, that you have taken so much pains, and all seems to be to no purpose. You have many a time cried earnestly to God, yet he doth not regard you. Others obtain comfort, but you are left in darkness. But is it any wonder at all, if you have lived in some way of sin all this while? If you have lived in any

sinful way, this is a sufficient reason why all your prayers and all your pains have been blasted.

If all this while you have lived in some sinful way, so far you have failed of seeking salvation in the right way. The right way of seeking salvation is, to seek it in the diligent performance of all duties, and in the denial of all ungodliness. If there be any one member that is corrupt, and you cut it not off, there is danger that it will carry you to hell, (Matt. v. 29, 30.)

2. If grace have not been flourishing, but, on the contrary, in languishing circumstances in your souls, perhaps this is the cause. The way to grow in grace is to walk in the way of obedience to all the commands of God, to be very thorough in the practice of religion. Grace will flourish in the hearts of those who live in this manner; but if you live in some way of sin, that will be like some secret disease at your vitals, which will keep you poor, weak, and languishing.

One way of sin lived in will wonderfully keep you down in your spiritual prosperity, and in the growth and strength of grace in your hearts. It will grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and will in a great measure banish him from you: this will prevent the good influence of the word and ordinances of God to the causing of grace to flourish in you. It will be a great obstacle to their good effect. It will be like an ulcer within a man, which, while it remains, will keep him weak and lean, though you feed him with ever so wholesome food, or feast him ever so daintily.

3. If you have been left to fall into great sin, perhaps this was the occasion of it. If you have been left greatly to wound your own souls, perhaps this was what made way for it, that you allowed yourselves in some way of sin. A man who doth not avoid every sin, and is not universally obedient, cannot be well guarded against great sins. The sin in which he lives will be always an inlet, an open door, by which Satan from time to time will find entrance. It is like a breach in your fortress, through which the enemy may get in, and find his way to you greatly to hurt and wound you.

If there be any way of sin which is retained as an outlet to corruption, it will be like a breach in a dam, which, if it be let alone, and be not stopped, will grow bigger and wider, and will endanger the whole. If any way of sin be lived in, it will be like Gideon's ephod, which was a snare to him and his house.

4. If you live very much in spiritual darkness, and without the comfortable presence of God, it may be this is the cause. If you complain that you have but little sweet communion with God, that you seem to be left and deserted of God, that God seems to hide his face from you, and but seldom gives you the sweet views of his glory and grace, that you seem to be left very much to grope in darkness, and to wander in a wilderness; perhaps you have wondered what is the matter; you have cried to God often, that you might have the light of his countenance, but he heareth you not; and you have sorrowful days and nights upon this account. But if you have found, by what hath been said, that you live in some way of sin, it is very probable that is the cause, that is the root of your mischief, that is the Achan, the troubler that offends God, and causes him to withdraw, and brings so many clouds of darkness upon your souls. You grieve the Holy Spirit by the way in which you live; and that is the reason that you have no more comfort from him.

Christ hath promised that he will manifest himself to his disciples; but it is upon the condition, that they keep his commands: John xiv. 21. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." But if you habitually live in disobedience to any of the commandments of Christ, then it is no wonder that he doth not give you the comfortable manifestations of himself.

The way to receive the special favours of God, and to enjoy comfortable communion with him, is to walk closely with him.

5. If you have been long doubting about your condition, perhaps this is the cause. If persons be converted, the most likely way to have the evidences of it clear, and to have the Spirit of God witnessing with our spirits, that we are the children of God, is to walk closely with God. This, as we have observed already, is the way to have grace in a flourishing state in the soul; it is the way to have the habits of grace strengthened, and the exercises of it lively. And the more lively the exercises of grace are, the more likely will they be to be seen. Besides, this is the way to have God manifesting himself to us, as our father and our friend, to have the manifestations and inward testimonies of his love and favour.

But if you live in some way of sin, it is no wonder if that greatly darkens your evidences, as it keeps down the exercises of grace, and hides the light of God's countenance. And it may be

that you never will come to a comfortable resolution of that point, whether you be converted or not, until you shall have wholly forsaken the way of sin in which you live.

6. If you have met with the frowns of Providence, perhaps this has been the cause. When you have met with very sore rebukes and chastisements that way of sin hath probably been your troubler.

Sometimes God is exceedingly awful in his dealings with his own people in this world, for their sins. Moses and Aaron were not suffered to enter into Canaan, because they believed not God, and spoke unadvisedly with their lips, at the waters of Meribah. And how terrible was God in his dealings with David! what affliction in his family did he send upon him! one of his sons ravishing his sister; another murdering his brother, and having expelled his father out of his kingdom, openly in the sight of all Israel, and in the sight of the sun, defiling his father's concubines on the top of the house, and at last coming to a miserable end? Immediately after this followed the rebellion of Sheba; and he had this uncomfortable circumstance attending the end of his life, that he saw another of his sons usurping the crown.

How awfully did God deal with Eli, for living in the sin of not restraining his children from wickedness! He killed his two sons in one day; brought a violent death upon Eli himself; took the ark from him, and sent it into captivity; cursed his house for ever; and swore that the iniquity of his house should not be purged with sacrifice and offering for ever; that the priesthood should be taken from him, and given to another family; and that there should never be an old man in his family.

Is not some way of sin in which you live the occasion of the frowns and rebukes of Providence which you have met with? True, it is not the proper business of your neighbours to judge you with respect to events of Providence; but you yourselves ought to inquire, wherefore God is contending with you, Job ix. 10.

7. If death be terrible to you, perhaps this is the foundation of it. When you think of dying, you find you shrink back at the thought. When you have any illness, or when there is anything which seems any way to threaten life, you find you are affrighted by it; the thoughts of dying, and going into eternity, are awful to you; and that although you entertain a hope that you are converted. If you live in some way of sin, probably this is very much the

foundation of it. This keeps your minds sensual and worldly, and hinders a lively sense of heaven and heavenly enjoyments. This keeps grace low, and prevents that relish of heavenly enjoyments which otherwise you would have. This prevents you having the comfortable sense of the divine favour and presence; and without that no wonder you cannot look death in the face without terror.

The way to have the prospect of death comfortable, and to have undisturbed peace and quiet when we encounter death, is, to walk closely with God, and to be undefiled in the way of obedience to the commands of God; and that it is otherwise sometimes with truly godly persons, is doubtless frequently owing to their living in ways displeasing to God.

8. If you find by these things which have been proposed to you, that you have lived in a way of sin, consider that if you henceforward live in the same way, you will live in known sin. Whether in time past it have been known sin or not, though you may have hitherto lived in it through ignorance or inadvertence; yet if now you be sensible of it, henceforward, if you continue in it still, it will not be a sin of ignorance, but you will be proved to be of that class of men who live in ways of known sin.