

## CHAPTER 9

A summary of the book...

### “THE SOUL’S CONFLICT”

by Richard Sibbes

(1577–1635)

**Satan labors to unsettle and disquiet God’s children** – since he cannot hinder their estate, he will “*trouble their peace.*” Of all Christians, Satan is the most successful against “discontented” people; he hammers all his dark plots in their brains. When Joshua was downcast at Israel’s turning their backs before their enemies, God reproved him saying, “*Get up, Joshua, why is your face to the ground?*” (Josh 7:10). Once we are “in Christ,” we should settle the question of who we are in Him – yet a guilty conscience will be full of objections, and God will not speak peace unto it until it be *humbled*. God will let his best children know what it is to be too bold with sin, as we see in *David and Peter – they felt no peace till they had renewed their repentance*. One of the main things that hinders Christians from “rejoicing” is not being diligent of making their “*calling sure.*” We are not to hearken to our own fears and doubts, or to the suggestions of the enemy – but to the Word, and our own consciences enlightened by the Spirit. It is of paramount importance that Christians study to corroborate who they are in Christ. *When the waters of sanctification are troubled and muddy, let us run to the witness of the cross* – it is there where you can untie the knots that keep you from experiencing the mercy of God. Since Sibbes’ books are a somewhat difficult archaic read and require careful thought, ponder his writings in a slow, attentive, reflective manner.

**A “growing” Christian is always a comfortable Christian** – Growing Christians go on to add grace to grace, and the oil of grace brings forth the oil of gladness. Some degree of comfort follows every good action – as heat issues forth from fire. When Christians forget what a *gracious and merciful covenant* they live under, their comfort is hindered.

**The psalms, as it were, are the anatomy of a holy man** – In the psalms holy men speak to God and their own hearts. In Psalm 42 we have the passionate words of a man with a broken and troubled spirit – “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” David was a banished man because of Saul’s persecution. His soul was nearly overwhelmed, yet he recovers himself a little to look up to God for comfort and peace. All of the greatest saints agree that we must pass through “*many afflictions*” before we enter heaven (Acts 14:22); yet according to the diversity of issues and circumstances, there is a different cup measured to every one of us. *Spurgeon* wrote, “*Never was a poor creature distressed as I am.*” Regardless of your stature within Christendom, all of us are made of flesh and blood, subject to the same passions, made of the same mould, and subject to the same impressions from without as other men. By reason of the advancement of the most godly in holiness, and their new disposition, they are more sensible in a peculiar manner to those troubles that touch upon their blessed condition of being “in Christ.”

**God Himself sometimes “withdraws” the beams of His countenance from His children**, whereupon the soul even of the strongest Christian is *disquieted*; and God Himself seems to be an enemy to them; perhaps his conscience tells him that God hath a just quarrel against him. There were some ingredients of this divine temptation (as is sometimes called) in David, when God appeared to him as an enemy. Even the Son of God Himself complained in all His torments – “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Mt 27:46).

**If we look down to the “inferior cause,” the soul is often cast down by “Satan”** – Being a cursed spirit, he is full of disquiet, carrying hell about in himself, whereupon all that he labors for is to cast down and disquiet others. By his envy and subtlety we were driven out of Paradise in the beginning; and now he envies us the “paradise of a good conscience.” When Satan sees a man strongly and comfortably walking with God, he cannot endure that a creature of lower rank than himself should enjoy such happiness. “Mine enemies reproach me,” wrote David – there is nothing the nature of man is more impatient of than of the reproaches of a malicious heart and a slandering tongue. *The goal of the devil is to shake the godly man’s faith and confidence in God; just as Satan labored to place a divide between Christ and His Father* – “If Thou art the Son of God, command that these stones be turned into bread” (Mt 2:4). By the way, God is nearest to His children when He seems farthest off – God is with them and in them. How was David affected by the reproachful words? Their words were like “*swords*” that pierced him deeply (Ps 42:10). The policy of “popish tyrants” was to keep the people in darkness and keep them “*fearful*,” that they might better rule them for their own ends.

**Many Christians think they have “no grace” when they don’t feel any** – Our “*feelings*” are not fit to judge our state. How many imagine their “failings” to be “*fallings*,” and their “fallings” to be “falling away,” and every sin against conscience to be the sin against the Holy Spirit. *Satan enlarges the fancy, to think things bigger than they really are* – Satan also tries to get Christians to see “great sins” as little, and “little sins” as none. Some also think they have “*no grace*” because they have not grown much as a Christian – as such, they focus more on “what they don’t have” than “what they do have.” Men may be rich, though they are not millionaires or emperors.

**If we “neglect” to grow in holiness, the soul will never be soundly quiet**, because it will be prone to question the truth of justification; and it is as proper for sin to raise doubts and fears in the conscience, as for rotten flesh and wood to breed worms. *Sin causes storms within and without*, and where there is not a pure conscience, there is not a pacified conscience. A conscience guilty of many neglects and of allowing itself to sin, God will suffer us to have “*painful wounds*” that we might experience the preciousness of His balm.

**When men rely on outward things for their comfort, their spirit will be “unsettled and disquiet.”** We are not to build our comfort upon things that have no firm foundation. It is the good desire of the wise man to desire that God remove from us vanity and lies (Prv 30), because such things promise a contentment they cannot yield. *The “heart” becomes the nature of the thing it relies on*; therefore, it is no wonder that worldly men are often downcast and disquieted (Ps 39). The “*cause*” of our disquiet is chiefly from ourselves, though Satan will have had a hand in it – we insist on having “*our will*,” or we will be disappointed in God. Thus, in all our troubles we should first look at “*our own hearts*,” and stop the storm there. It was not the “troubled condition” that so disquieted David’s soul, but David yielded to the discouragements of the flesh – which is like “the troubled sea that casts up mire and dirt” (Is 57:20). Satan’s sin cast him out of Heaven, and by his temptations “man” was cast out of Paradise – ever since he has labored to cast us deeper into *sin and despair*; if God in His mercy does not stop Satan’s malice, he would cast us as low as himself, *even to hell itself*.

**When believers are discouraged, they are like an “instrument out of tune,”** like a body out of joint. Additionally, “*discouragement*” (Satan is its author; as the Holy Spirit is of “encouragement”) is a great wrong to God as well, and it makes us conceive “*dark thoughts*” about Him, as if He were an enemy; what an injury it is to so gracious a Father. Discouragement also makes a man forgetful of all former blessings, and stops the influence of God’s grace in his life. Men never experience true comfort until

they give themselves up to God and His will for their lives. As we yield to discouragement, we lose the joy of life and happiness God wants us to experience. One way to raise a dejected soul, is to hold a “*court of reason*” in the heart, wherein the conscience has an office. It is a *great mercy of God* that we judge matters ourselves, and prevent public disgrace; if this not be done, the matter will be dealt with in God’s higher court – the long and short of it is this: *if we judge ourselves, God will not judge us.* (1-44)

**Sin is a work of darkness – it shuns not only the light of grace, but the light of reason.** Satan could not deceive us, unless we are “*willingly deceived.*” Willful sinners are blind, because they put out the light of reason; as such, they are deservedly termed “*fools.*” Martin Luther used to say, “Men are born with a ‘pope’ in their belly; they are loath to give an account, although it be to themselves; thus their wills are a kingdom unto themselves.” Of all the troubles, the trouble of a “*proud heart*” is the greatest. A “*godly man*” when forced to be alone can talk with his God and himself – one reason is that his heart is a treasury and storehouse of divine truths; conversely, the “*ungodly man*” differs – he cannot endure solitariness because his heart is empty. We should set ourselves to care most for that which God cares for – *our soul* – and never yield our soul to the ways of darkness. A Christian is not subdued until his spirit be subdued; thus Job prevailed over Satan and all his troubles at length. The soul is that which Satan and his minions have the most spite for. Satan works upon our affections and our affections work upon our “*will*” – we can “thank ourselves” for willingly yielding to our own passions.

**A godly man “complains to God,” but not of God, rather he “complains of himself”** – A “*carnal*” man is ready to justify himself and complain of God; he complains of the grievance that lies upon him, but never regards what is amiss within himself. As in all discouragements, a godly man has the most trouble with “his own heart.” (45-99)

**Sometimes God allows “corruption” to break out in His children, that they may know themselves better,** whereupon grace stirs up in the soul a fresh hatred and revenge against it... and lets us see the need for not only having our sins pardoned, but also having our sinful natures purged and cleansed. We should labor that the truth of God may be grafted into our hearts, that there may be a sweet agreement between the soul and all things that are spiritual – that we may be changed into His likeness. Nothing in heaven or earth will work out corruption and change our hearts, but the Spirit of Christ clothing divine truths. When corruption rises, pray it down by claiming the promise of the new covenant, that God would circumcise and cleanse your heart. Herein consists of the believer’s comfort:

1. Our nature is perfect “*in Christ.*”
2. Christ hath satisfied “*divine justice*” for both the sins we commit and our sin nature.
3. Christ will never stop “*working in us*” until we are perfect in purity and holiness.
4. The Spirit of Christ and truth will eventually dry up the spring of our “*corrupt nature.*”

**Christians must remember when they are much annoyed with their corruptions,** that it is not their particular case alone, but the condition of all God’s people, lest they be discouraged. When the Christian looks within he is apt to think, “*no man’s nature is so vile as mine*” – be careful, Satan often abuses this thinking toward discouragement and desperation. Many think that corruption is greatest when they feel it most; the truth is, the less we see it and lament it, the greater its presence – the more sight, the more hatred... *the more hatred of sin, the more love of grace.* Upon every discovery and conflict, corruption loses some ground, and grace gains upon it.

**Among all the faculties of the soul that creates the most disquiet in us, is our “imagination”** – Our imaginations become the seat of vanity within us, and the greatest vexation to us, because it apprehends a greater happiness in outward good things than there is. Experience shows us that there is not that “good” in those things which we imagine to be, but contrarily, we find much “evil” in them which we never expected; hereupon the soul cannot but be troubled. *The life of many men is almost nothing but a “fancy” that takes up most of their time – how to please their own imagination.* From hence spring “**ambition,**” and the vein of being great in the world; hence comes an unmeasurable desire of abounding in those things which the world esteems highly. There is in us naturally a competition and desire to be equal or above others, and esteemed among men; wherein being crossed or humiliated is the greatest misery that can befall us.

**A corrupt desire of “being great” in the opinion of others, creeps into our religion** if we live in those places wherein it brings credit or gain – men will sacrifice their very lives for vain glory; it is an evidence that man lives more to opinion and reputation of others, than to conscience. It mars all in religion when we go about heavenly things with earthly affections, and seek not Christ but the world. The reason why imagination works so upon the soul, is because it stirs up the affections answerable to the good in which it apprehends. Things work upon the soul in this order:

1. Some object is presented.
2. It is apprehended by the imagination as good and pleasing, or evil and hurtful.
3. If it is good, the desire is carried to it with delight; if evil it is rejected with distaste.
4. If it is good, the affections stir up the whole man toward what he imagines.

**Jacob was as much troubled with the “imagination” of his son’s death, as if he had been dead** – imagination, though it be an empty thing, yet it hath real effects. *Superstitious* persons are as much troubled for neglecting any voluntary service of man’s invention, as if they had offended against the direct commandment of God; thus superstition breeds false fears, and false fears brings true vexation; it transforms God to an idol, imagining Him to be pleased with whatsoever pleases ourselves – our Lord said, “In vain they worship Me” (Mt 15:9). God blasted all devised types of service saying, “Who required these things of you?” (Is 1:12). We should not bring God down to our own imaginations, but raise our imaginations up to God. The way to *cure* this malady in us is this:

1. Labor to bring the imaginations of our souls into the “obedience of God’s truth” – because the imagination ungoverned is a wild thing (2 Cor 10:5); it injures the work of God in us, and produces an unquiet and unsettled soul. Many good men are in a long dream of misery; therefore it is necessary that God by His Word and Spirit should erect a government in our hearts to captivate this unordered faculty.
2. Present “real things” to the soul, the true riches – whatever is in the world are but shadows of things in comparison of those “true realities” which religion afford; and why should we vex ourselves about a vain shadow? (Ps 39:6). When we trust in nothing, we become as nothing.
3. Give your mind “true objects” to work upon – consider the greatness and goodness of Almighty God, and His love to us in Christ; consider the joy of heaven and the torments of hell; consider the Day of Judgment; consider the vanity of all earthly things; and consider the uncertainty of our lives. By

meditating on these things, the soul will be prepared to have a right understanding of things. A careful reflection of the “*truth*” sets the compass in our soul pointing due north.

4. The well-ordering of this unruly faculty demands our “*nature be changed*” – as men are, so they imagine, as the treasure of the heart is (Mt 7:35); an evil heart cannot think well. When the “law of God” is written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, the soul is then inclined and made pliable to every good thought – when the heart is once taught of God to love, we love God not only with our hearts but with our mind as well (Mt 22:37); that is, both with our understanding and imagination. Therefore, our chief care should be, that our hearts may be circumcised and purified so, as they may be filled with the love of God.
5. Even when we have been given a new disposition, yet there is still some “*sickness of fancy*” remaining in the best of us, whereby we work trouble to ourselves, and therefore it is necessary we should labor to restrain and limit our fancy. Idleness is the hour of temptation, wherein Satan joins with our imagination, and sets it about his own work; *our imagination needs the bridle of reason*. “Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, lovely, of good report – think on these things” (Phil 4:8).
6. Even the wisest and holiest of men, like David and Solomon, “*suffered their souls*” to be led by their fancies, and their hearts to run after their eyes – they betrayed and robbed themselves of much grace and comfort. Therefore Solomon cries out with grief and shame, “Vanity of vanities” (Ecc 1:2). *Fancy will take fire before we be aware*. Little things are seeds of great matters. It would much avail for the well-ordering of our thoughts, to set our souls in order every morning with some gracious meditations. It is a thing to be lamented that a Christian born for heaven, should be taken up with *trifles*, and fill both his head and his heart with vanity and nothing, as all earthly things will one day prove to be.
7. Satan oftentimes by a “*spirit of illusion*” makes worldly things appear bigger to us, and spiritual things less than they are – as a result, our affections are misled. God will not only call us to account of how we lived, but how we believed, disputed, and reasoned. Our care therefore should be to build our profession upon sound grounds, that the gates of hell cannot prevail against. Many men are so vain that they delight in being flattered, so that their imaginations are pleased. It is just with God that those who take liberty in their thoughts should be given up to their own imaginations, to delight in them, and so reap the fruit of their own ways. *God will even allow the best of His people, when they take liberty with their imagination, to become vexed and entangled with their own hearts*. The greatest and hardest work of a Christian is the well-ordering of his heart and mind. There is no law to bind the inner man but the “law of the Spirit of grace.” (100-124)

**Men whose “wills” are stronger than their “wits,” are wedded to their own ways;** as such, they are more pleased to hear that which complies with their inclinations, than a harsh truth which crosses them. God fills such men with their own ways – they flatter themselves and are robbed of the “true judgment” of themselves.

**What if neither the word of a friend or the rebuke of our own heart will “quiet our soul”** – is there any other remedy? Yes, look up to God. The child of God hath something in him above a man; he hath the *Spirit of God* to guide his spirit. God commanded David to “trust” in Him (Ps 42), and at the same time infused strength into his soul to think of God’s command and trust in God’s power – David’s spirit was moved as it was moved by God’s Spirit, which inwardly spoke to him to speak to himself. God’s children have a principle of life in them from the Spirit of God, by which they command themselves. Our spirits are the Spirit’s agents; the Holy Spirit is a divine agent maintaining His right in us. As God

hath made man a free agent, so He guides him, and preserves that free manner of working which is agreeable to man's nature. The Spirit of God opens our understandings to see that it is best to trust in God. David was willing to trust in God, but God wrought that will in him; He first makes our will good, and then works by it. Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Good desires and actions all come from God.

**A Christian, when he is beaten out of all other comforts, still has "God" to run to** – The wicked beaten out of earthly comforts, is like a ship tossed in the sea without an anchor. The Christian can wrestle and strive with God, and plead with God by His own arguments. Furthermore, there is a sanctified use of all troubles to God's children – first they drive them out of themselves, and then drive them nearer to God. *A man in the state of grace finds every condition draws him nearer to God.* The Holy Spirit stirs up the "*grace of faith*" to its proper function. When the soul sees itself out of order, then it enjoins this duty of trusting in God. The soul that hath had a saving work upon it, will be always impatient until it recovers its former sweetness in God – *after God's Spirit hath once touched the soul, it will never be quiet until it stands pointed God-ward.* "God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee" (Is 26:3). Though the soul be overcome by passion for a time, yet if grace hath once truly seasoned it, it will work itself into freedom again – it is proper for the *sea* to rage and cast up dirt; likewise, when dust gets into the *eye*, it will not become quiet again until the dust be wrought out again. (124-143)

**The "unwise man" hopes most for the things of this life – he being most deceived who hopes most.** In religion, it is far otherwise – here hope is the main supporting grace of the soul, springing from "*faith in the promises of God.*" Trust in God is a remedy against all distempers. "*God alone*" is the only fit foundation for the soul to build upon, for the firmer the foundation, the stronger will the building be; conversely, the higher the tree rises, the deeper the root spreads itself below. So it is with "*faith*" – if the foundation is not firm, the soul cannot build itself strongly upon it.

**The most casual and disordered things are subject to "divine providence."** The most horrible sin the sun ever beheld – the crucifixion of the Lord of life – was guided by a hand of providence to the "*greatest good.*" Although man hath a freedom in working, yet even these are guided by an over-ruling power (Prv 21:1). We must know that God's manner of guiding things is without prejudice – He guides them according to the instincts He hath put into them. God is not only the "*cause*" of things and actions, but also the cause of the *cessation* of them – He is the "*cause*" of why things are not, and why things are. Nothing is so high that it is above His providence; nothing is so bad that God cannot draw good out of it; and nothing is so wisely plotted that God cannot disappoint it. It cannot but bring strong security to the soul, to know that in the intercourse of all events, both good and bad, God hath such a disposing hand. Whatever befalls us serves His eternal purpose. *All sufferings, blessings, ordinances, graces and gifts are ruled by God.* (144-151)

**It is important for believers to know that they are "under a providence" that is above their own.** Flesh and blood is prone to expostulate with God, and question His dealings, as we see in Gideon, Asaph, Habakkuk, and others – "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" After some struggling between the flesh and the spirit, the conclusion will be, yet however matters go, "God is God to Israel" (Ps 73:1). God's ways often seem to us full of contradictions, because His course is to bring things to pass by "*contrary means.*" "God doth all things according to the counsel of His own will." His will is a wise will, and a sovereign will. The only way to truly have "*our will*" is bring it to God's will – we must align our will with God's will; and that we do through prayer. If we could delight in Him, we should have our

heart's desire (Ps 37:4). Thus, David yields up himself to God: "Here I am, let the Lord deal with me as seems good unto Him" (2 Sam 15:26). "Not my will, but Thy will be done." "The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21:14). *Out of our inferior reasons we may desire that God remove the cup;* but when we look to the supreme reason of reasons, the will of God, here we must stoop and kiss the rod, and humble ourselves under His mighty hand.

**He that endures anything will endure it quietly, when he knows it is the "will of God,"** and considers that whatever befalls him comes from "*His good pleasure.*" Those that have not inured themselves to the yoke of obedience, will never endure the yoke of suffering – they fume and rage as a wild boar in a net. *The man who establishes his soul on Christ will bear his afflictions; whereas the other rageth as a fool.* Nothing should displease us that pleases God; neither should anything be pleasing to us that displeases Him. We find by experience that when "our wills" are subject to "God's will," that we delight to do what God would have us do, and to be what God would have us be, that then sweet peace presently riseth to the soul (Ps 37).

**When we can say, "Lord, if Thou wilt have me poor and disgraced, I am content to be so;** if Thou wilt have me serve Thee in this condition I am in, I will gladly do so. *It is enough to me that Thou wouldst have it so. I desire to yield readily, humbly, and cheerfully, to Thy disposing providence.*" The wicked say that calamities rule over men, but Christians have a spirit overruling all calamities. God's kingdom comes where His will is being done. None feel the sweet experience of God's providence more than those who are most resolute in their obedience.

**We must not consult with flesh, for "self-love" will deprave all our actions,** by setting before us corrupt ends. It considers not what is best, but what is safest. Where the aims are good, there God delights to reveal His good pleasure. In what measure any lust is favored, in that measure the soul is darkened. Even wise Solomon, whilst he gave way to his lust, had like to have lost his wisdom. *Nature of itself is wild and untamed, and impatient of the "yoke" – but as beasts that cannot endure the yoke at first... after they are inured awhile unto it, they bear it willingly, and carry their work more easily by it; so the "yoke of obedience" makes the life regular and quiet. The more "passion," the less discretion; because passion hinders the sight of what is to be done. It clouds the soul, and puts it on to action without advisement. Where passions are subdued, and the soul purged and cleared, there is nothing to hinder the impression of God's Spirit; the soul is fitted as a clean glass to receive light from above.* Because it is not in man to "know his own ways," we should look unto Christ, the great Counselor of His Church, for counsel and direction... suggesting, "this is the way, walk in it." We owe God this respect, to depend upon Him for direction in the particular passages of our lives, in regard that He is our sovereign, and His will is the rule, and we are to be accountable to Him as our Judge. Only God can see through all our circumstances. After prayer and trust follows the "peace of God" (Phil 4:6-7), and a heart void of division. (151-159)

**To know the will of God towards us, and our duty towards Him,** we must first have a knowledge of the "*promises of God.*" We should not call God's love into question – He not only gives us His promise, but hath entered into covenant with us through the blood of Christ; therefore, there should be no place left for doubting. Why should it not satisfy our souls to look upon promises in the word of God? All our misery is either in having a "*false foundation,*" or else "*reckless building*" upon a true foundation; therefore having so strong a ground as God's nature, His providence, His promises, to build upon, the only way for establishing our souls is "*by trust*" – relying firmly on Him. No man can know truth without the Spirit revealing it to the soul – furthermore, supernatural truths must have a supernatural power to apprehend

them (1 Cor 2:14). The Spirit of God must likewise subdue the rebellion and malice of our will, so that it may be suitable to divine things; there will follow not only peace in the soul, but joy and delight surpassing any contentment the world offers. We should labor for a *“single heart”* to trust in God only, to rely upon Christ only, and to make the Scriptures our rule only – either we trust God alone, or not at all.

**It is the “office of faith” to quiet our souls in all the necessities of this life;** we have continual use of *trust* while we are here. God trains us up this way, by exercising our trust in lesser matters, to fit us for greater. It pleases God to keep us in a state of *“continual dependence”* upon Him... who gives us the grace and spirit of faith needed to sustain our souls. Christians should labor their hearts to trust in God, even when no light of comfort appears either from within or without – when the darkness of the night is thickest, then the morning begins to dawn. *In a hopeless estate a Christian will see some “door of hope” opened*, first, because God shows Himself nearest to us, when we stand most in need of Him – He knows our souls best, and our souls know Him best in *“adversity”* (Ps 31:7)... second, because our prayers then are *“strong cries”* fervent and frequent – God is sure to hear us at such a time, which pleases Him well, as delighting to hear the voice of His beloved. To encourage us in difficult times, and to help us trust God more, we should often call to mind the *“former experiences”* of God’s goodness. God is so good to His children even in this world, that He trains them up by daily renewed experiences of His fatherly care. *The heart is never drawn to some sinful vanity, or frightening trouble, till faith first loseth the sight and estimation of divine things.*

**That “faith” may take the better place in the soul and the soul in God,** the heart must continually be taught what little worth everything else is – reputation, riches, and pleasures, etc. Our heart being weaned from these things may open itself to God, and embrace things of a higher nature; otherwise baser things will be nearer the soul than faith. The main scope of God’s dealing with His children in any danger or affliction, is to *“embitter all other things but Himself”* unto them. God is very jealous of our trust; therefore it behoves us to take notice, not only of the deceitfulness of things, but of the deceitfulness of our hearts in the use of them. Our nature is still apt to think there is some *“secret good”* in the forbidden fruit.

**It is not a simple matter to bring God and the soul together “in faith”** – God is not only the object, but the *“working cause”* of our trust; for such is our proneness to live by sense and natural reason. Because *“guilt”* still remains upon our souls for our rebellion and unkindness towards God, it makes us afraid to entertain serious thoughts of Him. *“Lord, increase our faith; help us against our unbelieving hearts.”* By *“prayer and holy thoughts”* stirred up in us, we shall feel divine strength infused and conveyed into our souls to trust. The decay of a plant, though it appears first in the withering leaves and twigs, yet it arises chiefly from a *decay in the root* – therefore the better part of wisdom is to look to the feeding of the root. We shall find that the *main breaches* of our lives arise either from false principles or doubts, or mindlessness of those that are true – all sin is a turning of the soul from God to some other seeming good; but this proceeds from a former turning of the soul from God by *“distrust.”* As *faith* is the first return of the soul to God, so the first degree of departing from God is by *infidelity*.

**We are prone to conceive that to “trust in God” is an easy matter,** therefore it is needful that we should have a right understanding of this trust, what it is, and how it may be discerned. True trust is willing to be tried and searched, and can say to God as David, “Now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in Thee” (Ps 39:7); and as it is willing to come to trial, so it is able to endure trial, and to hold out in opposition, as appears in David. *A child that believes his father will make him heir, doubts not that he will provide him food and nourishment, and give him breeding suitable to his future condition;* it is a vain pretence to believe that God will give us heaven, and yet leave us to shift for ourselves on the

way. Where trust is rightly planted, it gives boldness to the soul in going to God, for it is grounded upon the discovery of *God's love* first. The greatest honor we can do unto God, is to close our eyes to all inferior things here below, and look upon "*His all-sufficiency.*" God seldom makes any promises to His children, but that He exercises their trust in "*waiting long*" before that which is promised is realized – as David waited long for a kingdom, and the world for Christ's coming. (160-185)

**When God seems "contrary" to our spirits, where shall we find relief?** Everything in a sense is "spiritual" – God, our soul, terrors, the devil, and that which the soul fears for the time being is also spiritual; and not only spiritual, but eternal, unless it pleases God at length to break out of the thick cloud, wherewith He covers Himself, and shine upon the soul, as in His own time He will. *When a man sees no comfort from above*, and sees nothing but evidences of God's displeasure; clouds without, and clouds within, nothing but clouds in his condition; *here he hath need of faith to break through it all.* Upon this, the distressed soul is in danger to be set upon a temptation, called the *temptation of blasphemy*, that is, to entertain bitter thoughts against God, and especially against the grace and goodness of God. To this degree of blasphemy God's children never fully fall, yet they may feel the venom of corruption stirring in their hearts, against God and His ways, and this adds greatly to the depth of their affliction. The way out of this predicament is to "*call home the soul, and charge it to trust in God,*" even though He shows Himself an enemy – He doth but put on a mask with a purpose to reveal Himself the more graciously afterward; His manner is to work by "*contraries.*" In this condition God lets in *a few beams of light*, whereby the soul casts a longing look upon God, even when He seems to forsake it. There is nothing more comfortable in this condition, than to *fly to Him.*

**Sin may be somewhat "sweet" in the committing... but it is "bitter" in the reckoning.** When Adam had once offended God, *Paradise itself was not Paradise to him*; the presence of God, which was most comfortable before, was now his greatest terror. Sin makes us afraid of that which should be our greatest comfort – the guilty soul becomes embittered, and interprets all that befalls as the messengers of an "*angry God,*" sent in displeasure to take revenge upon it (Ps 38). Writes Sibbes, "There is not the stoutest man breathing, but if God sets his conscience against him, it will pull him down, and lay him flat, and fill him with inward terrors."

**Conceive of "God's mercy" as no ordinary mercy** – the greater our sins are, the greater the glory of His powerful pardoning mercy, and His powerful grace in healing will appear. God delights to show His greatness in the greatest things – "*God delighteth in mercy*" (Mic 7:18); it pleases Him. David after his heinous sins, cries not for mercy, but for *abundance of mercy*, "according to the multitude of Thy mercies do away with my offences" (Ps 51:1). Though we fall by distrust, we recover by trust. *If we could sin more than He could pardon, then we might have some reason to despair.* God is infinite in lovingkindness and mercy.

**Nothing keeps the soul more down than "sins of long continuance"** – because corruption of nature hath gotten such strength in them, *men think it impossible to recover themselves*; they think by necessity they must be *damned*; they see themselves so *hardened*, that they cannot repent; they would give the whole world to have their spirits at freedom from this *bondage and fear.* To keep them from utter sinking, let them consider the "*unlimited mercy of God*" – invincible mercy can never be conquered. We must never think the "*door of hope*" is shut against us; there is nothing more injurious to Christ – in whom a breast of mercy for "*humbled sinners*" is always available. Indeed "where sin abounds, grace does much more abound!" (Rom 5:20). Those that have enjoyed long the sweet of sin, may expect the bitterest sorrow and repentance for sin; yet never give place to *thoughts of despair.* We must go to God, with whom all things

are possible, to put forth His almighty power, not only in pardoning, but in subduing our iniquities. He that can make a “camel go through the eye of a needle,” can make a high conceited man lowly, and a rich man humble. Therefore never question His power, much less His willingness. He entreats us to “*come unto Him.*” If Christ will have us pardon our brother “*seventy-seven times,*” can we think that He will enjoin us more, than He will be ready to do Himself.

**Where the “work of grace” is begun, sin loses strength by “every new fall;”** for hence issues deeper humility, stronger hatred, fresh indignation against ourselves; more experience of the deceitfulness of our hearts; renewed resolutions until sin be brought under. Nothing will make us more ashamed to sin, than thoughts of so free and large a mercy. It will grieve an ingenuous spirit to offend so good a God. This is our comfort – that the “*plea of mercy*” from a broken spirit to a gracious Father, will ever hold good. When we are at the lowest in this world, yet there are these three grounds of comfort still remaining –

1. That we are not yet in the place of the damned, whose estate is unalterable.
2. That while we live there is time and space for recovering of ourselves.
3. That there is grace offered, if we will not shut our hearts against it.

**Is it “too late” for you? Has your hour passed?** By nature of the very questions, “*your fear*” shows you want to experience His forgiveness and mercy; that in itself is proof that your time of mercy is not yet out; so rather than betraying yourself to your greatest enemy, like the “*Prodigal,*” run to the Father and experience His embrace. God is more willing to entertain us, than we are to cast ourselves upon Him. (185-196)

**It is one of Satan’s schemes to keep us in a “barren condition,”** by having us think we have not “*sorrowed sufficiently*” in proportion to our offenses – that we should labor that our sorrow might in some measure answer to the heinousness of our sins. The truth is, we could not grieve sufficiently to satisfy God for our sins – the “*suffering for sin*” was done by His Son on the cross; as such, God delights not in “*sorrow,*” but in making us vessels of “*mercy.*” By the way, sensibleness of the “*want of feeling*” shows some degree of the life of grace.

**Another thing that disquiets and casts down the soul, is that “inward conflict” between grace and corruption.** It is the trouble of troubles to have “*two inhabitants*” so near in one soul, and these two *strive against one another* (Gal 5:17) – the one carrying us upward, higher and higher, till we come to God; the other pulling us lower and lower, further from Him. This cannot but breed a great disquiet, when a Christian does the things he does not want to do, and is hindered from doing that which he wants to do, or is troubled in the performance of it – “O wretched man that I am!” cries Paul (Rom 7:18-24). All is “*stained*” that comes from us, and it is one main end of God’s leaving us in this “*conflicting condition.*”

**Christ will help us in this “fight” until He has made us “like Himself.”** “Oh,” say some, “I find such “*strong inclinations to sin*” in me, and such weakness to resist temptation, that I fear I shall but shame the cause; I shall one day perish by the hand of Satan, strengthening my corruption.” Why are you so troubled? “*Trust in God! Be strong in the Lord! The battle is His! The victory ours!*” Charge the soul to make use of the promises, and *rely upon God* for perfecting the good work that He hath begun in thee. *Corruptions are strong, but stronger is He that is “in us,” than that corruption that is in us.* When we are weak in our own sense, then we are strong in Him (2 Cor 12:7) – The Lord perfecteth strength in our weakness! Our corruptions are God’s enemies as well as ours, and therefore in trusting them to Him, and fighting against them, we may be sure He will take our part against them. God gave the Israelites’

enemies into their hands – but, they had to “*fight it out!*” Why wouldn’t one fight when he is sure of help and victory? (196-207)

**Whatsoever comfort we have in friends, health, or other blessings – it is all conveyed by God,** who still remains, though these be taken from us. As for those miseries which our weak nature is subject to, they are also all under Christ; they come and go at His command; they are His messengers, sent for our *good*, and called back again when they have done what they came for. Therefore look not so much upon them as to Him for strength and comfort. Trust Him then with health, wealth, good name, all that Thou hast. It is not in man to take away that from us which God will give us, and keep for us.

**God is never nearer than when trouble is nearest;** there is not so much as a shadow of change in Him or His love. If God takes us from business by sickness, then we have a time of serving God by patiently submitting to His will. If He means to use our service any further, He will restore our health and strength to do that work He sets us about. In the mean time, the time of sickness is a time of purging from that defilement we gathered in our health, till we come purer out. *Blessed is that sickness that proves the health of the soul.* We are best, for the most part, when we are weakest. Learn from the apostle Paul: He who raises our dead bodies out of the grave, can *raise our diseased bodies* out of the bed of sickness, if He hath a pleasure to serve Himself by us.

**In all kind of troubles, it is not the “ingredients” that God puts into the cup so much that afflicts us,** as it is the ingredients of our “*distempered passions*” mingled with them. The sting and core of them all is sin. Labor to keep out “*sin,*” and then let come what will come – we should not be cast down about outward troubles, but about sin. *Outward troubles* drive us nearer to God, but “*sin*” defileth the soul, and drives it further from God. Whatsoever our outward condition be, if our hearts do not condemn us, we may have boldness with God. In any trouble, our care should not be to avoid the trouble, but the sinful miscarriage in and about the trouble. It is a heavy condition to be under the *burden of trouble*, and under the *burden of a guilty conscience*, both at once. (207-213)

**Christianity is a matter rather of “grace” – not a matter of “gifts not received.”** Moses did not have good speaking abilities (Ex 6:12; 7:1-2); nevertheless, he was chosen over Aaron (who spoke well), to speak for God. It is a business more of the “*heart*” than of the tongue. Most of our disquietness in our calling is that we trouble ourselves about God’s work. Trust God and be doing, and leave the rest up to Him. *All our sufficiency for every calling is from God.* The only way to quiet the soul is to lay a charge upon it to trust God – unquietness and impatience are symptoms and discoveries of an unbelieving heart.

**Those who truly trust in God, labor to back their faith with “sound arguments”** – Faith is an understanding grace; it know whom it trusts, and for what, and upon what grounds it trusts. *He believes best, that knows best why he should believe.* God having made man an “understanding creature,” guides him by a way suitable to such a condition. Godly men have reasons for their trust; those reasons are divine and spiritual like faith is. *A heavenly soul is never satisfied, until it be as near to God as is attainable.* And the nearer a creature comes to God, the more it is emptied of itself, and all self-aims. Our happiness is more in Him, than in ourselves. We seek ourselves most when we deny ourselves most. And the more we labor to advance God, the more we advance our own condition in Him. (213-223)

**When we are at our “worst,” we still have cause to praise God;** when we are at our lowest, yet it is a mercy that we are not consumed; we are never so ill, but it might be worse with us. “Yet will I praise Thee” (Ps 42). “The Lord afflicted me, but He hath not delivered me to death” (Ps 18:18). *In the worst times*

*there is a presence of God with His children* – God limits what the wicked can do to us (Ps 125:3)... God is always present and mixing in some comfort... God supports the soul with inward strength so that it will not utterly fail... he may be cast out of his happy condition, but never out of God's favor... no matter how bad things are now, God will deal graciously with us hereafter. "Is any afflicted, let him pray," said James (5:13). "In the day of evil call upon Me," saith the Lord. *Our lives are nothing but a web of interminglings of crosses and blessings*, standings and failings, combat and victory, wants and favors – therefore there should be a perpetual intercourse of *praying and praising* in our hearts.

**It is the nature of faith to "antedate blessings," because we have them in the promise.** The very hopes of future good, made David praise God for the present. "Faith is the evidence of things not seen – of things hoped for" (Heb 11:1). Therefore, a true believing soul cannot but be a praising soul; hence, we should be praising God as if we already possess that which has been promised. "No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Ps 84:11). Abraham was an old man before he enjoyed his son of promise; Joseph stayed a long time in Egypt before he was exalted. *God defers*, but His deferring is no empty space, wherein no good is done – while the seed lay hidden in the earth, time is not lost, for winter fits for spring, yet the harder the winter, the more hopeful the spring – winter being only a "preparing time." Cheer up thyself, when the morning is darkest, then comes day. A saint of God continues still waiting, though all things seem contrary to what he expects. What can encourage us more to wait than this, that the good we wait for is greater than we are able to conceive! yea, greater than what we desire or even hope for!

**Though "praise" be God's due and our duty, yet it is not so easy a matter to praise God** – Music is sweet, but the setting of the strings in tune is displeasing; our souls will not be long in tune, and it is harsh to us to go about setting them in order. "*Praising*" sets all the parts and graces of the soul to work – it especially requires self-denial, from a conscience of our own wants, weaknesses, and unworthiness; it requires a giving up of ourselves and all we have to God. Those who *know* God aright, will honor Him by *trusting* Him, and those who trust Him will honor Him by *praying*; and those who honor Him by praying will honor Him by *praising* – when we return praises to Him, He returns new favors to us. When we neglect the praising of God, we lose the comfort of God's love – it is a spiritual judgment to lose sight of God's favors. The greatest danger of all is being "*ungrateful*" and "*unthankful*."

**Blessing will procure blessing** – The soul hath never such freedom from sin, as when it is in a thankful frame; for thankfulness issues from a heart truly humbled and emptied of itself, truly loving and rejoicing in God – "*unthankfulness*" to His goodness, melts a godly heart most of all. Though it be our duty to be good stewards of all God has entrusted to us, "*thankfulness*" adds a luster and a grace otherwise not present. It was a good speech of him that said – "If God had made me a nightingale, I would have sung as a nightingale, but God hath made me a man, therefore I will sing forth the praises of God, which is the work of a saint only."

**Little favors come from no small love;** the godly are more thankful for the least favors, than worldly men for the greatest ones. Our time here on earth is short, therefore let us study real praises – God's blessings are in "*deed*," therefore let us bless in "*deed*" also (1 Jn 3:18). Thanks in words is good, but in deeds is better; leaves are good, but fruit is better; and of fruit, that which costs us most. Our whole life should speak nothing but thankfulness; every condition and place we are in should be a witness of our thankfulness; this will make the times and places we live in the better for us. When we are monuments of God's mercy, it is fitting that we should be patterns of His praises; we should think "*life*" is given to us to do something better than mere living – our life is not the end of itself, but the praise of the Giver!

**It is God's will that we should "call upon Him when we are in trouble,"** and it is His promise that He will deliver. When trouble stirs up *prayer*... God's answer to them will stir up *praise*. A thankful disposition is a special help in an afflicted condition. If God expects praise from us, surely He will put us into a condition of praise. God's children, wherein their wills are conformable to God's will, are sure to have their requests fulfilled. When God by grace enlarges the will, He intends to give the deed. When *our wills* carry us to that which *God wills* above all, we may well expect He will satisfy our desires. The living God is a living fountain never drawn dry. If there be no end of our praises, there shall be no end of His goodness. By this means (praise) we are sure never to be very miserable.

**Praise is a just and due tribute for all "God's blessings"** – It is a debt always owing; upon the due discharge of this debt, the soul will find much peace. This duty is a work of the *heart* – "let all that is within me bless His Holy Name" (Ps 103:1). Consider how miserable life would be without all of God's favors, even without His "*common favors*" – our life would be "dark" without these. Furthermore, in all favors think not of them so much, but of God's mercy and lovingkindness in bestowing them. What would we be if God had not been good to us? How many blessings hath God bestowed upon us, that we never even prayed for? and yet we are not ready to praise Him? This shows too much "self-love." *Who are we that God should single us out for the glory of His rich mercy?* These things well pondered should set the greater price upon God's blessings. As God hath thoughts of love to us, so should our thoughts be of *praises to Him*, and of *doing good in our places to others* for His sake. Think on this: Is there any way I may honor God by relieving, comforting, or counseling someone? "I will do good to them, that they together with me, may praise God" (Ps 118; 2 Cor 1:3-4). (223-241)

**We need reason upon reason to steel and strengthen the soul against the onset of "contrary reasons."** Because our lives are subjected to many miseries, in soul, body, and estate, so God hath many salvations; if we have a thousand troubles, He hath a thousand ways to help. He saves our souls from sin, our bodies from danger, and our estates from trouble – *our sins only slow the current of His mercy*. "All His ways are mercy and peace to a repentant soul that casts itself upon Him." The "*devil*" in trouble presents God to us as a revenging destroyer – the skill of "*faith*" is to present Him as our Savior clothed with salvation. *He that brought us into trouble can easily make a way out of it when He pleaseth*. We must trust in Him, as David doth, and conceive of Him as salvation – He is our deliverer. If we would lift up our hearts and hands to God, He would lift up our countenance. Salvation is God's work of mercy; humbling and casting down is His strange work, whereby He comes to His work of mercy.

**God bids us to "draw near to Him, and He will draw near to us"** – When we *draw near to Him*, He will delight to show Himself favorable unto us. While we *strive against an unbelieving heart*, He will come in and help us, so fresh light can come in. If any thing help us, it must be God; and if ever He help us, it must be by casting ourselves upon Him – for then He will reach out Himself unto us in the promise of mercy to pardon our sin, and in the promise of grace to sanctify our natures. So we should thus reason – if we sit still under the load of our sin, we shall die; if we put ourselves into the hands of Christ, we shall live. *God delights to show Himself gracious to those that strive to be well persuaded of Him*, concerning His readiness to show mercy to all that look to Him in Christ. God will never shut His bosom against those that fly to Him in humble obedience. We can never conceive of God too graciously. (242-257)

**We prove that God is ours to our souls, when we take Him at His offer** (that is faith), when we bring nothing but a *sense of our own emptiness* to Him, and an *understanding of His faithfulness* and ability to do us good. The voice of the faithful soul: "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." God will be to us whatsoever we make Him by our faith to be. God is our God when we plant all our happiness in Him,

when the desires of our souls are towards Him, and we place all our contentment in Him. *We make God our God when we set up a throne for Him in our hearts, where self-love before had sat on the throne;* when the heart is so unloosed from the world, that it is ready to part with anything for God's sake, giving Him the supremacy in our hearts, making Him our trust, our love, our joy, our delight, our fear, our all. When we cleave to Him above all, depending upon Him as our chief good, He brings contentment to the soul.

**When we resign ourselves to “His gracious government,” to do and suffer what He will,** we will offer ourselves and all our spiritual services as sacrifices to Him. When the soul without hypocrisy can say, “*My God,*” we shall be ambitious of doing that which may be well-pleasing to Him. When we know we are a peculiar people, we cannot but be zealous for good works. *The Spirit of God reveals the “divine interests” to those that are His... He knows their souls and feeds them with His hidden manna... He sanctifies them to keep them from being led away by the error of the wicked.* Religion is nothing else but a “binding of the soul close to God.” (257-263)

**If I am in a “perplexed condition,” His wisdom is mine;** if in *great danger*, His power is mine... if I lie sighing under the *burden of sin*, His grace is mine... if in *any need*, His all-sufficiency is mine. Says Paul, “My God shall supply all your needs!” (Phil 4:19). What is religion but a “*spiritual bond,*” whereby the soul is tied to God as its own. What a wonderful comfort it is to know that God gave Himself up to be “*ours.*” When riches and friends and life itself cease to be ours, yet God never loses interest in us, nor we in Him. When we leave this world, and are no longer seen here, yet we have a dwelling place “*forever with God.*” God is ours from everlasting in election, to everlasting in glory. David himself said, “Though his flesh see corruption, yet he will be alive in his God still.” A godly man has one grand policy to secure him in all dangers, and that is to “*run to His God*” – his tower of offense and defense. God never fails those that “*fly to Him.*” His mercy and truth never fails. Oh consider, if we had all and had not God – we have nothing! If we had all the comforts our hearts can desire, yet if God withdrew Himself, what remains but a curse of emptiness! What makes heaven but the *presence* of God? And what makes hell but the *absence* of God? *Let God be in any condition, yet it is comfortable* – by the way, usually we find more of God in trouble, than when we are out of trouble; the comforts of religion never come till all other comforts fail.

**It is our chief wisdom to “know God;” our holiness to “love God;” our happiness to “enjoy God.”** “Our strength may fail, and our heart may fail, but God is our portion forever” (Ps 73:26). Everything teaches us that our happiness is not in anything but God – our search sends us to God! If God be ours, He goes with us forever – when earth no longer holds us, heaven shall. O then let us labor for a larger faith – if we had a thousand times more faith, we would have a thousand times more increase of God's blessings. *God's people are like Israel at the Red Sea, environed with dangers on all sides – what course have we then to take but only to look up and wait for the salvation of our God?* If God is our God, will He suffer anything to befall us for our hurt? Will He lay more upon us than He gives us strength to bear? Will He suffer any wind to blow upon us but for our good? Will a friend suffer his friend to be injured? No. As Scripture says, “He hath bottles for our tears, and our sighs are not hid from Him.” Thus, let us prize the favor of so good a God, who though He dwells on high yet regards things so low. A Christian undergoes more troubles and suffering (especially with his own heart) than others do, but what are these compared to his gains? What returns so rich, as trading with God?

**Paul said, “I know whom I have trusted, I have tried Him, and He never yet failed me.”** Every new experience is a new knowledge of God. When God shows Himself as “*contrary to us,*” remembering an act of God's former goodness will enable us to lay claim unto Him. God's concealing of Himself is but a wise discipline for a time. *It is the nature of true faith, to search and pry into every corner, until it*

*discovers afresh the presence of God.* If God should take advantage of our waywardness, what would become of us? The fact is, God is ever ready to respond with mercy – He delights in being merciful. When God appears as a “*stranger*” to us, we need to follow after Him with faith and prayer; He withdraws Himself, that thou shouldst be the more earnest in seeking after Him. *God speaks the sweetest comfort to the heart in the wilderness.* God is the center and resting place of the soul – said David, “He who dwells in the secret place of the most High, shall lodge under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” (Ps 91:1-2). “My strength and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever” (Ps 73:26). (263-295)