The Secret Key of Heaven

Or twenty arguments for closet prayer

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Thomas Brooks



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But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

— Matthew 6:6

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Preface

Dear friends, the following discourse on closet prayer I heartily recommend to your serious perusal. I have many reasons to hope that when you have once read it over, you will be more in love with closet prayer than ever, and that you will set a higher price upon closet prayer than ever, and that you will make a better and fuller improvement of closet prayer than ever yet you have done. Consider what I say in my epistle to the reader and labor so to manage this little treatise that now I put into your hands, that God may be glorified, your own souls edified, comforted, and encouraged in the ways of the Lord, and that you may be my crown and joy in the great day of our Lord Jesus (1 Thess 2:19–20). So wishing that "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush" (Deut 33:16) may abide upon you and yours forever, I take leave and rest, dear friends, your soul's servant in our dear Lord Jesus,

—Thomas Brooks

To the Reader

Christian reader, the epistle dedicatory being occasionally so large, I shall do little more than give thee the grounds and reasons of sending forth this little piece into the world, especially in such a day as this is. Now, my reasons are these:

First, because God by His present dispensations calls more loudly for closet prayer now than He hath done in those last twenty years that are now passed over our heads. See more of this in the 16th argument for closet prayer.

Secondly, because I have several reasons to fear that many Christians do not clearly nor fully understand the necessity, excellency, and usefulness of this subject, and that many—oh, that I could not say any—live in too great a neglect of this indispensable duty, and that more than a few, for want of light, err in the very practice of it.

Thirdly, for the refreshing, support, and encouragement of all those churches of Christ that walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, especially that particular church to whom I stand related.

Fourthly, to preserve and keep up the power of religion and godliness in men's houses, hearts, and lives. The power of religion and godliness lives, thrives, or dies as closet prayer lives, thrives, or dies. Godliness never rises to a higher pitch than when men keep closest to their closets.

Fifthly, because closet prayer is a most sovereign remedy, a most precious antidote of God's own prescribing, against the plague that now rageth in the midst of us (1 Kgs 8:37–39).

Sixthly, because every man is that really which he is secretly. Never tell me how handsomely, how neatly, how bravely this or that man acts his part before others; but tell me, if thou canst, how he acts his part before God in his closet; for the man is certainly what he is *secretly*. There are many that sweat upon the stage that are key-cold in their closets.

Seventhly, though many worthies have done worthily upon all other parts of prayer, yet there are none either of a former or later date that have fallen under my eye that have written any treatise on this subject. I have not a little wondered that so many eminent writers should pass over this great and princely duty of closet prayer, either with a few brief touches, or else in a very great silence. If several bodies of divinity are consulted, you will find that all they say clearly and distinctly as to closet prayer may be brought into a very narrow compass, if not into a nutshell. I have also inquired of several old disciples whether they have ever heard one sermon on closet prayer among all the thousand sermons that they have heard in their days? And they have answered, "No." I have also inquired of them whether they had ever read any treatise on the subject? and they have answered, "No." And truly this hath been no small encouragement to me, to make an offer of my mite; and if this small attempt of mine shall be so blessed as to provoke others that have better heads, and hearts, and hands, than any I have, to do Christ and His people more service in the handling of this choice point in a more copious way than what I have been able to reach unto, I shall therein rejoice.

Eighthly and lastly, that favor, that good acceptance, and fair quarter that my other poor labors have found, not only in this nation, but in other countries also, hath put me upon putting pen to paper once more. And I hope that "the good

will of him that dwelt in the bush" (Deut 33:16) will rest upon this, as it hath to the glory of free grace rested upon my former endeavors. I could add other reasons, but let these suffice.

Good reader, when thou art in thy closet, pray hard for a poor, weak, worthless worm, that I may be found faithful and fruitful to the death, that so at last I may receive a crown of life. So wishing thee all happiness both in this lower and in that upper world, I rest.

Thine in our dear Lord Jesus,
Thomas Brooks.

Introduction

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet,
and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy
Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth
in secret shall reward thee openly.
— Matt 6:6

These words of our Savior are plain and to be taken literally, not allegorically, for He speaketh of shutting the door of the chamber. In this chapter, there is a manifest opposition between the Pharisees praying in the synagogues and corners of the streets and others praying in secret.

In the text, you have a positive precept for every Christian to pray alone: "But thou, when *thou* prayest." He saith not, when *you* pray, but *thou*, "when *thou* prayest, enter into thy closet," as speaking not so much of a joint duty of many praying together, as of a duty which each person is to do alone. The command in the text sends us as well to the closet as to the church. And he is a hypocrite in grain that chooses the one and neglects the other; for thereby he tells the world he cares for neither, he makes conscience of neither. He that puts on a religious habit abroad to gain himself a great name among men, and at the same time lives like an atheist at home, shall at the last be uncased by God and presented before all the world for a most egregious hypocrite.

Bellarmine and some others turn the text into an allegory. They say that in these words there are two allegories. First, the chamber door is the sense: "shut thy door," that is, say

they, thy sense, lest vain imaginations and worldly thoughts distract thy mind in praying. Secondly, the door, say they, is our mouth: "shut thy door," that is, thy lips, say they, and let thy prayer be like the prayer of Hannah, conceived in thy mind, but not uttered with thy mouth. It is usual with papists, and other monkish men that lie in wait to deceive, to turn the blessed Scriptures into a nose of wax under pretense of allegories and mysteries. Origen was a great admirer of allegories. By the strength of his parts and wanton wit, he turned most of the Scriptures into allegories; and by the just judgment of God upon him, he foolishly understood and absurdly applied Matt 19:12 literally: "There be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake," and so gelded himself. And indeed he might as well have plucked out one of his eyes upon the same account, because Christ saith, "It is better…to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Matt 18:9). In all ages, heretics have commonly defended their heresies by translating of Scriptures into allegories. The apostle speaks of such as, denying the resurrection of the body, turn all the testimonies of the resurrection into an allegory, meaning thereby only the spiritual resurrection of the soul from sin, of which sort was Hymenaeus and Philetus, who destroyed the faith of some, saying "the resurrection was past already" (2 Tim 2:17–18). And are there not many among us that turn the whole history of the Bible into an allegory, and that turn Christ, sin, death, the soul, hell, heaven, and all into an allegory? Many have and many do miserably pervert the Scriptures by turning them into vain and groundless allegories. Some wanton wits have expounded paradise to be the soul, man to be the mind, the woman to be the sense, the serpent to be delight, the tree of knowledge of good and

evil to be wisdom, and the rest of the trees to be the virtues and endowments of the mind. O friends! It is dangerous to bring in allegories where the Scripture doth not clearly and plainly warrant them, and to take those words figuratively which should be taken properly.

The word ταμεῖον that is in the text rendered *closet*, hath only three common meanings amongst Greek authors. First, it may be taken for a secret chamber or close and locked parlor; secondly, for a safe or cupboard to lay food in; thirdly, for a locked chest or cupboard wherein treasure usually is reserved.

The best and most judicious interpreters that I have cast mine eye upon, both of a former and later date, do all expound my text of private prayer in retired places, and with them I close. And so the main doctrine that I shall gather from the words is this:

> Doctrine: Closet prayer or private prayer is an indispensable duty that Christ Himself hath laid upon all that are not willing to lie under the woeful brand of being hypocrites.

I beseech you seriously to lay to heart these five things:

First, if any prayer be a duty, then secret prayer must needs be a duty; for secret prayer is as much prayer as any other prayer is prayer; and secret prayer prepares and fits the soul for family prayer and for public prayer. Secret prayer sweetly inclines and strongly disposes a Christian to all other religious duties and services.

Therefore, *secondly*, if secret prayer be not an indispensable duty that lies upon thee, by what authority doth conscience so upbraid thee, and so accuse thee, and so condemn thee, and so terrify thee, as it often doth for the neglect of this duty?

Thirdly, was it ever the way or method of God to promise again and again a reward, an open reward, for that work or service which He Himself never commanded? Surely not. Now, to this duty of secret prayer, the Lord hath again and again promised an open reward (Matt 6:6, 18). And therefore, without any doubt, this is a duty incumbent upon all Christians.

Fourthly, our Savior in the text takes it for granted that every child of God will be frequent in praying to His heavenly Father; and therefore, He encourages them so much the more in the work of secret prayer. "When you pray"—as if He had said, I know you can as well hear without ears, and live without food, and fight without hands, and walk without feet, as you are able to live without prayer. And therefore, when you go to wait on God, or to give your heavenly Father a visit, enter your closet, and shut your doors, etc.

Fifthly, if closet prayer be not an indispensable duty that Christ hath laid upon all His people, why doth Satan so much oppose it? Why doth he so industriously and so unweariedly labor to discourage Christians in it, and to take off Christians from it? Certainly, Satan would never make such a fierce and constant war as he doth upon private prayer were it not a necessary duty, a real duty, and a soul-enriching duty. But more of this you will find in the following discourse; and therefore, let this touch suffice for the present.

Now, these five things do very clearly and evidently demonstrate that to hold intercourse with God secretly and solitarily is the undoubted duty of every Christian. But for a more full opening and confirmation of this great and important point, I shall lay down these twenty arguments or considerations.

Twenty Arguments for Private Prayer

1. The Most Eminent Saints in Private Prayer

First, the most eminent saints, both in the Old and New Testament, have applied themselves to private prayer. Moses was alone in the mount with God forty days and forty nights (Exod 34:28). So Abraham fills his mouth with arguments and reasons the case out alone with God in prayer to prevent Sodom's desolation and destruction, and never leaves off pleading and praying until he had brought God down from fifty to ten (Gen 18:22–32). And in Genesis 21:33, you have Abraham again at his private prayers: "And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God." Why did Abraham plant a grove, but that he might have a most private place to pray and pour out his soul before the Lord in? So Isaac: "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide" (Gen 24:63). The Hebrew word *lasuach* that is here rendered "meditate" signifies to pray as well as to meditate, and so it is often used. It is a comprehensive word that takes in both prayer and meditation. So you shall find Jacob at his private prayer: "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (Gen 32:24–28). When Jacob was all alone in the dark night, and when his joints were out of joint, he so wrestles and weeps, and weeps and wrestles in private prayer that as a prince at last he prevails with God (Hos 12:3–4). So David: "As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. Evening, and morning, and at noon,

will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Ps 55:16–17).

So Daniel was three times a day in private prayer: "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Dan 6:10). Daniel had accustomed himself to private prayer. He went to his closet before he went to his public employment and state affairs; and at his return to dinner, he turned first into his chamber to serve his God and refresh his soul before he sat down to feast his body. And at the end of the day, when he had dispatched his business with men, he made it his business to wait upon God in his chamber. So Jonah keeps up private prayer when he was in "the fish's belly," yea, when he was in "the belly of hell" (Jonah 2:1–2). So we have Elijah at prayer under the juniper tree (1 Kgs 19:4). So Hannah: "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard" (1 Sam 1:13). The very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of the soul before God as Hannah did (v. 15). Neither was Rebekah a stranger to this duty, who, upon the babe's struggling in her womb, "went to enquire of the LORD" (Gen 25:22); that is, she went to some secret place to pray, saith Calvin, Musculus, Mercerus, and others. So Saul is no sooner converted, but presently he falls upon private prayer: "And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). Though he was a strict Pharisee, yet he never prayed to purpose before, nor ever prayed in private before. The Pharisees used to pray in the corners of the streets, and not in

the corners of their houses. And after his conversion he was frequently in private prayer, as you may see by comparing these scriptures together: Rom 1:9; Eph 1:15–16; Phil 1:3–4; 2 Tim 1:3. So Epaphras was a warm man in closet prayer (Col 4:12–13); so Cornelius had devoted himself to private prayer (Acts 10:2, 4); and so Peter gets up to the housetop to pray: "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour" (Acts 10:9). Peter got up upon the leads, not only to avoid distraction, but that he might be the more secret in his private devotion.

Eusebius tells us of James called Justus, that his knees were grown hard and brawny with kneeling so much in private prayer. And Nazianzen reports of his sister Gorgonia that her knees seemed to cleave to the earth by her often praying in private. And Gregory saith of his aunt Trucilla that her elbows were as hard as horn by often leaning upon her desk at private prayer. I have read of a devout person, who, when the set time for his private devotion was come, whatever company he was in, he would break from them with this neat and handsome come-off, "I have a friend waiting for me; farewell." And there was once a great lady of this land, who would frequently withdraw from the company of lords and ladies of great quality who came to visit her, rather than she would lose her set times of waiting upon God in her closet; she would, as they called it, rudely take her leave of them, so that she might in private attend the Lord of lords. She would spare what time she could to express her favors, civilities, and courtesies among her relations and friends; but she would never suffer them to rob God of His time, nor her soul of that comfort and communion which she used to enjoy when she was with God in her closet. And indeed, one hour's

communion with God in one's closet is to be preferred before the greatest and best company in the world.

There was a child of a Christian gentlewoman that was so given to prayer from his infancy that before he could well speak, he would use to get alone and go to prayer. As he grew, he was more frequent in prayer and retiring of himself from company. He would ask his mother very strange questions, far above the capacity of one of his years. But at last, when this child was but five years old and whipping of his top, on a sudden he flung away his scourge-stick and top and ran to his mother, and with great joy said unto her, "Mother, I must go to God; will you go with me?" She answered, "My dear child, how dost thou know thou shalt go to God?" He answered, "God hath told me so, for I love God, and God loves me." She answered, "Dear child, I must go when God pleaseth. But why wilt thou not stay with me?" The child answered, "I will not stay; I must go to God." And the child did not live above a month after, but never cared more for play; but falling sick, he would always be saying that he must go to God, he must go to God. Thus sometimes "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God hath perfected praise" (Matt 21:16). Certainly, such persons will be ripe for heaven betimes who begin betimes to seek God in a closet, in a corner.

Eusebius reports of Constantine the emperor that every day he used to shut himself up in some secret place in his palace and there, on bended knees, did make his devout prayers and soliloquies to God. "My God and I are good company," said famous Dr. Sibbes. A man whose soul is conversant with God in a closet, in a hole, behind the door, or in a desert, a den, a dungeon, shall find more real pleasure, more choice delight, and more full content, than in the palace of a prince.

By all these famous instances, you see that the people of God in all ages have addicted themselves to private prayer. O friends! These pious examples should be very awakening, very convincing, and very encouraging to you. Certainly, it is as much your duty as it is your glory to follow these pious patterns that are now set before you. Witness these following scriptures: "That thou mayest walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous…Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ…Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample…Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you…And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction…That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Prov 2:20; 1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Thess 1:6; Heb 6:12). See also 2 Tim 3:10–12, 14; Titus 2:7. It was an excellent law that the Ephesians made, that men should propound to themselves the best patterns and ever bear in mind some eminent man. Bad men are wonderfully in love with bad examples (Jer 44:16–17). The Indian, hearing that his ancestors were gone to hell, said that then he would go thither too. Some men have a mind to go to hell for company's sake. Oh, that we were as much in love with the examples of good men as others are in love with the examples of bad men; and then we should be oftener in our closets than now we are! Oh, that our eyes were more fixed on the pious examples of all that have in them *aliquid Christi* (anything of Christ), as Bucer spake! Shall we love to look upon the pictures of our friends; and shall we not love to look upon the pious examples of those that are the lively and lovely picture of Christ? The pious examples of others should

be the looking-glasses by which we should dress ourselves. He is the best and wisest Christian that writes after the fairest Scripture copy, that imitates those Christians that are most eminent in grace, and that have been most exercised in closet prayer, and in the most secret duties of religion.

Jerome having read the life and death of Hilarion, one that lived most Christianly and died most comfortably, folded up the book, saying, "Well, Hilarion shall be the champion that I will follow. His good life shall be my example, and his godly death my precedent." It is brave to live and die by the examples of the most eminent saints.

2. Christ Much Exercised Himself in Secret Prayer

Secondly, consider, when Christ was on earth He did much exercise Himself in secret prayer. He was often with God alone, as you may see in these famous scriptures: "And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone" (Matt 14:23). Christ's choosing solitudes for private prayer doth not only hint to us the danger of distraction and deviation of thoughts in prayer, but how necessary it is for us to choose the most convenient places we can for private prayers. Our own fickleness and Satan's restlessness call upon us to get into such corners where we may most freely pour out our souls into the bosom of God. "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). As the morning time is the fittest time for prayer, so solitary places are the fittest places for prayer. "And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray" (Mark 6:46). He that would pray to purpose had need be quiet when he is alone. "And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (Luke 5:16). The Greek, He "was departing and praying," to give us to understand that He did thus often. When Christ was neither exercised in teaching nor in working of miracles, He was then very intent on private prayer. "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12).

Did Christ spend whole nights in private prayer to save our souls; and shall we think it much to spend an hour or two in the day for the furtherance of the internal and eternal welfare of our souls?

"And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives" (Luke 21:37). Christ frequently joins praying and preaching together, and those whom Christ hath joined together, let no man presume to put asunder. "And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him…And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed…And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood (clotted or congealed blood) falling down to the ground (never was garden watered before or since with blood as this was). And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow" (Luke 22:39, 41, 44–45). Ah! What sad pieces of vanity are the best of men in an hour of trial and temptation! These very men that a little before did stoutly profess and promise that they would never leave Him nor forsake Him, and that they would go to prison for Christ, and die for Christ, yet when the day of trial came, they could not so much as watch with Him one hour. They had neither eyes to see nor hands to wipe off Christ's bloody sweat. So John 6:15–17. Thus you see, by all these famous instances, that Christ was frequent in private prayer. Oh, that we would daily propound to ourselves this noble pattern for our imitation, and make it our business, our work, our heaven, to write after this blessed copy that Christ hath set us: to be much with God alone. Certainly, Christianity is nothing else but an imitation of the divine nature, a reducing of a man's

self to the image of God in which he was "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph 4:24). A Christian's whole life should be nothing but a visible representation of Christ. The heathens had this notion amongst them, as Lactantius reports, that the way to honor their gods was to be like them. Sure I am that the highest way of honoring Christ is to be like to Christ: "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (1 John 2:6). Oh, that this blessed Scripture might always lie warm upon our hearts. Christ is the sun, and all the watches of our lives should be set by the dial of His motion. Christ is a pattern of patterns; His example should be to us instead of a thousand examples. It is not only our liberty, but our duty and glory, to follow Christ in all His moral virtues absolutely. Other patterns are imperfect and defective, but Christ is a perfect pattern; and of all His children, they are the happiest that come nearest to this perfect pattern.

Heliogabalus loved his children the better for resembling him in sin. But Christ loves His children the more for resembling Him in sanctity. I have read of some springs that change the color of the cattle that drink of them into the color of their own waters, as Du Bartas sings:

Cerona, Xanth, and Cephisus do make
The thirsty flocks, that of their waters take,
Black, red, and white; and near the crimson deep,
The Arabian fountain maketh crimson sheep.

Certainly, Jesus Christ is such a fountain, in which whosoever bathes, and of which whosoever drinks, shall be changed into the same likeness (2 Cor 3:18).

Question. But why was our Lord Jesus so much in private prayer? Why was He so often with God alone?

Answer 1. First, it was to put a very high honor and value upon private prayer; it was to enhance and raise the price of this duty. Men naturally are very apt and prone to have low and undervaluing thoughts of secret prayer. But Christ, by exercising Himself so frequently in it, hath put an everlasting honor and an inestimable value upon it.

Answer 2. Secondly, He was much in private prayer, He was often with God alone, that He might not be seen of men, and that He might avoid all shows and appearances of ostentation and popular applause. He that hath commanded us to "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess 5:22) would not Himself, when He was in this world, venture upon the least appearance of evil. Christ was very shy of everything that did but look like sin; He was very shy of the very show and shadow of pride or vain glory.

Answer 3. Thirdly, to avoid interruptions in the duty. Secrecy is no small advantage to the serious and lively carrying on of a private duty. Interruptions and disturbances from without are oftentimes quench-coals to private prayer. The best Christians do but bungle when they meet with interruptions in their private devotions.

Answer 4. Fourthly, to set us such a blessed pattern and gracious example, that we should never please nor content ourselves with public prayers only, nor with family prayers only, but that we should also apply ourselves to secret prayer, to closet prayer. Christ was not always in public, nor always in His family, but He was often in private with God alone, that by His own example He might encourage us to be often with God in secret. Happy are they that tread in His steps and that write after His copy.

Answer 5. Fifthly, that He might approve Himself to our understandings and consciences to be a most just and faithful

High Priest (Heb 2:17; John 17). Christ was wonderfully faithful and careful in both parts of His priestly office: satisfaction and intercession. He was His people's only spokesman. Ah! How earnest, how frequent was He in pouring out prayers, and tears, and sighs, and groans for His people in secret, when He was in this world (Heb 5:7). And now He is in heaven, He is still a-making intercession for them (Heb 7:25).

Answer 6. Sixthly, to convince us that His Father hears and observes our private prayers, and bottles up all our secret tears, and that He is not a stranger to our closet desires, wrestlings, breathings, hungerings, and thirstings.

3. Secret Prayer Distinguishes You from Hypocrites

Thirdly, consider that the ordinary exercising of yourselves in secret prayer is that which will distinguish you from hypocrites, who do all they do to be seen of men. "Take heed that you do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily, I say unto you, they have their reward" (Matt 6:1–2). Self is the only oil that makes the chariot-wheels of the hypocrite move in all religious concernments. "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to stand praying in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward…Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward" (Matt 6:5, 16). Thus you see that these hypocrites look more at men than at God in all their duties. When they give alms, the trumpet must sound; when they pray, it must be in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets; and when they fasted, they disfigured their faces that they might appear unto men to fast. Hypocrites

live upon the praises and applauses of men. Naturalists report of the Chelydonian stone that it will retain its virtue no longer than it is enclosed in gold. So hypocrites will keep up their duties no longer than they are fed, and encouraged, and enclosed with the golden praises and applauses of men. Hypocrites are like blazing stars, which, so long as they are fed with vapors, shine as if they were fixed stars; but let the vapors dry up, and presently they vanish and disappear.

Closet duty speaks out most sincerity. He prays with a witness that prays without a witness. The more sincere the soul is, the more in closet duty the soul will be (Job 31:33). Where do you read in all the Scripture that Pharaoh, or Saul, or Judas, or Demas, or Simon Magus, or the scribes and Pharisees did ever use to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret? Secret prayer is not the hypocrite's ordinary walk, his ordinary work or trade. There is great cause to fear that his heart was never right with God whose whole devotion is spent among men, or among many; or else our Savior, in drawing the hypocrite's picture, would never have made this to be the very cast of his countenance, as He doth in Matthew 6:5. It is very observable that Christ commands His disciples that they should not be as the hypocrites. It is one thing to be hypocrites, and it is another thing to be as the hypocrites. Christ would not have His people to look like hypocrites, nor to be like to hypocrites. It is only sincerity that will enable a man to make a trade of private prayer. In praying with many, there are many things that may bribe and provoke a carnal heart, as pride, vain-glory, love of applause, or to get a name. A hypocrite, in all his duties, trades more for a good name than for a good life, for a good report than for a good conscience—like fiddlers that are more careful in tuning their

instruments than in composing their lives. But in private prayer there is no such trade to be driven.

4. In Secret We May Freely Unbosom Our Souls to God

Fourthly, consider that in secret we may more freely, and fully, and safely unbosom our souls to God than we can in the presence of many or a few. Hence the husband is to mourn apart, and the wife apart (Zech 12:12–14), not only to show the soundness of their sorrow, but also to show their sincerity by their secrecy. They must mourn apart that their sins may not be disclosed nor discovered one to another. Here they are severed to show that they wept not for company's sake, but for their own particular sins by which they had pierced and crucified the Lord of glory. In secret, a Christian may descend into such particulars as in public or before others he will not, he may not, he ought not to mention. Ah! How many Christians are there who would blush and be ashamed to walk in the streets, and to converse with sinners or saints, should but those infirmities, enormities, and wickednesses be written in their foreheads, or known to others, which they freely and fully lay open to God in secret. There are many sins which many men have fallen into before conversion and since conversion, which, should they be known to the world, would make themselves to stink, and religion to stink, and their profession to stink in the nostrils of all that know them. Yea, should those weaknesses and wickednesses be published upon the house-tops, which many are guilty of before grace received, or since grace received, how would weak Christians be staggered, young comers-on in the ways of God

discouraged, and many mouths of blasphemy opened, and many sinners' hearts hardened against the Lord, His ways, reproofs, and the things of their own peace. Yea, how would Satan's banner be displayed, and his kingdom strengthened, and himself infinitely pleased and delighted! It is an infinite mercy and condescension in God to lay a law of restraint upon Satan, who else would be the greatest blab in all the world. It would be mirth and music to him to be still a-laying open the follies and weaknesses of the saints.

Ambrose brings in the devil boasting against Christ, and challenging Judas as his own. "He is not Thine, Lord Jesus, he is mine. His thoughts beat for me; he eats with Thee, but is fed by me; he takes bread from Thee, but money from me; he drinks with Thee, and sells Thy blood to me." There is not a sin that a saint commits, but Satan would trumpet it out to all the world if God would but give him leave. No man that is in his right wits will lay open to everyone his bodily infirmities, weaknesses, diseases, ailments, griefs, etc., but to some near relation, or bosom friend, or able physician. So no man that is in his right wits will lay open to everyone his soul infirmities, weaknesses, diseases, ailments, griefs, etc., but to the Lord, or to some particular person that is wise, faithful, and able to contribute something to his soul's relief. Should a Christian but lay open or rip up all his follies and vanities to the world, how sadly would some deride him and scorn him! And how severely and bitterly would others censure him and judge him! When David was alone in the cave, then he poured out his complaint to God, and showed before Him his trouble (Ps 142:2). And when Job was all alone, then his eyes poured out tears to God (Job 16:20). There is no hazard, no danger, in ripping up of all before God in a corner, but

there may be a great deal of hazard and danger in ripping up of all before men.

5. Secret Duties Shall Have Open Rewards

Fifthly, secret duties shall have open rewards. "And thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt 6:6). God will reward His people here in part, and hereafter in all perfection (v. 18). He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him in a corner. They that sow in tears secretly shall reap in joy openly. Private prayer shall be rewarded before men and angels publicly. How openly did God reward Daniel for his secret prayer (Dan 6:10, 23–28)! Mordecai privately discovered a plot of treason against the person of king Ahasuerus, and he is rewarded openly (Esth 2:21–23; with chapter 6). Darius, before he came to the kingdom, received privately a garment for a gift of one Syloson; and when he came to be a king, he rewarded him openly with the command of his country Samos. God, in the great day, will recompense His people before all the world for every secret prayer, and secret tear, and secret sigh, and secret groan that hath come from His people. God, in the great day, will declare to men and angels how often His people have been in pouring out their souls before Him in such and such holes, corners, and secret places; and accordingly He will reward them.

Ah, Christians! Did you really believe this, and seriously dwell on this, you would

- walk more thankfully;
- work more cheerfully;
- suffer more patiently;

- fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil more courageously;
- lay out yourselves for God, His interest, and glory more freely;
- live with what providence hath cut out for your portion more quietly and contentedly; and,
- you would be in private prayer more frequently, more abundantly.

6. God Lets Out Himself Most to His People in Secret

Sixthly, consider that God hath usually let out Himself most to His people when they have been in secret, when they have been alone at the throne of grace. Oh the sweet meltings, the heavenly warmings, the blessed cheerings, the glorious manifestations, and the choice communion with God that Christians have found when they have been alone with God in a corner, in a closet, behind the door! When had Daniel that vision and comfortable message, that blessed news by the angel that he was "greatly beloved," but when he was all alone at prayer? "And whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision" (Dan 9:20–23). While Daniel was at private prayer, God, by the angel Gabriel, reveals to him the secret of His

counsel concerning the restoration of Jerusalem and the duration thereof, even to the Messiah. And while Daniel was at private prayer, the Lord appears to him, and in an extraordinary way assures him that he was a man "greatly beloved," or as the Hebrew *chumudoth* hath it, "a man of desires," that is, a man whom God's desires are towards, a man singularly beloved of God, and highly in favor with God, a man that is very pleasing and delightful to God. God loves to lade the wings of private prayer with the sweetest, choicest, and chiefest blessings. Ah! How often has God kissed a poor Christian at the beginning of private prayer, and spoken peace to him in the midst of private prayer, and filled him with light and joy and assurance upon the close of private prayer?

And so, Cornelius is highly commended and graciously rewarded upon the account of his private prayer. "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God…And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour (that is, until three o'clock in the afternoon, v. 3); and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said…Thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God" (Acts 10:1–4, 30–31). Mark, as he was praying in his house, namely, by himself alone, a man in bright clothing (that was an angel in man's shape, v. 3)

appeared to him, and said, "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard" (v. 31). He doth not mean only that prayer which he made when he fasted and humbled himself before the Lord; but, as verses 2-4 show, his prayers, his prayers which he made alone. For it seems none else were with him then, for he only saw that man in bright clothing; and to him alone the angel addressed his present speech, saying, "Cornelius, thy prayer is heard" (v. 31). Here you see that Cornelius' private prayers are not only heard, but kindly remembered, and graciously accepted, and gloriously rewarded. Praying Cornelius is not only remembered by God, but he is also visited, sensibly and evidently, by an angel, and assured that his private prayers and good deeds are an odor, "a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, and wellpleasing to God" (Phil 4:18).

And so when did Peter have his vision but when he was praying alone on the housetop? "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up unto the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat" (Acts 10:9–13). When Peter was upon the housetop at prayer alone, then he fell into a trance, and he saw heaven opened; and then he had his spirit raised, his mind elevated, and all the faculties of his soul filled with a divine revelation.

And so when Paul was at prayer alone, he saw "in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight" (Acts 9:12). Paul had not

been long at private prayer before it was revealed to him that he was a chosen vessel, and before he was filled with the gifts, graces, and comforts of the Holy Ghost.

And when John was alone in the isle of Patmos "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9), whither he was banished by Domitian (Rev 1:9; 5:1–9), a most cruel emperor, then he had a glorious sight of the Son of Man, and then the Lord discovered to him most deep and profound mysteries, both concerning the present and future state of the church, to the end of the world. And when John was weeping, in private prayer doubtless, then the sealed book was opened to him.

So when Daniel was at private prayer, God dispatches a heavenly messenger to him, and his errand was to open more clearly and fully the blessed Scripture to him. Some comfortable and encouraging knowledge this holy man of God had attained unto before by his frequent and constant study in the Word, and this eggs him on to private prayer, and private prayer posts an angel from heaven to give him a clearer and fuller light. Private prayer is a golden key to unlock the mysteries of the Word unto us. The knowledge of many choice and blessed truths are but the returns of private prayer. The Word most dwells richly in their hearts who are most in pouring out their hearts before God in their closets. When Bonaventure, that seraphical doctor, as some call him, was asked by Aquinas from what books and helps he derived such holy and divine expressions and contemplations, he pointed to a crucifix, and said, "Prostrate in prayer at the feet of this image, my soul receiveth greater light from heaven than from all study and disputation." Though this be a monkish tradition and superstitious fiction, yet some improvement may be made of it. Certainly, that Christian or

that minister that in private prayer lies most at the feet of Jesus Christ shall understand most of the mind of Christ in the gospel, and he shall have most of heaven and the things of his own peace brought down into his heart.

There is no service wherein Christians have such a near, familiar, and friendly intercourse with God as in this of private prayer; neither is there any service wherein God doth more delight to make known His truth and faithfulness, His grace and goodness, His mercy and bounty, His beauty and glory to poor souls, than this of private prayer. Luther professed that he profited more in the knowledge of the Scripture by private prayer in a short space than he did by study in a longer space, as John by weeping in a corner got the sealed book opened. Private prayer crowns God with the honor and glory that is due to His name; and God crowns private prayer with a discovery of those blessed weighty truths to His servants that are a sealed book to others. Certainly, the soul usually enjoys most communion with God in secret. When a Christian is in a wilderness, which is a very solitary place, then God delights to speak friendly and comfortably to him. "Behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak friendly or comfortably unto her" (Hos 2:14), or as the Hebrew hath it, "I will speak to her heart." When I have her alone, saith God, in a solitary wilderness, I will speak such things to her heart as shall exceedingly cheer her, and comfort her, and even make her heart leap and dance within her. A husband imparts his mind most freely and fully to his wife when she is alone; and so doth Christ to the believing soul. Oh, the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret visits, the secret whispers, the secret cheerings, the secret sealings, the secret discoveries, etc., that God gives to His people when alone, when in a hole, when under the stairs,

when behind the door, when in a dungeon! When Jeremiah was calling upon God alone in his dark dungeon, he had great and wonderful things showed him that he knew not of (Jer 33:1–3).

Ambrose was wont to say, "I am never less alone than when I am alone; for then I can enjoy the presence of my God most freely, fully, and sweetly, without interruption."

And it was a most sweet and divine saying of Bernard, "O saint, knowest thou not that thy husband Christ is bashful, and will not be familiar in company? Retire thyself therefore by prayer and meditation into thy closet or the fields, and there thou shalt have Christ's embraces."

A gentlewoman, being at private prayer and meditation in her parlor, had such sweet, choice, and full enjoyments of God that she cried out, "Oh, that I might ever enjoy this sweet communion with God!"

Christ loves to embrace His spouse, not so much in the open street, as in a closet; and certainly the gracious soul hath never sweeter views of glory than when it is most out of the view of the world. Wise men give their best, their choicest, and their richest gifts in secret; and so doth Christ give His the best of the best when they are in a corner, when they are all alone. But as for such as cannot spare time to seek God in a closet, to serve Him in secret, they sufficiently manifest that they have little fellowship or friendship with God, Whom they so seldom come to.

7. This Life Is the Only Time for Private Prayer

Seventhly, consider the time of this life is the only time for private prayer. Heaven will admit of no secret prayer. In heaven there will be no secret sins to trouble us, nor no secret wants to pinch us, nor no secret temptations to betray us, nor no secret snares to entangle us, nor no secret enemies to supplant us. We had need live much in the practice of that duty here on earth that we shall never be exercised in after death. Some duties that are incumbent upon us now, as praising of God, admiring of God, exalting and lifting up of God, joying and delighting in God, etc., will be forever incumbent upon us in heaven; but this duty of private prayer, we must take our leaves of when we come to lay our heads in the dust.

8. The Great Prevalency of Secret Prayer

Eighthly, consider the great prevalence of secret prayer. Private prayer is *porta coeli, clavis paradisi*, the gate of heaven, a key to let us into Paradise. Oh, the great things that private prayer hath done with God (Ps 31:22)! Oh, the great mercies that have been obtained by private prayer (Ps 38:8–9)! And oh, the great threatenings that have been diverted by private prayer! And oh, the great judgments that have been removed by private prayer! And oh, the great judgments that have been prevented by private prayer! I have read of a malicious woman who gave herself to the devil, provided that he would do a mischief to such a neighbor, whom she mortally hated. The devil went again and again to do his errand, but at last he returns and tells her that he could do no hurt to that man, for whenever he came, he found him either reading the Scriptures or at private prayer. Private prayers pierce the heavens and are commonly blessed and loaded with gracious and glorious returns from thence. While Hezekiah was praying and weeping in private, God sent the prophet Isaiah to him to assure him that his prayer was heard, and that his tears were seen, and that he would add unto his days fifteen years (Isa 38:5). So, when Isaac was all alone meditating and praying and treating with God for a good wife in the fields, he meets Rebekah (Gen 24:63–64).

So Jacob: "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he

saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen 32:24–28). In this scripture, we have an elegant description of a duel fought between the Almighty and Jacob; and in it there are these things most observable:

a. The Combatants: Jacob, and God in the Appearance of a Man

(1) First, we have the combatants or duelists, Jacob and God, who appeared in the shape or appearance of a man. He that is here said to be a man was the Son of God in human shape, as it appeareth by the whole narration, and by Hosea 12:3–5. Now, that this man that wrestled with Jacob was indeed God, and not really man, is most evident by these reasons:

First, Jacob desires a blessing from Him (v. 26). Now, it is God's prerogative-royal to bless, and not angels' nor men's.

Secondly, he calls Him by the name of God. "As a prince hast thou power with God" (v. 28). And saith Jacob, "I have seen God face to face" (v. 30). Not that he saw the majesty and essence of God: for no man can see the essential glory of God and live (Exod 33:20, 23); but he saw God more apparently, more manifestly, more gloriously than ever he had done before. Some created shape, some glimpse of glory, Jacob saw, whereby God was pleased for the present to testify His more immediate presence, but not Himself.

Thirdly, the same person that here Jacob wrestles with is He Whom Jacob remembereth in his benediction as his deliverer from all evil (Gen 48:16). It was that God that appeared to him at Bethel "when he fled from the face of his brother" (Gen 35:7).

Fourthly, Jacob is reproved for his curious inquiring or asking after the Angel's name (v. 29), which is a clear argument or demonstration of His majesty and glory, God being above all notion and name. God is a supersubstantial substance, an understanding not to be understood, a word never to be spoken. One being asked what God was, answered that he must be God Himself, before he could know God fully. We are as well able to comprehend the sea in a cockleshell, as we are able to comprehend the Almighty, or that *nomen majestativum* (majestic name), as Tertullian phraseth it. "In searching after God," saith Chrysostom, "I am like a man digging in a deep spring: I stand here, and the water riseth upon me; and I stand there, and still the water riseth upon me."

In this conflict, you have not one man wrestling with another, nor one man wrestling with a created angel, but a poor, weak, mortal man wrestling with an immortal God—weakness wrestling with strength, and a finite being with an infinite being. Though Jacob had no second, though he was all alone, though he was wonderfully overmatched, yet he wrestles and keeps his hold, and all in the strength of Him he wrestles with.

b. The Place: Beside the Ford Jabbok

Secondly, you have the place where they combated, and that was beside the ford Jabbok (Gen 32:22). This is the name of a brook or river springing by Rabba, the metropolis of the Ammonites, and issuing into Jordan beneath the Sea of Galilee

(Num 21:24; Deut 2:37; Judg 11:13, 15; Deut 3:16). Jacob did never enjoy so much of the presence of God as when he had left the company of men. Oh, the sweet communion that Jacob had with God when he was retired from his family and was all alone with his God by the ford Jabbok! Certainly, Jacob was never less alone than at this time, when he was so alone. Saints often meet with the best wine and with the strongest cordials when they are all alone with God.

c. The Time: The Night, and It Lasted Until Break of Day

Thirdly, you have the time of the combat, and that was the night. At what time of the night this wrestling, this duel, began, we nowhere read. But it lasted until break of day; it lasted until Jacob had the better of the Angel. How many hours of the night this conflict lasted, no mortal man can tell. God's design was that none should be spectators nor witnesses of this combat but Jacob only; and therefore, Jacob must be wrestling when others were sleeping.

d. The Ground of the Quarrel: Jacob's Fear of Esau, and His Desire for a Blessing

Fourthly, you have the ground of the quarrel, and that was Jacob's fear of Esau, and his importunate desire for a blessing. Jacob flies to God that he might not fall before man; he flies to God that he might not fly before men. In a storm, there is no shelter like the wing of God. He is safest and happiest and wisest that lays himself under divine protection. This Jacob knew, and, therefore, he runs to God, as to his only city of refuge. In this conflict, God would have given out: "Let me go, for the day breaketh" (v. 26); but Jacob keeps his hold and

tells Him boldly to His very face that he would not let Him go unless He would bless him. Oh, the power of private prayer! It hath a kind of omnipotence in it. It takes God captive; it holds Him as a prisoner; it binds the hands of the Almighty; yea, it will wring a mercy, a blessing, out of the hand of heaven itself. Oh, the power of that prayer that makes a man victorious over the greatest, the highest power! Jacob, though a man, a single man, a travelling man, a tired man, yea, though a worm, that is easily crushed and trodden under foot, and no man (Isa 41:14), yet in private prayer he is so potent that he overcomes the omnipotent God; he is so mighty that he overcomes the Almighty.

e. The Nature of the Combat: Both Outward and Inward, Corporal and Spiritual

Fifthly, you have the nature or manner of the combat, and that was both outward and inward, both corporal and spiritual. It was by might and sleight; it was as well by the strength of his body as it was by the force of his faith. He wrestled not only with spiritual strugglings, tears, and prayers (Hos 12:4), but with corporal also, wherein God assailed him with one hand and upheld him with the other. In this conflict, Jacob and the Angel of the covenant did really lay arm on arm, and set shoulder to shoulder, and put foot to foot, and used all other sleights and ways as men do that wrestle one with another. The Hebrew word ואבק, from אבק, that is here rendered *wrestled* signifies the raising of the dust, because those which did wrestle of old did not only wrestle naked, as the manner then was, but did also use to cast dust one upon another, that so they might take surer hold one of another. Some, from this word *abak*, do conclude that Jacob and the

Angel did tug, strive, and turn each other, until they sweat again; for so much the word imports. Jacob and the Angel did not wrestle in jest, but in good earnest; they wrestled with their might, as it were, for the garland; they strove for victory as for life.

But as this wrestling was corporal, so it was spiritual also. Jacob's soul takes hold of God, Jacob's faith takes hold of God, Jacob's prayers takes hold of God, and Jacob's tears takes hold of God (Hos 12:4–5). Certainly, Jacob's weapons in this warfare were mainly spiritual, and so "mighty through God" (2 Cor 10:4). There is no overcoming of God but in His own strength. Jacob did more by his royal faith than he did by his noble hands, more by weeping than he did by sweating, and more by praying than he did by all his bodily strivings.

f. The Issue of the Combat: Victory over the Angel

Sixthly and lastly, you have the issue of the combat, and that is victory over the Angel (v. 28). Jacob wrestles in the Angel's arms and armor, and so overcomes Him. As a prince, he overpowers the Angel by that very power he had from the Angel. The Angel was as freely and fully willing to be conquered by Jacob, as Jacob was willing to be conqueror. When lovers wrestle, the strongest is willing enough to take a fall of the weakest; and so it was here. The father, in wrestling with his child, is willing enough, for his child's comfort and encouragement, to take a fall now and then; and so it was between the Angel and Jacob in the present case. Now in this blessed story, as in a crystal glass, you may see the great power and prevalence of private prayer. It conquers the great Conqueror; it is so omnipotent that it overcomes an omnipotent God.

Now this you may see more fully and sweetly cleared up in Hosea 12:3–4: "He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us." When Jacob was all alone and in a dark night, and but on one leg, yet then he played the prince with God, as the Hebrew hath it. Jacob by prayers and tears did so prince it with God as that he carried the blessing. Jacob's wrestling was by weeping, and his prevailing by praying. Prayers and tears are not only very pleasing to God, but also very prevalent with God. And thus, you see that this great instance of Jacob speaks out aloud the prevalence of private prayer.

See another instance of this in David: "I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears" (Ps 6:6). These are all excessive figurative speeches to set forth the greatness of his sorrow and the multitude of his tears. David in his retirement makes the place of his sin, his bed, to be the place of his repentance. David sins privately upon his bed, and David mourns privately upon his bed. Every place which we have polluted by sin, we should sanctify and water with our tears. "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; for the LORD hath heard the voice of my weeping" (Ps 6:8). As blood hath a voice, and as the rod hath a voice, so tears have a voice. Tears have tongues, and tears can speak. There is no noise to that that tears in secret make in the ears of God. A prudent and indulgent father can better pick out the wants and necessities of his children by their secret tears than by their loud complaints, by their weeping than by their words; and do you think that God cannot do as much? Tears are not always mutes (Lam 2:18). "Cry aloud," saith one, "not with

thy tongue, but with thy eyes; not with thy words, but with thy tears; for that is the prayer that maketh the most forcible entry into the ears of the great God of heaven." Penitent tears are undeniable ambassadors that never return from the throne of grace without a gracious answer. Tears are a kind of silent prayers, which, though they say nothing, yet they obtain pardon; and though they plead not a man's cause, yet they obtain mercy at the hands of God. As you see in that great instance of Peter, who, though he said nothing that we read of, yet weeping bitterly, he obtained mercy (Matt 26:75). I have read of Augustine, who, coming as a visitant to the house of a sick man, he saw the room full of friends and kindred who were all silent, yet all weeping: the wife sobbing, the children sighing, the kinsfolk lamenting, all mourning; whereupon Augustine uttered this short ejaculatory prayer, "Lord, what prayer dost Thou hear, if not these?" "The LORD hath heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer" (Ps 6:9). God sometimes answers His people before they pray. "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer" (Isa 65:24). And sometimes while they are praying; so it follows in the same verse, "And while they are yet speaking, I will hear." So Isa 30:19 states: "He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee." And sometimes after they have prayed, as the experiences of all Christians can testify. Sometimes God neither hears nor receives a prayer; and this is the common case and lot of the wicked (Prov 1:28; Job 27:9; Isa 1:15). Sometimes God hears the prayers of His people, but doth not presently answer them, as in that case of Paul (2 Cor 12:7–9). And sometimes God both hears and receives the prayers of His people, as here He did David's. Now in this

instance of David, as in a glass, you may run and read the prevalence of private prayer and of secret tears.

You may take another instance of this in Jonah: "Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me…The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head…When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple…And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land" (Jonah 2:1–3, 5, 7, 10). When Jonah was all alone and in the midst of many dangers and deaths; when he was in the whale's belly, yea, in the belly of hell—so called because horrid and hideous, deep and dismal—yet then private prayer fetches him from thence. Let a man's dangers be never so many, nor never so great, yet secret prayer hath a certain omnipotence in it that will deliver him out of them all. In multiplied afflictions, private prayer is most prevalent with God. In the very midst of drowning, secret prayer will keep both head and heart above water. Upon Jonah's private prayer, God sends forth His mandamus, and the fish serves Jonah for a ship to sail safe to shore. When the case is even desperate, yet then private prayer can do much with God. Private prayer is of that power that it can open the doors of leviathan, as you see in this great instance, which yet is reckoned as a thing not feasible (Job 41:14).

You have another instance of the prevalence of private prayer in 2 Kings 4:32–33: "And when Elisha was come into

the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD." Privacy is a good help to fervency in prayer. "And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes" (vv. 34-35). Oh, the power, the prevalence, the omnipotence of private prayer that raises the dead to life! And the same effect had the private prayer of Elijah in raising the widow's son of Zarephath to life (1 Kgs 17:18ff). The great prevalence of Moses' private prayers you may read in the following scriptures: "And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched" (Num 11:1–2). Moses by private prayer rules and overrules with God; he was so potent with God in private prayer that he could have what he would of God (see also Num 21:7–9; Ps 106:23; Exod 32:9–14; Exod 14:15–17). The same you may see in Nehemiah 1:11 compared with 2:4-8. So, Luther, perceiving the cause of God and the work of reformation to be greatly strained and in danger, he went into his closet, and never left wrestling with God until he had received a gracious answer from heaven; upon which he comes out of his closet to his friends leaping and triumphing with *vicimus, vicimus*, "We have overcome, we have overcome" in his mouth. At which time it is observed

that there came out a proclamation from Charles the Fifth that none should be further molested for the profession of the gospel. At another time, Luther being in private prayer for a sick friend of his, who was very comfortable and useful to him, had a particular answer for his recovery; whereupon he was so confident, that he sent word to his friend that he should certainly recover; and so, it fell out accordingly. And so, Latimer prayed with great zeal for three things: 1) that Queen Elizabeth might come to the crown; 2) that he might seal the truth with his heart blood; and 3) that the gospel might be restored once again, once again, which he expressed with great vehemence of spirit; all which three God heard him in.

Constantine commanded that his effigies should be engraven, not as other emperors in their armor leaning, but as in a posture of prayer, kneeling, to manifest to the world that he won more by secret prayer than by open battles.

Mr. Dod reports that when many good people had often sought the Lord in the behalf of a woman that was possessed with the devil and yet could not prevail, at last they appointed a day for fasting and prayer, at which time there came a poor woman to the chamber door where the exercise was begun and craved entrance, but she being poor they would not admit her in. Upon that, the poor woman kneeled behind the door and sought God by prayer. But she had not prayed long before the evil spirit raged, roared, and cried out in the possessed woman, "Take away the old woman behind the door, for I must be gone; take away the old woman behind the door, for I must be gone." And so, by the old woman's prayers behind the door, he was cast out. Oh, the prevalence of prayer behind the door! And thus you see by all these great instances the great prevalence of private prayer.

Private prayer, like Saul's sword and Jonathan's bow, when duly qualified as to the person and act, never returns empty. It hits the mark; it carries the day with God. It pierceth the walls of heaven, though made of brass and iron like those of Gaza (Isa 45:2). Oh, who can express the powerful oratory of private prayer!

9. Secret Duties Are the Most Soul-Enriching

Ninthly, consider that secret duties are the most soul-enriching duties. Look, as secret meals make fat bodies, so secret duties make fat souls; and as secret trade brings in great earthly riches, so secret prayers make many rich in spiritual blessings and in heavenly riches. Private prayer is that privy key of heaven that unlocks all the treasures of glory to the soul. God usually gives the best riches and the sweetest mercies to His people when they are in their closets upon their knees. Look, as the warmth the chicks find by close sitting under the hen's wings cherisheth them, so are the graces of the saints enlivened and cherished and strengthened by the sweet secret influences which their souls fall under when they are in their closet communion with God. Private prayer conscientiously performed is the privy key of heaven that hath unlocked such treasures and such secrets as hath passed the skill of the cunningest devil to find out. Private prayer midwifes the choicest mercies and the chiefest riches in upon us.

Certainly, there are none so rich in gracious experiences as those that are most exercised in closet duties. "This poor man cried," saith David, "and the LORD…saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps 34:6). David, pointing to himself, tells us that he "cried," that is, silently and secretly, as Moses did at the Red Sea, and as Nehemiah did in the presence of the king of Persia. "And the LORD…saved him out of all his troubles" (v.

6; Exod 14:15; Neh 1:11; 2:4). And, oh, what additions were these deliverances to his experiences! O my friends, look, as the tender dew that falls in the silent night makes the grass and herbs and flowers to flourish and grow more abundantly than great showers of rain that fall in the day, so secret prayer will more abundantly cause the sweet herbs of grace and holiness to grow and flourish in the soul than all those more open, public, and visible duties of religion, which too, too often are mingled and mixed with the sun and wind of pride and hypocrisy.

Beloved! You know that many times a favorite at court gets more by one secret motion, by one private request to his prince, than a tradesman or a merchant gets in twenty years' labor and pains. So, a Christian many times gets more by one secret motion, by one private request to the King of kings, than many others do by trading long in the more public duties of religion. O sirs! Remember that in private prayer we have a far greater advantage as to the exercise of our own gifts and graces and parts than we have in public; for in public, we only hear others exercise their parts and gifts. In public duties, we are more passive; but in private duties, we are more active. Now, the more our gifts and parts and graces are exercised, the more they are strengthened and increased. All acts strengthen habits. The more sin is acted, the more it is strengthened. And so it is with our gifts and graces: the more they are acted, the more they are strengthened.

10. All Christians Have Their Secret Sins

Tenthly, take many things together. All Christians have their secret sins. “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults” (Ps 19:12). Secret not only to other men, but himself; even such secret sins as grew from errors which he understood not. It is incident to every man to err, and then to be ignorant of his errors. Many sins I see in myself, saith he, and more there are which I cannot espy, which I cannot find out; nay, I think, saith he, that every man’s sins do arise beyond his accounts. There is not the best, the wisest, nor the holiest man in the world, that can give a full and entire list of his sins. “Who can understand his errors?” This interrogation hath the force of an affirmation: “Who can?” “No man!” No, not the most perfect and innocent man in the world. Friends! Who can reckon up the secret sinful imaginations, the secret sinful inclinations, or the secret pride, the secret blasphemies, the secret hypocrisies, the secret atheistic risings, the secret murmurings, the secret repinings, the secret discontents, the secret insolences, the secret filthinesses, the secret unbelief that God might every day charge upon his soul? Should the best and holiest man on earth have but his secret sins every day written in his forehead, it would not only put him to a crimson blush, but it would make him pull his hat over his eyes, or cover his face with a double scarf. “What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall

know every man the plague of his own heart" (1 Kgs 8:38). Sin is the greatest plague in the world, but never more dangerous than when it reaches the heart. Now, secret sins commonly lie nearest the heart, the fountain from whence they take a quick, immediate, and continual supply. Secret sins are as near to original sin as the first droppings are to the spring head. And as every secret sin lies nearest the heart, so every secret sin is the plague of the heart. Now, as secret diseases are not to be laid open to everyone, but only to the prudent physician, so our secret sins, which are the secret plagues, the secret diseases of our souls, are not to be laid open to everyone, but only to the Physician of souls, Who is only able both to cure them and pardon them. And as all Christians have their secret sins, so all Christians have their secret temptations (2 Cor 12:8–9). And as they have their secret temptations, so they have their secret wants; yea, many times they have such particular and personal wants that there is not one in the congregation, nor one in the family, that hath the like. And as they have their secret wants, so they have their secret fears, and secret snares, and secret straits, and secret troubles, and secret doubts, and secret jealousies. And how do all these things call aloud to every Christian to be frequent and constant in secret prayer!

11. Christ Delights in His People's Secret Prayers

Eleventhly, consider, Christ is very much affected and delighted in the secret prayers of His people. "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" (Song 2:14). Christ observes His spouse when she is in the clefts of the rock. When she is gotten into a corner a-praying, He looks upon her with singular delight and with special intimations of His love. Nothing is more sweet, delightful, and welcome to Christ than the secret services of His people. Their secret breathings are like lovely songs to Him (Mal 3:4); their secret prayers in the clefts of the rock, or under the stairs, are as sweet incense to Jesus. The spouse retires to the secret places of the stairs not only for security, but also for secrecy, that so she might the more freely, without suspicion of hypocrisy, pour out her soul into the bosom of her beloved. The great delight that parents take in the secret lispings and whisperings of their children is no delight to that which Christ takes in the secret prayers of His people. And therefore, as you would be friends and furtherers of Christ's delight, be much in secret prayer.

12. God Hath Chosen You to Reveal His Secrets To

Twelfthly, consider you are the only persons in all the world that God hath made choice of to reveal His secrets to. "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). Everything that God the Father had communicated to Christ as mediator to be revealed to His servants, He did make known to His disciples as to His bosom friends. Christ loves His people as friends, and He uses them as friends, and He opens His heart to them as friends. There is nothing in the heart of Christ that concerns the internal and eternal welfare of His friends, but He reveals it to them. He reveals Himself, His love, His eternal good will, the mysteries of faith, and the secrets of His covenant to His friends. Christ loves to entertain His friends with things that are not commonly and vulgarly known. Christ will reveal the secrets of His mind, the secrets of His love, the secrets of His thoughts, the secrets of His heart, and the secrets of His purposes, to all His bosom friends. Samson could not hide his mind, his secrets, from Delilah, though it cost him his life (Judg 16:15–17); and do you think that Christ can hide His mind, His secrets, from them for whom He hath laid down His life? Surely not. O sirs! Christ is

- a universal friend,

- an omnipotent friend, an almighty friend. He is no less than thirty times called Almighty in that book of Job; He can do above all expressions and beyond all apprehensions.
- He is an omniscient friend.
- He is an omnipresent friend.
- He is an indeficient friend.
- He is an independent friend.
- He is an unchangeable friend.
- He is a watchful friend.
- He is a tender and compassionate friend.
- He is a close and faithful friend.

Therefore, He cannot but open and unbosom Himself to all His bosom friends. To be reserved and close is against the very law of friendship. Faithful friends are very free in imparting their thoughts, their minds, their secrets, one to another. A real friend accounts nothing worth knowing unless he makes it known to his friends. He rips up his greatest and most inward secrets to his friends. Job calls his friends "inward friends," or the men of his secrets (Job 19:19). All Christ's friends are inward friends; they are the men of His secrets. "His secret is with the righteous" (Prov 3:32); that is, His covenant and fatherly affection, which is hid and secret from the world. He that is righteous in secret, where no man sees him, he is the righteous man, to whom God will communicate His closest secrets, as to His dearest bosom friend. It is only a bosom friend to whom we will unbosom ourselves. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Ps 25:14).

Now, there are three sorts of divine secrets:

(1) First, *there are secrets of providence*, and these He reveals to the righteous and to them that fear Him (Ps 107:43; Hos 14:9). The prophet Amos speaks of these secrets of

providence: "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Micah knew the secret of the Lord touching Ahab, which neither Zedekiah nor any other of the false prophets knew. "And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Gen 18:17). The destruction of Sodom was a secret that lay in the bosom of God; but Abraham being a bosom friend, God communicates this secret to him (vv. 19-21). Abraham was a friend, a faithful friend, a friend by a specialty (Jas 2:23); and therefore, God makes him both of His court and counsel. Oh, how greatly doth God condescend to His people. He speaks to them as a man would speak to his friend; and there are no secrets of providence, which may be for their advantage, but He will reveal them to His faithful servants. As all faithful friends have the same friends and the same enemies, so they are mutual in the communication of their secrets one to another; and so it was between God and Abraham.

(2) Secondly, *there are the secrets of His kingdom*, and these He reveals to His people. "It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given…At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt 13:11; 11:25). "Let us not think," saith Jerome, "that the gospel is in the words of Scripture, but in the sense; not in the outside, but in the marrow; not in the leaves of words, but in the root of reason." Augustine humbly begged of God that if it were His pleasure, He would send Moses to him to interpret some more abstruse and intricate passages in his book of Genesis. There are many choice, secret, hidden, and mysterious truths and doctrines in the

gospel, which Christ reveals to His people, that this poor, blind, ignorant world are strangers to. There are many secrets wrapped up in the plainest truths and doctrines of the gospel, which none can effectually open and reveal but the Spirit of the Lord, that "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor 2:10). There are many secrets and mysteries in the gospel that all the learning and labor in the world can never give a man insight into. There are many that know the doctrine of the gospel, the history of the gospel, that are mere strangers to the secrets of the gospel. There is a secret power, a secret authority, a secret efficacy, a secret prevalence, a secret goodness, a secret sweetness in the gospel, that none experience but those to whom the Lord is pleased to impart gospel secrets to. "Seal the law among my disciples" (Isa 8:16; 29:11–12). The law of God to wicked men is a sealed book that they cannot understand (Dan 12:9–10). It is as blotted paper that they cannot read. Look, as a private letter to a friend contains secret matter that no man else may read because it is sealed; so the law of grace is sealed up under the privy seal of heaven, so that no man can open it or read it except Christ's faithful friends to whom it is sent. The whole Scripture, saith Gregory, is but one entire letter dispatched from the Lord Christ to His beloved spouse on earth. The rabbins say that there are four keys that God hath under His girdle: 1) the key of the clouds; 2) the key of the womb; 3) the key of the grave; 4) the key of food. I may add a fifth key that is under His girdle, and that is the key of the Word, the key of the Scripture; which key none can turn but "he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth" (Rev 3:7).

O sirs! God reveals Himself and His mind and will and truth to His people in a more friendly and familiar way than

He doth to others. "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables… And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand" (Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). Though great doctors, and profound clerks, and deep-studied but unsanctified divines may know much of the doctrines of the gospel, and commend much the doctrines of the gospel, and dispute much for the doctrines of the gospel, and glory much in the doctrines of the gospel, and take a great deal of pains to dress and trim up the doctrines of the gospel, with the flowers of rhetoric or eloquence; though it be much better to present truth in her native plainness than to hang her ears with counterfeit pearls (the Word, without human adornments, is like the stone *Garamantides* that hath drops of gold in itself, sufficient to enrich the believing soul), yet the special, spiritual, powerful, and saving knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel is a secret, a mystery, yea, a hidden mystery to them (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7).

Chrysostom compares the mysteries of Christ, in regard of the wicked, to a written book that the ignorant can neither read nor spell. He sees the cover, the leaves, and the letters, but he understands not the meaning of what he sees. He compares the mystery of grace to a dictated epistle, which an uneducated person viewing, he cannot read it, he cannot understand it. He knoweth it is paper and ink, but the sense, the matter, he knows not, he understands not. So unsanctified persons, though they are never so learned, and though they may perceive the bark of the mystery of Christ, yet they perceive not, they understand not, the mystery of grace, the inward sense of the Spirit in the blessed Scriptures. Though

the devil be the greatest scholar in the world, and though he have more learning than all the men in the world have, yet there are many thousand secrets and mysteries in the gospel of grace that he knows not really, spiritually, feelingly, efficaciously, powerfully, thoroughly, savingly.

Oh, but now Christ makes known Himself, His mind, His grace, His truth, to His people, in a more clear, full, familiar, and friendly way. "For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant" (2 Sam 7:27). So you read it in your books; but in the Hebrew it is thus: "Lord, thou hast revealed this to the ear of thy servant." Now, the emphasis lieth in that word, "to the ear," which is left out in your books. When God makes known Himself to His people, He revealeth things to their ears, as we use to do to a friend who is intimate with us: we speak a thing to his ear. There is many a secret which Jesus Christ speaks in the ears of His servants, which others never come to be acquainted with. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

The six several gradations that are in this scripture are worthy of our most serious consideration. Here is:

First, knowledge;

Second, the knowledge of the glory of God;

Third, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God;

Fourth, shining;

Fifth, shining into our hearts; and,

Sixth, shining into our hearts in the face of Jesus Christ.

And thus, you see that the Lord reveals the secrets of Himself, His kingdom, His truth, His grace, His glory, to the saints.

(3) Thirdly, there are *the secrets of His favor*, the secrets of His special love that He bears to them, the secret purposes of His heart to save them. And these are those great secrets, those "deep things of God," which none can reveal "but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:10–11). Now these great secrets, these deep things of God, God doth reveal to His people by His Spirit. "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor 2:10–12). Now what are the things that are freely given to us of God, but our election, vocation, justification, sanctification, and glorification? And why hath God given us His Spirit, but that we should know "the things that are freely given to us of God" (v. 12)? Some by "secret" in the 25th Psalm do understand a particular assurance of God's favors whereby happiness is secured to us, both for the present and for the future. They understand by "secret" the sealing of the Spirit, the hidden manna, the white stone, and the new name in it, which none knoweth but he that hath it. And so much those words, "He will shew them his covenant," seem to import (Ps 25:14); for what greater secret can God impart to His people than that of opening the covenant of grace to them in its freeness, fulness, sureness, sweetness, suitableness, everlastingness, and in sealing up His good pleasure and all the spiritual and eternal blessings of the covenant to them? Such as love and serve the Lord shall be of His cabinet council, they shall know His soul secrets, and be admitted into a very gracious familiarity and friendship with Him. "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. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:21–23). God and Christ will keep house with them and manifest the secrets of Their love to them that are observant of Their commands. And thus, you see that the saints are the only persons to whom God will reveal the secrets of His providence, the secrets of His kingdom, and the secrets of His love unto. Christ came out of the bosom of His Father, and He opens all the secrets of His Father only to His bosom friends.

Now what an exceeding high honor is it for God to open the secrets of His love, the secrets of His promises, the secrets of His providences, the secrets of His counsels, and the secrets of His covenant to His people! Tiberius Caesar thought no man fit to know his secrets. And among the Persians none but noblemen, lords, and dukes might be made partakers of state secrets. They esteemed secrecy a godhead, a divine thing, as Ammianus Marcellinus affirms. But now such honor God hath put upon all His saints as to make them lords and nobles and the only privy statesmen in the court of heaven. The highest honor and glory that earthly princes can put upon their subjects is to communicate to them their greatest secrets. Now this high honor and glory the King of kings hath put upon His people. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Ps 25:14). It was a high honor to Elisha that he could tell the secrets that were spoken in the king's bedchamber (2 Kgs

6:12). Oh, what an honor must it then be for the saints to know the secrets that are spoken in the presence-chamber of the King of kings!

Now I appeal to the very consciences of all that fear the Lord, whether it be not a just, equal, righteous, and necessary thing that the people of God should freely and fully lay open all the secrets of their hearts before the Lord, Who hath thus highly honored them as to reveal the secrets of His providence, kingdom, and favor to them? Yea, I appeal to all serious and ingenuous Christians, whether it be not against the light and law of nature, and against the law of love, and law of friendship, to be reserved and close, yea, to hide our secrets from Him Who reveals His greatest and His choicest secrets to us? And if it be, why then do not you in secret lay open all your secret sins, and secret wants, and secret desires, secret fears, etc., to Him that seeth in secret? You know all secrets are to be communicated only in secret. None but fools in folio will communicate secrets upon a stage or before many.

13. Private Prayer in Times of Great Straits and Trials

Consider that in times of great straits and trials, in times of great afflictions and persecutions, private prayer is the Christian's meat and drink. It is his chief city of refuge; it is his shelter and hiding place in a stormy day. When the saints have been driven by violent persecutions into holes, and caves, and dens, and deserts, and howling wildernesses, private prayer hath been their meat and drink, and under Christ their only refuge. When Esau came forth with hostile intentions against Jacob, secret prayer was Jacob's refuge. "And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him, all cut-throats. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape" (Gen 32:6–8). When all is at stake, it is Christian prudence to save what we can, though we cannot save what we would. "And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee" (v. 9). Promises in private must be prayed over. God loves to be sued upon His own bond, when He and His people are alone. "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and

smite me, and the mother with the children" (v. 11)—or "upon the children," meaning he will put all to death. Some look upon the words to be a metaphor taken from fowlers who kill and take away the young and the dams together contrary to that old law (Deut 22:6). Others say it is a phrase that doth most lively represent the tenderness of a mother, who, seeing her children in distress, spares not her own body nor life to hazard the same for her children's preservation, by interposing herself, even to be massacred together with and upon them (Hos 10:14). When Jacob and all that was near and dear unto him was in imminent danger of being cut off by Esau and those men of blood that were with him, he betakes himself to private prayer as his only city of refuge against the rage and malice of the mighty.

And so, when Jeremiah was in a solitary and loathsome dungeon, private prayer was his meat and drink; it was his only city of refuge. "Moreover, the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Thus saith the LORD the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, to establish it; The LORD is his name; Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty," or hidden "things, which thou knowest not" (Jer 33:1–3). When Jeremiah was in a lonesome, loathsome prison, God encourages him by private prayer to seek for further discoveries and revelations of those choice and singular favors which in future times He purposed to confer upon His people.

"Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters," or chains, "and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly

before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God" (2 Chr 33:11–13). When Manasseh was in fetters in his enemy's country, when he was stripped of all his princely glory and led captive into Babylon, he betakes himself to private prayer as his only city of refuge; and by this means he prevails with God for his restoration to his crown and kingdom.

Private prayer is a city of refuge that no power nor policy, no craft nor cruelty, no violence nor force, is ever able to surprise. Though the joint prayers of the people of God together were often obstructed and hindered in the times of the ten persecutions, yet they were never able to obstruct or hinder secret prayer, private prayer. When men and devils have done their worst, every Christian will be able to maintain his private trade with heaven. Private prayer will shelter a Christian against all the national, domestical, and personal storms and tempests that may threaten him. When a man is lying upon a sick-bed alone, or when a man is in prison alone, or when a man is with Job left upon the dunghill alone, or when a man is with John banished for the testimony of Jesus into this or that island alone, oh, then private prayer will be his meat and drink, his shelter, his hiding-place, his heaven. When all other trades fail, this trade of private prayer will hold good.

14. God Is Omnipresent

Fourteenthly, consider that God is omnipresent. We cannot get into any blind hole, dark corner, or secret place, but the Lord hath an eye there; the Lord will keep us company there. "And thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt 6:6, 18). There is not the darkest, dirtiest hole in the world into which a saint creeps, but God hath a favorable eye there. God never wants an eye to see our secret tears, nor an ear to hear our secret cries and groans, nor a heart to grant our secret requests, and therefore, we ought to pour out our souls to Him in secret. "Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee" (Ps 38:9). Though our private desires are never so confused, though our private requests are never so broken, and though our private groanings are never so much hidden from men, yet God eyes them all, God records them all, and God puts them all upon the file of heaven, and will one day crown them with glorious answers and returns. We cannot sigh out a prayer in secret without Him seeing us; we cannot lift up our eyes to Him at midnight without Him observing us. The eye that God hath upon His people when they are in secret is such a special tender eye of love as opens His ear, His heart, and His hand for their good. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers"—or as the Greek hath it, "his ears are unto their prayers" (1 Pet 3:12). If their prayers are so faint that they cannot reach up as high as heaven, then God will bow the heavens and come down to their prayers.

God's eye is upon every secret sigh, and every secret groan, and every secret tear, and every secret desire, and every secret pant of love, and every secret breathing of soul, and every secret melting and working of heart; all which should encourage us to be much in secret duties, in closet services. As a Christian is never out of the reach of God's hand, so he is never out of the view of God's eye. If a Christian cannot hide himself from the sun, which is God's minister of light, how impossible will it be to hide himself from Him Whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun? In every private duty, a Christian is still under the eye of God's omniscience. When we are in the darkest hole, God hath windows into our breasts and observes all the secret actings of our inward man (1 Tim 2:8). The eye of God is not confined to this place or that, to this company or that. God hath an eye upon His people as well when they are alone as when they are among a multitude—as well when they are in a corner as when they are in a crowd. Diana's temple was burnt down when she was busy at Alexander's birth and could not be at two places together. But God is present both in paradise and in the wilderness, both in the family and in the closet, both in public and in private at the same time. God is an omnipresent God; He is everywhere. "There is nowhere where God is not." As He is included in no place, so He is excluded from no place. "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD" (Jer 23:24). "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," or, "contemplating the evil and the good," as the Hebrew may be read (Prov 15:3). Now, to contemplate is more than simply to behold, for contemplation addeth to a simple apprehension a deeper degree of knowledge, entering into the very inside of a matter. And so indeed doth God discern the very inward

intentions of the heart and the most secret motions of the spirit. God is an infinite and immense being Whose center is everywhere and Whose circumference is nowhere. Now, if our God be omnipresent, then wheresoever we are our God is present with us. If we are in prison alone with Joseph, our God is present with us there; or if we are in exile alone with David, our God is present with us there; or if we are alone in our closets, our God is present with us there. God seeth us in secret, and therefore, let us seek His face in secret. Though heaven be God's palace, yet it is not His prison.

15. He That Neglects the Closet Is Neglected in Public

He that willingly neglects private prayer shall certainly be neglected in his public prayer. He that will not call upon God in secret shall find by sad experience that God will neither hear him nor regard him in public. Want of private duties is the great reason why the hearts of many are so dead and dull, so formal and carnal, so barren and unfruitful under public ordinances. Oh, that Christians would seriously lay this to heart! Certainly, that man or woman's heart is best in public who is most frequent in private. They make most yearnings in public ordinances that are most conscientiously exercised in closet duties. No man's graces rise so high, nor no man's experiences rise so high, nor no man's communion with God rises so high, nor no man's divine enjoyments rise so high, nor no man's springs of comfort rise so high, nor no man's hopes rise so high, nor no man's parts and gifts rise so high as theirs do who conscientiously wait upon God in their closets before they wait upon Him in the assembly of His people, and who when they return from public ordinances retire into their closets and look up to heaven for a blessing upon the public means. It is certain that private duties fit the soul for public ordinances. He that makes conscience to wait upon God in private shall find by experience that God will wonderfully bless public ordinances to him (Mic 2:7). My

design is not to set up one ordinance of God above another, nor to cause one ordinance of God to clash with another—the public with the private, or the private with the public—but that every ordinance may have its proper place and right, the desires of my soul being to prize every ordinance, and to praise every ordinance, and to practice every ordinance, and to improve every ordinance, and to bless the Lord for every ordinance. But as ever you would see the beauty and glory of God in His sanctuary, as ever you would have public ordinances to be lovely and lively to your souls, as ever you would have your drooping spirits revived, and your languishing souls refreshed, and your weak graces strengthened, and your strong corruptions weakened under public ordinances, be more careful and conscientious in the performance of closet duties (Ps 63:1–3). Oh, how strong in grace! Oh, how victorious over sin! Oh, how dead to the world! Oh, how alive to Christ! Oh, how fit to live! Oh, how prepared to die might many a Christian have been, had they been but more frequent, serious, and conscientious in the discharge of closet duties. Not but that I think there is a truth in that saying of Bede—the word *church* being rightly understood—that he that comes not willingly to church shall one day go unwillingly to hell.

16. The Times Wherein We Live Call for Secret Prayer

Consider, the times wherein we live call aloud for secret prayer. Hell seems to be broke loose, and men turned into incarnate devils. Land-destroying and soul-damning wickednesses walk up and down the streets with a whore's forehead, without the least check or control. "Thou hast a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed…Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jer 3:3; 6:15). They had sinned away shame, instead of being ashamed of sin. Custom in sin had quite banished all sense of sin and all shame for sin, so that they would not suffer nature to draw her veil of blushing before their great abominations. They were like to Caligula, a wicked emperor, who used to say of himself that he loved nothing better in himself than that he could not be ashamed. The same words are repeated in Jeremiah 8:12. I will leave the prudent reader to judge how applicable these scriptures are to the present time.

But what doth the prophet do when they were as bold in sin and as shameless as so many harlots? That you may see in Jeremiah 13:17: "But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places," or secrecies, "for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears." The Hebrew, "weeping weep" or "shedding tears shed tears"; the doubling of the verb notes the bitter and grievous lamentation that he should make for them. Now they were grown up to that

height of sin and wickedness that they were above all shame and blushing; now they were grown so proud, so hardened, so obstinate, so rebellious, so mad upon mischief that no mercies could melt them or allure them, nor no threatenings nor judgments could any ways terrify them or stop them. The prophet goes into a corner, he retires himself into the most secret places, and there he weeps bitterly; there he weeps as if he were resolved to drown himself in his own tears. When the springs of sorrow rise high, a Christian turns his back upon company and retires himself into places of greatest privacy, that so he may the more freely and the more fully vent his sorrow and grief before the Lord.

Ah, England, England! What pride, luxury, lasciviousness, licentiousness, wantonness, drunkenness, cruelties, injustice, oppressions, fornications, adulteries, falsehoods, hypocrisy, bribery, atheism, horrid blasphemies, and hellish impieties are now to be found rampant in the midst of thee! Ah, England! England! How are the Lord's Sabbaths profaned, pure ordinances despised, Scriptures rejected, the Spirit resisted and derided, the righteous reviled, wickedness countenanced, and Christ many thousand times in a day by these cursed practices afresh crucified! Ah, England! England! Were our forefathers alive, how sadly would they blush to see such a horrid degenerate posterity as is to be found in the midst of thee! How is our forefathers' hospitality converted into riot and luxury, their frugality into pride and prodigality, their simplicity into subtilty, their sincerity into hypocrisy, their charity into cruelty, their chastity into chambering and wantonness, their sobriety into drunkenness, their plain dealing into dissembling, their works of compassion into works of oppression, and their love to the people of God into an utter enmity against the people of God! And what is the

voice of all these crying abominations, but every Christian to his closet, every Christian to his closet, and there weep bitterly with weeping Jeremiah for all these great abominations whereby God is dishonored openly. Oh, weep in secret for their sins who openly glory in their sins, which should be their greatest shame. Oh, blush in secret for them that are past all blushing for their sins, for who knows but that the whole land may fare the better for the sakes of a few that are mourners in secret? But however it goes with the nation, such as mourn in secret for the abominations of the times may be confident that when sweeping judgments shall come upon the land, the Lord will hide them in the secret chambers of His providence. He will set a secret mark of deliverance upon their foreheads that mourn in secret for the crying sins of the present day, as He did upon theirs in Ezekiel 9:4–6.

17. Your Relations to the Lord Call for Secret Prayer

Consider that the near and dear relation that you stand in to the Lord calls aloud for secret prayer (John 15:14–15). You are His friends. Now, a true friend loves to visit his friend when he may find him alone and enjoy privacy with him. A true friend loves to pour out his heart into the bosom of his friend when he hath him in a corner, or in the field, or under a hedge. You are His favorites. And what favorite is there that hides his secret from his prince? Do not all favorites open their hearts to their princes when they are alone? You are His children. And what ingenuous child is there that doth not delight to be much with his father when he is alone, when nobody is by? Oh, how free and open are children when they have their parents alone, beyond what they are when company is present. You are the spouse of Christ. And what spouse, what wife, is there that doth not love to be much with her husband when he is alone? True lovers are always best when they are most alone. "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves" (Song 7:10–12). The spouse of Christ is very desirous to enjoy His company in the fields, that so having her beloved alone she might the more freely and the more secretly open her heart to Him. As wives, when they are

walking alone with their husbands in the fields, are more free to open their minds and the secrets of their hearts than they are when in their houses with their children and servants about them, so it was with the spouse.

Without all peradventure, they have very great cause to question whether they are Christ's real friends, favorites, children, spouse, who seldom or never converse with Christ in their closets, who are shy of Christ when they are alone, who never accustom themselves to give Christ secret visits. Christ may say to very many in our days what Delilah said to Samson: "How canst thou say, I love thee, when thou hast not told me wherein thy great strength lieth" (Judg 16:15), the discovery of which secret at last cost him his life. How can you say you love Me when you never acquaint Me with your secrets? How can you say you love Me when you never bestow any private visits upon Me? How can you say that you are My friends, My faithful friends, My bosom friends, when you never in private unbosom yourselves to Me? How can you say that you are My favorites, when you can spend one month after another, and one quarter of a year after another, and yet not let Me know one of all your secrets, when every day you might have My ear in secret if you pleased? How can you say that you are My children and yet be so close and reserved as you are? How can you say you are My spouse, and that you lie in My bosom, and yet never take any delight to open your hearts, your secrets, to Me when I am alone? What Alexander said to one that was of his name, but a coward, "Either lay down the name of Alexander, or fight like Alexander," that I say to you. Either be frequent in closet duties as becomes a Christian, or else lay down the name of a Christian. Either unbosom yourselves in secret to Christ as

friends, favorites, children, spouses, or else lay down these names.

18. God's Special Mark on Those That Pray in Secret

Consider that God hath set a special mark of favor, honor, and observation upon those that have prayed in secret. As you may see in Moses (Exod 34:28), and in Abraham (Gen 21:33), and in Isaac (Gen 24:63), and in Jacob (Gen 32:24–29), and in David (Ps 55:16–17), and in Daniel (Dan 6:10), and in Paul (Acts 9:11), and in Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 4), and in Peter (Acts 10:9–12), and in Manasseh (2 Chr 33:18–19). God has put all these worthies that have exercised themselves in secret prayer upon record to their everlasting fame and honor. The Persians seldom write their king's name but in characters of gold. God has writ, as I may say, their names in characters of gold who have made conscience of exercising themselves in secret prayer. The precious names of those that have addicted themselves to closet duties are as statues of gold, which the polluted breath of men can no ways stain. They are like so many shining suns that no clouds can darken. They are like so many sparkling diamonds that shine brightest in the darkest night. A Christian can never get into a hole, a corner, a closet, to pour out his soul before the Lord, but the Lord makes an honorable observation of him, and sets a secret mark of favor upon him (Ezek 9:4–6). And how should this provoke all Christians to be much with God alone! The Romans were very ambitious of obtaining a great name, a great report, in this world; and why should not Christians be as divinely ambitious of obtaining a good name,

a good report, in the other world (Heb 11:39)? A good name is always better than a great name, and a name in heaven is infinitely better than a thousand names on earth, and the way to both these is to be much with God in secret.

19. Satan Is a Very Great Enemy to Secret Prayer

Consider that Satan is a very great enemy to secret prayer. Secret prayer is a scourge, a hell, to Satan. Every secret prayer adds to the devil's torment, and every secret sigh adds to his torment, and every secret groan adds to his torment, and every secret tear adds to his torment. When a child of God is on his knees in his secret addresses to God, oh, the strange thoughts, the earthly thoughts, the wandering thoughts, the distracted thoughts, the hideous thoughts, the blasphemous thoughts, that Satan often injects into his soul, and all to wean him from secret prayer, and to weary him of secret prayer! Sometimes he tells the soul that it is in vain to seek God in secret. And at other times he tells the soul it is too late to seek God in secret, for the door of mercy is shut and there is no hope, no help, for the soul. Sometimes he tells the soul that it is enough to seek God in public; and at other times he tells the soul that it is but a precise trick to seek the Lord in private. Sometimes he tells the soul that it is not elected, and, therefore, all his secret prayers shall be rejected. And at other times he tells the soul that it is sealed up unto the day of wrath, and, therefore, a secret prayer can never reverse that seal. All this to dishearten and discourage a poor Christian in his secret retirements. Sometimes Satan will object to a poor Christian the greatness of his sins; and at other times he will object against a Christian the greatness of his unworthiness. Sometimes he will object against a Christian

his want of grace; and at other times he will object against a Christian his want of gifts to manage such a duty as it should be managed. Sometimes he will object against a Christian his former straitenedness in secret prayer; and at other times he will object against a Christian the small yearnings that he makes of secret prayer. All to work the soul out of love with secret prayer, yea, to work the soul to loathe secret prayer, so deadly an enemy is Satan to secret prayer. Oh, the strange fears, fancies, and conceits that Satan often raises in the spirits of Christians when they are alone with God in a corner, and all to work them to cast off private prayer.

It is none of Satan's least designs to interrupt a Christian in his private trade with God. Satan watches all a Christian's motions so that he cannot turn into his closet, nor creep into any hole to converse privately with his God, but he follows him hard at heels, and will be still injecting one thing or another into the soul, or else objecting one thing or another against the soul. A Christian is as well able to tell the stars of heaven and to number the sands of the sea as he is able to number up the several devices and sleights that Satan uses to obstruct the soul's private addresses to God. Now from that great opposition that Satan makes against private prayer, a Christian may safely conclude these five things:

(1) First, the *excellency* of private prayer. Certainly, if it were not an excellent thing for a man to be in secret with God, Satan would never make such head against it.

(2) Second, the *necessity* of this duty. The more necessary any duty is to the internal and eternal welfare of a Christian, the more Satan will bestir himself to blunt a Christian's spirit in that duty.

(3) Third, the *utility* or profit that attends a conscientious discharge of this duty. Where we are like to gain most, there Satan loves to oppose most.

(4) Fourth, the *prevalence* of private prayer. If there were not a kind of omnipotence in it, if it were not able to do wonders in heaven, and wonders on earth, and wonders in the hearts and lives and ways of men, Satan would never have such an aching tooth against it as he hath.

(5) Fifth, that *God is highly honored* by this duty, or else Satan would never be so greatly enraged against it. This is certain. The more glory God hath from any service we do, the more Satan will strive by all his wiles and sleights to take us either off from that service or so to interrupt us in that service that God may have no honor, nor we no good, nor himself no hurt, by our private retirements.

20. You Are the Lord's Secret Ones, His Hidden Ones

In the last place, consider that you are only the Lord's secret ones, His hidden ones; and therefore, if you do not apply yourselves to private prayer and to your secret retirements that you may enjoy God in a corner, none will. It is only God's hidden ones, His secret ones, that are spirited, principled, and prepared to wait on God in secret. "Then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (Exod 19:5). The Hebrew word *segullah* signifieth God's special jewels, God's proper ones, or God's secret ones that He keeps in store for Himself and for His own special service and use. Princes lock up with their own hands in secret their most precious and costly jewels; and so doth God His. "For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure" (Ps 135:4), or for His secret gem. "They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones" (Ps 83:3), or Thy secret ones—so called partly because God hides them in the secret of His tabernacle (Ps 31:20) and partly because God sets as high a value upon them as men do upon their hidden treasure, their secret treasure. Yea, He makes more reckoning of them than He doth of all the world besides. And so the world shall know when God shall arise to revenge the wrongs and injuries that have been done to His secret ones.

Neither are there any on earth that know so much of the secrets of His love, of the secrets of His counsels, of the secrets of His purposes, of the secrets of His heart, as His secret ones do. Neither are there any in all the world that are under those secret influences, those secret assistances, those secret incomes, those secret anointings of the Spirit, as His secret ones are under. And therefore, no wonder if God calls them again and again and again His "secret ones." Now, what can be more comely or more desirable than to see their natures and their practices to answer to their names? They are the Lord's secret ones, His hidden ones; therefore, how highly doth it concern them to be much with God in secret and to hide themselves with God in a corner! Shall Nabal's nature and practice answer to his name? "Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him" (1 Sam 25:25). Nabal signifies a fool, a sot, a churl; it notes one that is void of wisdom and goodness. It signifieth one whose mind, reason, judgment, and understanding are withered and decayed. Now, if you look into the story, you shall find that as face answers to face, so Nabal's nature and practice did echo and answer to his name. And why then should not our natures and practices answer to our names also? We are called the Lord's secret ones, His hidden ones; and how highly therefore doth it concern us to be much with God in secret!

Why should there be any jarring or discord between our names and our practices? It is observable that the practice and carriage of other saints have been answerable to their names. Isaac signifies laughter, and Isaac was a gracious son, a dutiful son, a son that kept clear of those abominations with which many of the patriarchs had defiled themselves, a son

that proved matter of laughter to his father and mother all their days. So, Josiah signifies "the fire of the Lord," and his practice did answer to his name. Witness the pulling down of Jeroboam's altar, and his burning of the vessels that were made for Baal, and his pulling down the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had set up, and his burning the grove at the brook Kedron, and his stamping it to powder, and his breaking down the houses of the sodomites, and his defiling of the high places where the priests had burnt incense, and his breaking in pieces the images, and cutting down the groves, and filling their places with the bones of men, etc. (1 Kgs 13:2; 2 Kgs 23:4–21). So, Joshua signifies "a savior," and his practice was answerable to his name. Though he could not save his people from their sins, yet he often saved them from their sufferings. Great and many were the deliverances, the salvations, that were instrumentally brought about by Joshua, as all know that have read the book of Joshua. So, John signifies "gracious," and his practice was answerable to his name. He was so gracious in his teachings and in his walkings that he gained favor in the very eyes of his enemies.

By all these instances, and by many more that might be given, you see that other saints' practices have answered to their names; and, therefore, let every one of us look that our practices do also answer to our names, that as we are called the Lord's secret ones so we may be much with God in secret, that so there may be a blessed harmony between our names and our practices, and we may never repent another day that we have been called God's secret ones, His "hidden ones" (Ps 83:3), but yet never made conscience of maintaining secret communion with God in our closets.

Thus, you see that there are no less than twenty arguments to persuade you to closet prayer and to maintain private communion with God in a corner.

Application

1. The Use and Application of All

The use and application of all follows.

Is it true that closet prayer or private prayer is such an indispensable duty that Christ Himself hath laid upon all that are not willing to lie under the woeful brand of being hypocrites? Then this truth looks very sourly and sadly upon these five sorts of persons.

a. Those That Put Off Secret Prayer Till They Are Moved to It by the Spirit

First, it looks sourly and sadly upon all those that put off secret prayer, private prayer, until they are moved to it by the Spirit; for by this sad delusion many have been kept from secret prayer many weeks, many months—oh, that I might not say—many years! Though it is a very fit season to pray when the Spirit moves us to pray, yet it is not the only season to pray (Isa 62:1; Ps 123:1–2; Gal 4:6). He that makes religion his business will pray as daily for daily grace as he doth pray daily for daily bread. "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph 6:18). "Continuing instant in prayer" (Rom 12:12). The Greek is a metaphor taken from hunting

dogs that never give over the game until they have got their prey. A Christian must not only pray but hold on in prayer until he hath got the heavenly prize. We are wanting always, and, therefore, we had need be praying always. The world is always alluring; and therefore, we had need be always a-praying. Satan is always a-tempting; and therefore, we had need be always a-praying. And we are always a-sinning; and therefore, we had need be always a-praying. And we are in dangers always; and therefore, we had need be praying always. And we are dying always (1 Cor 15:31); and therefore, we had need be praying always. Man's whole life is but a lingering death. Man no sooner begins to live, but he begins to die. When one was asked why he prayed six times a day, he only gave this answer, "I must die, I must die, I must die." Dying Christians had need be praying Christians, and they that are always a-dying had need be always a-praying. Certainly, prayerless families are graceless families, and prayerless persons are graceless persons (Jer 10:25). It were better ten thousand times that we had never been born into the world, than that we should go still-born out of the world.

b. Those That Pray Not at All, Neither in Their Families nor in Their Closets

Secondly, this truth looks sourly and sadly upon those that pray not at all, neither in their families nor in their closets. Among all God's children, there is not one possessed with a dumb devil. Prayerless persons are forsaken of God, blinded by Satan, hardened in sin, and every breath they draw liable to all temporal, spiritual, and eternal judgments. Prayer is that part of natural worship due to God which none will deny but stark atheists (Ps 14:1).

It is observable that amongst the worst of men, Turks, and the worst of Turks, the Moors, it is a just exception against any witness, by their law, that he hath not prayed six times in every natural day, it being usual with them to pray six times a day.

(1) Before the daybreak they pray for day.

(2) When it is day, they give thanks for day.

(3) At noon, they thank God for half the day past.

(4) After that, they pray for a good sunset.

(5) And after that, they thank God for the day past.

(6) And then, sixthly and lastly, they pray for a good night after their day.

Certainly, these very Moors will one day rise in judgment against them who cast off prayer, who live in a total neglect of prayer, who suffer so many suns and moons to rise and set upon their heads without any solemn calling upon God. I have read of a man who, being sick and afraid of death, fell to his prayers and to move God to hear him told Him that he was no common beggar, and that he had never troubled Him with his prayers before, and if He would but hear him at that time, he would never trouble Him again. This world is full of such profane, blasphemous, atheistical wretches.

c. Those That Are All for Public Prayer, but Never Regard Private Prayer

Thirdly, this truth looks very sourly and sadly upon such who are all for public prayer, but never regard private prayer, who are all for going up to the temple but never care for going into their closets. This is most palpable hypocrisy, for a man to be very zealous for public prayer but very cold and careless as to private prayer. He that pretends conscience in the one

and makes no conscience of the other is a hypocrite in grain (Matt 23:5; 6:1, 2, 5), and the devil knows well enough how to make his markets of all such hypocrites that are all for the prayers of the church, but perfect Gallios as to private prayer (Acts 18:17). Such as perform all their private devotion in the church but not in the chamber do put too great a slight upon the authority of Christ, Who saith, "When thou prayest, enter into thy chamber." He doth not say, "When thou prayest, go to the church," but, "When thou prayest, go into thy chamber."

d. Those That in Their Closets Pray with a Loud, Clamorous Voice

Fourthly, this truth looks sadly and sourly upon such who in their closets pray with a loud, clamorous voice. A Christian should shut both the door of his closet and the door of his lips so close that none should hear without what he saith within. "Enter into thy closet," saith Christ, "and when thou hast shut thy door, pray" (Matt 6:6). But what need a man shut his closet door if he may pray with a clamorous voice, if he make such a noise as all in the street or all in the house may hear him? The hen when she lays her eggs gets into a hole, a corner; but then she makes such a noise with her cackling that she tells all in the house where she is and about what she is. Such Christians that in their closets do imitate the hen do rather pray to be seen, heard, and observed by men than out of any noble design to glorify God, or to pour out their souls before Him that seeth in secret. Sometimes children, when they are vexed or afraid of the rod, will run behind the door or get into a dark hole, and there they will lie crying, and sighing, and sobbing, that all the house may know where they are.

Oh, it is a childish thing so to cry, and sigh, and sob in our closets as to tell all in the house where we are and about what work we are. Well, Christians, for an effectual redress of this evil, frequently and seriously consider of these five things:

First, that God seeth in secret.

Secondly, that God hath a quick ear and is taken more with the voice of the heart than He is with the clamor of the mouth. God can easily hear the most secret breathings of thy soul. God is more curious in observing the messages delivered by the heart than He is those that are only delivered by the mouth. He that prays aloud in private seems to tell others that God doth not understand the secret desires, and thoughts, and workings of His people's hearts.

Thirdly, it is not meet, it is not convenient nor expedient, that any should be acquainted with our secret prayers but God and our own souls. Now it is as much our duty to look to what is expedient as it is to look to what is lawful (2 Cor 8:10). "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient" (1 Cor 6:12). "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1 Cor 10:23). Now it is so far from being expedient that it is very high folly for men to lay open their secret infirmities unto others, who will rather deride them than lift up a prayer for them.

Fourthly, loud prayers may be a hindrance and disturbance to others that may be busied near us in some religious or civil exercises.

Fifthly and lastly, Hannah prayed and yet spoke never a word. Her heart was full, but her voice was not heard (1 Sam 1:11). Moses prays and cries and yet lets fall never a word. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me?" (Exod 14:15). Moses did not cry with any audible voice

but with inward sighs, and secret breathings, and wrestlings of soul. And these inward and secret cries, which made no noise, carried the day with God; for Moses is heard and answered, and his people are delivered. Oh, the prevalence of those prayers that make no noise in the ears of others!

e. Those That Hinder and Discourage Others from This Duty of Duties

Fifthly and lastly, this truth looks sourly and sadly upon those that do all they can to *hinder and discourage others from this duty* of duties, private prayer, and that either by deriding or vilifying of the duty, or else by denying of it to be a duty, or else by their daily neglect of this duty, or else by denying them that are under them time and opportunity for the discharge of this duty. In Matthew 23:13, you have a woe pronounced against those that will neither go to heaven themselves nor suffer others to go that are willing to enter into an everlasting rest. And so I say, Woe to those parents and woe to those husbands and woe to those masters and mistresses that will neither pray in their closets themselves nor suffer their children nor their wives nor their servants to pour out their souls before the Lord in a corner. O sirs! How will you answer this to your consciences when you shall lie upon a dying bed! And how will you answer it to the Judge of all the world when you shall stand before a judgment seat? Certainly, all their sins and all their neglects and all their spiritual losses that might have been prevented by their secret prayers, by their closet communion with God, will one day be charged upon your accounts. And oh, that you were all so wise as to lay these things so to heart that you may

never hinder any that are under your care or charge from private prayer anymore!

But secondly, this may serve to exhort us to keep close to our closets, to be frequent and constant in private prayer, to be often with God in a corner. The twenty considerations already laid down may serve as so many motives to provoke your hearts to this noble and necessary duty.

2. The Main Objections Against Closet Prayer Answered

Objection 1: We Have Much Business upon Our Hands

But many will be ready to object and say: We have much business upon our hands, and we cannot spare time for private prayer; we have so much to do in our shops, and in our warehouses, and abroad with others, that we cannot spare time to wait upon the Lord in our closets.

Now to this objection I shall give these eight answers, that this objection may never have a resurrection more in any of your hearts.

1. What Is Your Business to That of Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel?

First, what are all those businesses that are upon your hands to those businesses and weighty affairs that did lie upon the hands of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel, Elias, Nehemiah, Peter, Cornelius? And yet you find all these worthies exercising themselves in private prayers. And the king is commanded every day to read some part of God's Word, notwithstanding all his great and weighty employments (Deut 17:18–20). Now certainly, sirs, your great businesses are little more than ciphers compared with theirs.

And if there were any on earth that might have pleaded an exemption from private prayer upon the account of business, of much business, of great business, these might have done it; but they were more honest and more noble than to neglect so choice a duty upon the account of much business. These brave hearts made all their public employments stoop to private prayer; they would never suffer their public employments to tread private prayer under foot.

2. None Ever Prospered More Than They That Devoted Themselves to Private Prayer

Secondly, I answer, no men's outward affairs did ever more prosper than theirs did, who devoted themselves to private prayer, notwithstanding their many and great worldly employments. Witness the prosperity and outward flourishing estates of Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Nehemiah, David, Daniel, and Cornelius. These were much with God in their closets, and God blessed their blessings to them (Gen 22:17). How did their cups overflow! What signal favors did God heap upon them and theirs! No families have been so prospered, protected, and graced, as theirs who have maintained secret communion with God in a corner (1 Chr 11:9).

Private prayer doth best expedite our temporal affairs. He that prays well in his closet, shall be sure to speed well in his shop, or at his plough, or whatever else he turns his hand unto (1 Tim 4:8). It is true, Abimelech was rich as well as Abraham, and so was Laban rich as well as Jacob, and Saul was a king as well as David, and Julian was an emperor as well as Constantine; but it was only Abraham, Jacob, David, and Constantine who had their blessings blessed unto them; all the rest had their blessings cursed unto them (Prov 3:33; Mal 2:2). They had many good things, but they had not "the

good will of him that dwelt in the bush" with what they had (Deut 33:16); and therefore, all their mercies were but bittersweets unto them. Though all the sons of Jacob returned laden from Egypt with corn and money in their sacks, yet Benjamin only had the silver cup in the mouth of his sack. So though the men of the world have their corn and their money, etc., yet it is only God's Benjamins that have the silver cup, the grace cup, "the cup of blessing," as the apostle calls it, for their portion (1 Cor 10:16). O sirs, as ever you would prosper and flourish in the world; as ever you would have your water turned into wine, your temporal mercies into spiritual benefits, be much with God in your closets.

3. You Fool Away an Hour a Day, and Yet Object the Want of Time

Thirdly, I answer, It is ten to one but that the objector every day fools away, or trifles away, or idles away, or sins away, one hour in a day, and why then should he object the want of time? There are none that toil and moil and busy themselves most in their worldly employments, but do spend an hour or more in a day to little or no purpose, either in gazing about, or in dallying, or toying, or courting, or in telling of stories, or in busying themselves in other men's matters, or in idle visits, or in smoking the pipe, etc. And why then should not these men redeem an hour's time in a day for private prayer out of that time which they usually spend so vainly and idly? Can you, notwithstanding all your great worldly employments, find an hour in the day to catch flies in, as Domitian the emperor did? And to play the fool in? And cannot you find an hour in the day to wait on God in your closets?

There were three special faults whereof Cato professed himself to have seriously repented: one was passing by water

when he might have gone by land; another was trusting a secret in a woman's bosom; but the main was spending an hour unprofitably. This heathen will one day rise up in judgment against them who, notwithstanding their great employments, spend many hours in a week unprofitably, and yet cry out with the Duke of Alva, that they have so much to do on earth, that they have no time to look up to heaven. It was a base and sordid spirit in that King Sardanapalus, who spent much of his time among women in spinning and carding, which should have been spent in ruling and governing his kingdom. So, it is a base sordid spirit in any to spend any of their time in toying and trifling, and then to cry out that they have so much business to do in the world, that they have no time for closet prayer, they have no time to serve God, nor to save their own precious and immortal souls.

4. No Man Dares Plead This Before the Lord Jesus in the Great Day of Account

Fourthly, I answer, No man dares plead this objection before the Lord Jesus in the great day of account (Eccl 11:9; Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10). And why then should any man be so childish and foolish, so ignorant and impudent, to plead that before men which is not pleadable before the judgment seat of Christ? O sirs, as you love your souls, and as you would be happy for ever, never put off your own consciences nor others' with any pleas, arguments, or objections now that you dare not own and stand by when you shall lie upon a dying bed, and when you shall appear before the whole court of heaven, etc. In the great day of account when the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest, and God shall call men to a reckoning before angels, men, and devils, for the neglect of private prayer, all guilty persons will be found speechless.

There will not be a man or woman found that shall dare to stand up and say, "Lord, I would have waited upon Thee in my closet, but I had so much business to do in the world that I had no time to enjoy secret communion with Thee in a corner." It is the greatest wisdom in the world to plead nothing by way of excuse in this our day that we dare not plead in the great day.

5. It Is Our Duty to Redeem Time from All Our Secular Business

Fifthly, I answer that it is our duty to redeem time from all our secular businesses for private prayer. All sorts of Christians, whether bond or free, rich or poor, high or low, superiors or inferiors, are expressly charged by God to redeem time for prayer, for private prayer, as well as for other holy exercises. "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds" (Col 4:2–3).

But here some may object and say, We have so much business to do in the world that we have no time for prayer. The apostle answers this objection in verse 5, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time." "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16)—ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρόν, or buying out, gaining the time. The words are a metaphor taken from merchants who prefer the least profit that may be gained before their pleasures or delights, closely following their business while the markets are at best. A merchant when he comes to a mart or fair takes the first season and opportunity of buying his commodities. He puts it not off to the hazard of an evening or to the next

morning in hopes to have a better bargain, but he improves the present season and buys before the market is over.

Others carry the words thus: "Purchase at any rate all occasions and opportunities of doing good, that so ye may thereby, in some sort, redeem that precious jewel of time which you have formerly lost." As travelers that have loitered by the way or stayed long at their inn, when they find night coming upon them, they mend their pace and go as many miles in an hour as they did before in many. Though time let slip is physically irrecoverable, yet in a moral consideration it is accounted as regained when men double their care, diligence, and endeavors to redeem it. The best Christian is he that is the greatest monopolizer of time for private prayer. No Christian to him that redeems time from his worldly occasions and his lawful comforts and recreations to be with God in his closet. David, having tasted of the sweetness, goodness, and graciousness of God, cannot keep his bed but will borrow some time from his sleep that he might take some turns in Paradise and pour out his soul in prayer and praises, when no eye was open to see him, nor no ear open to hear him, but all were asleep round about him (Ps 63:6). "At midnight will I arise to give thanks unto thee…I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried" (Ps 119:62, 147). David was up and at private prayer before daybreak. David was no sluggish Christian, no slothful Christian, no lazy Christian. He used to be in his closet when others were sleeping in their beds. "Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word…My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning" (Ps 119:148; 130:6). Look, as the weary sentinel in a dark, cold, wet night waits and peeps, and peeps and waits, for the appearance of the morning, so David

did wait and peep, and peep and wait, for the first and fittest season to pour out his soul before God in a corner. David would never suffer his worldly business to justle out holy exercises. He would often borrow time from the world for private prayer, but he would never borrow time from private prayer to bestow it upon the world.

Mr. Bradford, the martyr, counted that hour lost wherein he did not some good either with his pen, tongue, or purse.

Ignatius, when he heard a clock strike, would use to say, "Now I have one hour more to answer for."

So the primitive Christians would redeem some time from their sleep that they might be with God in their closets, as Clemens observes.

And I have read of Theodosius the emperor, that after the variety of worldly employments relating to his civil affairs in the daytime were over, he was wont to consecrate the greatest part of the night to the studying of the Scriptures and private prayer, to which purpose he had a lamp so skillfully made that it supplied itself with oil so that he might no way be interrupted in his private retirements.

That time ought to be redeemed is a lesson that has been taught by the very heathens themselves. It was the saying of Pittacus, one of the seven wise men, "Know time, lose not a minute." And so Theophrastus used to say, "Time is of precious cost." And so Seneca, "Time is the only thing," saith he, "that we can innocently be covetous of; and yet there is nothing of which many are more lavishly and profusely prodigal." And Chrestus, a sophister of Byzantium in the time of Hadrianus the emperor, he was much given to wine; yet he always counted time so precious that when he had misspent his time all the day he would redeem it at night.

When Titus Vespasian, who revenged Christ's blood on Jerusalem, returned victor to Rome, remembering one night as he sat at supper with his friends, that he had done no good that day, he uttered this memorable and praiseworthy apophthegm, "*Amici, diem perdidi*" (My friends, I have lost a day).

Chilo, one of the seven sages, being asked what was the hardest thing in the world to be done, answered, "To use and employ a man's time well."

Cato held that an account must be given, not only of our labor, but also of our leisure. And Aelian gives this testimony of the Lacedaemonians, that "they were hugely covetous of their time, spending it all about necessary things, and suffering no citizen either to be idle or play." And, saith another, "We trifle with that which is most precious and throw away that which is our greatest interest to redeem."

Certainly, these heathens will rise in judgment, not only against Domitian the Roman emperor, who spent much of his time in killing of flies; nor only against Archimedes, who spent his time in drawing lines on the ground when Syracuse was taken; nor against Artaxerxes, who spent his time in making hafts for knives; nor only against Solyman the great Turk, who spent his time in making notches of horn for bows; nor only against Eropus, a Macedonian king, who spent his time in making of lanthorns; nor only against Hyrcanus the king of Parthia who spent his time in catching of moles, but also against many professors who, instead of redeeming of precious time, do trifle and fool away much of their precious time at the glass, the comb, the lute, the viol, the pipe, or at vain sports, and foolish pastimes, or by idle jestings, immoderate sleeping, and superfluous feasting, etc. O sirs! Good hours and blessed opportunities for closet

prayer are merchandise of the highest rate and price; and therefore, whosoever hath a mind to be rich in grace and to be high in glory should buy up that merchandise. They should be still a-redeeming precious time. O sirs! We should redeem time for private prayer out of our eating time, our drinking time, our sleeping time, our buying time, our selling time, our sinning time, our sporting time, rather than neglect our closet communion with God!

6. Closet Prayer Is Either a Duty or It Is No Duty

Sixthly, I answer, Closet prayer is either a duty or it is no duty. Now that it is a duty I have so strongly proved, I suppose, that no man nor devil can fairly or honestly deny it to be a duty. And therefore, why do men cry out of their great business? Alas! Duty must be done whatever business is left undone. Duty must be done, or the man that neglects it will be undone forever. It is a vain thing to object business when a required duty is to be performed; and, indeed, if the bare objecting of business, of much business, were enough to excuse men from duty, I am afraid that there are but few duties of the gospel but men would endeavor to evade under a pretense of business, of much business. He that pretends business to evade private prayer will be as ready to pretend business to evade family prayer; and he that pretends business to evade family prayer will be as ready to pretend business to evade public prayer.

Well, sirs, remember what became of those that excused themselves out of heaven by their carnal apologies and secular businesses. "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee, have me excused," saith one. "I have bought," saith another, "five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused." And, "I have married a wife," saith another, "and therefore I cannot come"

(Luke 14:18–20). The true reason why they would not come to the supper that the King of kings had invited them to was not because they had bought farms and oxen but because their farms and oxen had bought them. The things of the world and their carnal relations had taken up so much room in their hearts and affections that they had no stomach to heaven's dainties; and therefore, it is observable what Christ adds at the end of the parable, He that hateth "not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also," much more his farm and oxen, "he cannot be my disciple" (v. 26).

By these words, it is evident that it was not simply the farm nor the oxen, nor the wife, but a foolish, inordinate, carnal love and esteem of these things, above better and greater blessings, that made them refuse the gracious invitation of Christ. They refused the grace and mercy of God offered in the gospel under a pretense of worldly business; and God peremptorily concludes that not a man of them should taste of His supper. And indeed, what can be more just and righteous than that they should never so much as taste of spiritual and eternal blessings who prefer their earthly business before heaven's dainties, who with the Reubenites prefer a country commodious for the feeding of their cattle before an interest in the land of promise.

Private prayer is a work of absolute necessity both to the bringing of the heart into a good frame and to the keeping of the heart in a good frame. It is of absolute necessity both for the discovery of sin, and for the preventing of sin, and for the embittering of sin, and for the weakening of sin, and for the purging away of sin. It is of absolute necessity both for the discovery of grace, and for a full exercise of grace, and for an eminent increase of grace. It is of absolute necessity to arm

us both against inward and outward temptations, afflictions, and sufferings. It is of absolute necessity to fit us for all other duties and services. For a man to glorify God, to save his own soul, and to further his own everlasting happiness is a work of the greatest necessity. Now private prayer is such a work; and therefore, why should any man plead business, great business, when a work of such absolute necessity is before him? If a man's child or wife were dangerously sick, or wounded, or near to death, he would never plead, "I have business, I have a great deal of business to do; and therefore, I cannot stay with my child, my wife. And I have no time to go or send to the physician." Oh, no! But he would rather argue thus: "It is absolutely necessary that I should look after the preservation of the life of my child or my wife, and this I will attend whatever becomes of my business." O sirs! Your souls are of greater concernment to you than the lives of all the wives and children in the world; and therefore, these must be attended, these must be saved, whatever business is neglected.

7. God Never Appointed Your Calling to Thrust Private Prayer Out of Door

Seventhly, I answer that God did never appoint or design any man's ordinary, particular calling to thrust private prayer out of door. That it is a great sin for any professor to neglect his particular calling under any religious pretense is evident enough by these scriptures: "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work…Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called…For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread…And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing…But rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth…But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (Exod 20:9; 1 Cor 7:20; 2 Thess 3:10–12; 1 Thess 4:11–12; Eph 4:28; 1 Tim 5:8). Yea, our Lord Jesus Christ was a plain downright carpenter and was laborious in that particular calling until He entered upon the public ministry, as all the ancients do agree (Mark 6:3; Matt 13:55–56). And we read also that all the patriarchs had their particular callings. Abel was a keeper of sheep (Gen 4:2); Noah was a husbandman (Gen 9:20); the sons of Jacob were shepherds and keepers of cattle (Gen 46:34); and all the apostles, before they were called to the work of the ministry, had their particular callings.

By the law of Mahomet, the great Turk himself is bound to exercise some manual trade or occupation.

Solon made a law that the son should not be bound to relieve his father when old unless he had set himself in his youth to some occupation. And at Athens every man gave a yearly account to the magistrate by what trade or course of life he maintained himself, which, if he could not do he was banished. And it is by all writers condemned as a very great vanity in Dionysius, that would needs be the best poet; and Caligula, that would needs be the best orator; and in Nero, that would needs be the best fiddler; and so became the three worst princes by minding more other men's business

than their own particular calling. But for a man to evade or neglect private prayer under pretense of his particular calling is agreeable to no scripture; yea, it is contrary to very many scriptures, as is evident by the many arguments formerly cited.

Certainly, no man's calling is a calling away from God or godliness. It never entered into the heart of God that our particular callings should ever drive out of doors our general calling of Christianity. Look, as our general calling must not eat up our particular calling, so our particular calling must not eat up our general calling.

Certainly, our particular calling must give place to our general calling. Did not the woman of Samaria leave her water-pot, and run into the city, and say, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:28–29). Did not the shepherds leave their flocks in the field, and go to Bethlehem, and declare the good tidings of great joy that they had heard of the angel, that there was born that day in the city of David a Saviour, which was Christ the Lord (Luke 2:8–21)? And did not Christ commend Mary for that holy neglect of her particular calling when she sat at His feet and heard His word (Luke 10:38ff)? And what do all these instances show but that our particular callings must give the right hand to the general calling of Christianity?

Certainly, the works of our general calling are far more great and glorious, more eminent and excellent, more high and noble, than the works of our particular callings are; and therefore, it is much more tolerable for our general calling to borrow time of our particular calling than it is for our particular calling to borrow time of our general calling. Certainly, those men are very ignorant or very profane that either think themselves so closely tied up to follow their particular call-

ings six days in the week as that they must not intermeddle with any religious services, or that think their particular callings to be a gulf or a grave designed by God to swallow up private prayer in. God Who is the Lord of time hath reserved some part of our time to Himself every day. Though the Jews were commanded to labor six days of the week, yet they were commanded also to offer up morning and evening sacrifice daily (Deut 6:6–8; Exod 29:38–39; Num 28:3).

The Jews divided the day into three parts:

The first for prayer;

The second for the reading of the law;

And the third for the works of their lawful callings.

As bad as the Jews were, yet they every day set a part of the day apart for religious exercises. Certainly, they are worse than Jews that spend all their time about their particular callings and shut closet prayer quite out of doors. Certainly, that man's soul is in a very ill case who is so entangled with the incumbrances of the world that he can spare no time for private prayer. If God be the Lord of thy mercies, the Lord of thy time, and the Lord of thy soul, how canst thou, with any equity or honor, put off His service under a pretense of much business? That man is lost, that man is cursed, who can find time for anything but none to meet with God in his closet. That man is doubtless upon the brink of ruin whose worldly business eats up all thoughts of God, of Christ, of heaven, of eternity, of his soul, and of his soul concernments.

8. The More Business Lies upon Thy Hand, the More Need to Keep Close to Thy Closet

Eighthly, and lastly, I answer, The more worldly business lies upon thy hand, the more need hast thou to keep close to thy closet. Much business lays a man open to many sins, and to

many snares, and to many temptations. Now, the more sins, snares, and temptations a man's business lays him open to, the more need that man hath to be much in private prayer that his soul may be kept pure from sin, and that his foot may not be taken in the devil's trap, and that he may stand fast in the hour of temptation.

Private prayer is so far from being a hindrance to a man's business that it is the way of ways to bring down a blessing from heaven upon a man's business (Ps 1:2–3; 127:1–2; 128:1–2), as the first-fruits that God's people gave to Him brought down a blessing from heaven upon all the rest (Deut 26:10–11). Whet is no let. Prayer and provender never hinder a journey.

Private prayer is like to Jacob that brought down a blessing from heaven upon all that Laban had (Gen 30:27, 30). Private prayer gives a man a sanctified use both of all his earthly comforts and of all his earthly business. This David and Daniel found by experience, and therefore, it was not their great public employments that could take them off from their private duties. Time spent in heavenly employments is no time lost from worldly business (Deut 28:1–8). Private prayer makes all we take in hand successful. Closet prayer hath made many rich, but it never made any man poor or beggarly in this world.

No man on earth knows what may be the emergencies or the occurrences of a day. "Boast not thyself of to morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov 27:1). Every day is as it were a great-bellied day; every day is as it were with child of something. But what it will bring forth, whether a cross or a comfort, no man can tell. As whilst a woman is with child no man can tell what kind of birth it will be, no man knows what mercies a day may bring forth.

No man knows what miseries a day may bring forth. No man knows what good a day may bring forth. No man knows what evil a day may bring forth. No man knows what afflictions a day may bring forth. No man knows what temptations a day may bring forth. No man knows what liberty a day may bring forth. No man knows what bonds a day may bring forth. No man knows what good success a day may bring forth. No man knows what bad success a day may bring forth. And therefore, a man had need be every day in his closet with God that he may be prepared and fitted to entertain and improve all the occurrences, successes, and emergencies that may attend him in the course of his life. And let thus much suffice for answer to this first objection.

Objection 2: We Are Servants, and Have No Time We Can Call Our Own

Secondly, others may object and say, Sir, we grant that private prayer is an indispensable duty that lies upon the people of God, but we are servants, and we have no time that we can call our own, and our master's business is such as will not allow us any time for private prayer, and, therefore, we hope we may be excused.

1. The Text Is Indefinite, and Not Limited to Any Sort or Rank of Persons

First, the text is indefinite and not limited to any sort or rank of persons, whether high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, servant or master. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret" (Matt 6:6). Here are three *thous*, thou, thou, thou, which are to be understood indefinitely. Thou servant as well as thou master, thou bondman as well

as thou freeman, thou poor man as well as thou rich man, thou maid as well as thou mistress, thou child as well as thou father, thou wife as well as thou husband. Private prayer is an indispensable duty that lies upon all sorts and ranks of persons. A man may as well say that that pronoun *thou* that runs through the ten commandments—"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image…Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them…Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain…Six days shalt thou labour…Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's" (Exod 20:3–17)—relates to the rich and not to the poor, to masters and not to servants, to the free and not to them that are in bonds, as he may say that the three *thous* in the text relate to the rich and not to the poor, to masters and not to servants, to those that are free but not to those that are bound. But certainly there is no man in his wits that will say so, that will affirm such a thing. Doubtless this pronoun *thou* reacheth every man, of what rank or quality soever he be in this world.

2. The Former Answers Are Here Very Applicable

Secondly, I answer that the first, the third, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, the seventh, and the eighth answers that are given to the first objection are here very applicable; and oh, that all masters and servants were so wise, so serious, and so ingenuous, as to lay all those answers warm on their own hearts! It might be a means to prevent much sin and to

bespeak masters and mistresses to give their pious servants a little more time to lift up their hearts to Christ in a corner.

3. If Thou Hast Liberty to Choose, Remove Thy Station

Thirdly, I answer, If thou art a servant that hast liberty to choose a new master, thou wert better remove thy station than live under such a master's roof who is such an enemy to God, to Christ, to religion, to himself, and to the eternal welfare of thy poor soul as that he will not give thee half an hour's time in a day to spend in thy chamber, thy closet, though the glory of God, the good of his own family, and the everlasting happiness of thine own soul is concerned in it (Ps 84:10; 120:5). It is better for thee to shift thy master than to neglect thy duty. "Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather" (1 Cor 7:21). We lost our liberty by sin, and we affect nothing more than liberty by nature.

The Rabbins say of liberty, "If the heavens were parchment, the sea ink, and every pile of grass a pen, the praises of it could not be comprised nor expressed." Laban's house was full of idols. Great houses are often so. Jacob's tent was little, but the true worship of God was in it. It is infinitely better to live in Jacob's tent than in Laban's house. It is best being with such masters where we may have least of sin and most of God, where we may have the most helps, the best examples, and the choicest encouragements to be holy and happy.

The religious servant should be as careful in the choice of his master as the religious master is careful in the choice of his servant. Gracious servants are great blessings to the families where they live; and that master may well be called the unhappy master who will rather part with a gracious

servant than spare him a little time in a day to pour out his soul before the Lord in a corner.

4. A Gracious Servant Is Principled by God to Cry, Abba, Father

Fourthly, I answer, If thou art a gracious servant, then thou art spirited and principled by God to this very purpose, that thou mayest cry, Abba, Father, when thou art alone, when thou art in a corner, and no eye seeth thee but His Who seeth in secret (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6; 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Tim 1:14). If thou art a gracious servant, then thou hast received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is of God (1 Cor 2:12). Now, he that hath this tree of life hath also the fruit that grows upon this tree. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance," etc. (Gal 5:22–23). Now, grace is called, not the *works* of the Spirit, but the *fruits* of the Spirit,

(1) Because all grace is derived from the Spirit as the fruit is derived from the root. And,

(2) To note the pleasantness and delightfulness of grace, for what is more pleasant and delightful than sweet and wholesome fruits (Song 4:16; 6:2)?

(3) To note the profit and advantage that doth redound to them that have the Spirit. For as many grow rich by the fruits of their gardens and orchards, so many grow rich in grace, in holiness, in comfort, in spiritual experiences, by the fruits of the Spirit. Now why hath God given thee His Spirit, and why hath He laid into thy soul a stock of supernatural graces, but that thou mayest be every way qualified, disposed, and fitted for private prayer, and to maintain secret communion with God in a corner?

Certainly, God never gave any poor servant a talent of gifts, or a talent of grace, but in order to his driving of a secret trade heavenward.

5. Daniel Was Both a Subject and a Servant to King Darius

Fifthly, I answer, Though king Darius had made a decree that none should ask any petition of any god or man for thirty days, upon the penalty of being cast into the den of lions, yet Daniel, who was both a subject and a servant to king Darius and one upon whose hands the chiefest and greatest affairs of the kingdom did lie, did keep up his private devotions. In the first and second verses of that sixth of Daniel, you will find that Daniel had abundance of great and weighty employments upon his hands. He was set over the whole affairs of the whole empire of Persia, and he with two other presidents, of whom himself was chief, were to receive the accounts of the whole kingdom from all those hundred and twenty princes which in the Persian monarchy were employed in all public businesses. And yet, notwithstanding such a multiplicity of business as lay upon his hands, and notwithstanding his servile condition, yet he was very careful to redeem time for private prayer. Yea, it is very observable that the heart of Daniel, in the midst of all his mighty businesses, was so much set upon private prayer, upon his secret retirements for religious exercises, that he runs the hazard of losing all his honors, profits, pleasures, yea, and life itself, rather than he would be deprived of convenient time and opportunities to wait upon God in his chamber. Certainly, Daniel will one day rise in judgment against all those subjects and servants who think to evade private prayer by their pleas of much business, and of their being servants.

6. What Singular Thing Do You? What Do You More Than Others?

Sixthly, I answer, If you who are gracious servants, notwithstanding your masters' businesses, cannot redeem a little time to wrestle with God in a corner, what singular thing do you? What do you more than others? Do you hear? So do others. Do you read? So do others. Do you follow your masters to public prayers? So do others. Do you join with your masters in family prayers? So do others. Oh! But now gracious servants should go beyond all other servants in the world; they should do singular things for God. "What do ye more than others?" (Matt 5:47)—τί περισσὸν ποιεῖτε; What extraordinary thing do you? What more ordinary than to find servants follow their masters to public prayers and to family prayers? Oh! But now to find poor servants to redeem a little time from their masters' business to pour out their souls before the Lord in a corner, this is not ordinary, yea, this is extraordinary, and this doth wonderfully well become gracious servants. Oh! That all men's servants, who are servants to the most high God, would seriously consider,

(1) How singularly they are *privileged by God* above all other servants in the world. They are called, adopted, reconciled, pardoned, justified before the throne of God, which other servants are not (1 Cor 3:22–23). And why then should not such servants be singular in their services who are so singular in their privileges?

(2) Secondly, gracious servants are made *partakers of a more excellent nature* than other servants are. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). The apostle in this expression doth not aim at any essential change and conversion of our substance into the nature of

God and Christ, but only at the elevation and dignifying of our nature by Christ. Though that real, that near, that dear, that choice, that mysterious, that peculiar, that singular union that Christians have with Christ doth raise them up to a higher similitude and likeness of God and Christ than ever they had attained to in their primitive perfection, yet it doth not introduce any real transmutation either of our bodies or souls into the divine nature. It is certain that our union and conjunction with Christ doth neither mingle persons nor unite substances, but it doth conjoin our affections and brings our wills into a league of amity with Christ. To be made partaker of the divine nature notes two things, say some:

First, a fellowship with God in His holiness;

Secondly, a fellowship with God in His blessedness, in the beatifical vision and brightness of glory.

To be made "partakers of the divine nature," say others, is to be made partakers of those holy graces, those divine qualities, which sometimes are called the image of God, the likeness of God, the life of God, etc. (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), whereby we resemble God, not only as a picture doth a man in outward lineaments, but as a child doth his father in countenance and conditions. Now, take the words which way you will, how highly doth it concern those servants that are made partakers of the divine nature to do singular things for God, to do such things for God that other servants, that are not partakers of the divine nature, have no mind, no heart, no spirit to do—yea, that they refuse and scorn to do!

(3) Thirdly, gracious servants are *worthily descended*; they have the most illustrious extraction and honorable origin (1 John 5:19; John 3:8; Jas 2:5).

(4) Fourthly, gracious servants are *worthily attended*, they are nobly guarded (Ps 34:15; Heb 1:14; Deut 33:26–27; Zech 2:5).

(5) Fifthly, gracious servants are *worthily dignified*; they are dignified with the highest and most honorable titles (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:5–6; 5:10).

(6) Sixthly, take many things in one: gracious servants have *more excellent graces*, experiences, comforts, communions, promises, assurances, discoveries, hopes, helps, principles, diet, raiment, portion, than all other servants in the world have. And therefore, God may well expect better and greater things from them than from all other servants in the world. God may very well expect that they should do singular things for His glory Who hath done such singular things for their good. Certainly God expects that gracious servants should be a-blessing of Him when other servants are a-blaspheming of Him; that they should be a-magnifying of Him when other servants are a-debasing of Him; that they should be a-redeeming of precious time when other servants are a-trifling, fooling, playing or sinning away of precious time; that they should be a-weeping in a corner when other servants are a-sporting and making themselves merry among their jovial companions; that they should be a-mourning in secret when other servants are a-sinning in secret; and that they should be at their private devotion when other servants are sleeping and snoring.

Solomon, that was the wisest prince that ever sat upon a throne, and who was guided by an infallible Spirit, hath delivered it for a standing maxim above two thousand years ago that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour" (Prov 12:26). When Solomon dropped this aphorism from his royal pen, there was not a man in the world that was legally

righteous, Adam and all his posterity being fallen from all their honor, glory, dignity, and excellency, into a most woeful gulf of sin and misery; and therefore, Solomon must be understood of him that is evangelically righteous (Ps 14:1–3; Rom 3:9–12; Lam 5:16). He that is evangelically righteous, be he master or servant, rich or poor, bond or free, high or low, is more excellent than his neighbor. And oh, that all masters would seriously consider of this, that they may carry it no more so proudly, so loftily, so scornfully, so frowardly, so strangely, so sourly, so bitterly, so rigorously, towards their pious servants, as not to afford them a little time to pour out their souls before the Lord in a corner!

I have read of Ingo, an ancient king of the Draves and Veneds, who, making a stately feast, appointed all his pagan nobles to sit in the hall below, and at the same time commanded certain poor Christians to be brought up into his presence-chamber to sit with him at his table that they might eat of his kingly cheer. When many wondered at this, he told them that he accounted Christians, though never so poor, a greater ornament at his table and more worthy of his company than the greatest nobles that were not converted to the Christian faith. For saith he, "When these pagan nobles shall be thrust down to hell, these poor Christians shall be my consorts and fellow princes in heaven." Certainly, this noble prince will one day rise in judgment against all sour, churlish Labans who carry it so harshly and so severely towards their gracious servants as that they will not allow them a little time to wait upon God in a hole (Eph 6:9).

Why should not gracious masters give their gracious servants a little time for closet prayer now, considering that they are sharers with them in all the fundamental good that comes by Christ in this world, and considering that they shall be

partakers with them in all the glory of another world? The poorest servant in a family hath a soul more precious than heaven and earth; and the greatest work that lies upon his hand in this world is to look to the eternal safety and security of that. For if that be safe, all is safe. If that be well, all is well. But if that be lost, all is lost. Every gracious servant, though he be never so poor and mean, yet hath he the image of God, the image of the King of kings, stamped upon him. And woe to him that shall wrong, or despise, or trample upon that image! Certainly, God Himself is wronged by the injury that is done to His image. The contempt and despite that is done to the image or coin of a king is done to the king himself, and accordingly he will revenge it.

If it was a capital crime in Tiberius' days to carry the image of Augustus upon a ring or coin into any sordid place, as Suetonius saith it was, what crime must it be in those masters who despise, revile, reproach, scorn, abuse, and tread under foot such servants as have the image of the great God stamped upon their souls, and all because they look God-ward, Christ-ward, heaven-ward, holiness-ward, duty-ward? Masters should never twit their servants in the teeth with their inferiority, penury, poverty, misery, mean parentage, or servile condition, but remember that these things are more the Creator's pleasure than the servant's fault and that that God that hath made the master rich and the servant poor can as quickly make the master poor and the servant rich (Prov 22:2; 17:5). God many times puts down the mighty from their seats and exalts them of low degree (Luke 1:52). Certainly, no master nor mistress should dare to insult or triumph over such servants as have souls as noble as their own. But they should seriously and frequently consider of Solomon's aphorism, "The righteous," though a servant, though the

meanest among all the servants, "is more excellent than his neighbour" (Prov 12:26), and accordingly give them a little time and liberty to converse with God in secret. And oh, that all gracious servants would discover themselves to be more excellent than their neighbors by making more conscience of private prayer than their neighbors do, and by being more in their closets than their neighbors are, and by delighting themselves in their secret retirements more than their neighbors will, and by redeeming some time for God, for their souls, and for eternity, more than their neighbors do.

7. God Is the Only Lord of Time

Seventhly, I answer that God is the only Lord of time. Time is more the Lord's than it is thy master's; and therefore, it is no neglecting of thy master's business to take a little time daily for private prayer. Times do belong to providence as well as issues; and as God is the God of our mercies so He is the Lord of our times. "My times are in thy hand," saith David (Ps 31:15). Not only the times of his sorrows, but also the times of his comforts; not only the times of his miseries, but also the times of his mercies; not only the times of his dangers, but also the times of his duties, were in the hands of God.

It is observable the Psalmist doth not say time, but times, in the plural, to shew that every point and period of time depends upon the hand of God.

One, complaining of those who say, "Come, let us talk together, to pass away the time," with grief of spirit cries out, *O donec praetereat hora*, "Oh, until the hour be gone! Oh, until time be past, which the mercy of thy Maker hath bestowed upon thee to perform repentance, to procure pardon, to gain grace, and to obtain glory." That servant that borrows a little time every day to seek the face of God in a corner borrows it

rather of God than of his master; and therefore, why should his master swell, rage, or complain, considering that God never made him lord of time?

8. Redeem Time from Sleep, Recreations, and Meals Rather Than Neglect the Closet

Eighthly, I answer that servants should rather redeem time from their sleep, their recreations, their daily meals, than neglect closet duty a day. And certainly those servants that, out of conscience towards God and out of a due regard to the internal and eternal welfare of their own souls, shall every day redeem an hour's time from their sleep, or sports, or feedings, to spend with God in secret, they shall find by experience that the Lord will make a few hours' sleep sweeter and better than many hours' sleep to them; and their outward sports shall be made up with inward delights; and for their common bread God will feed them with that bread that came down from heaven.

Sirs, was not Christ His Father's Servant? "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect (or choice one), in whom my soul delighteth (or is well pleased); I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (Isa 42:1). And did not He redeem time from His natural rest rather than He would omit private prayer? "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). Christ spent the day in preaching, in healing the sick, in working of miracles; and rather than these noble works should shut out private prayer, He rises a great while before day that He might have some time to wrestle with His Father in secret. "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12).

O sirs! Did Christ spend whole nights in private prayer for the salvation of your souls, and will you think it much to redeem an hour's time from your natural rest to seek and to serve Him in a corner, and to make sure the things of your everlasting peace?

The redeeming of time for private prayer is the redeeming of a precious treasure, which, if once lost, can never fully be recovered again. If riches should make themselves wings and fly away, they may return again, as they did to Job; or if credit, and honor, and worldly greatness and renown should fly away, they may return again, as they did to Nebuchadnezzar; if success, and famous victories and conquests, should make themselves wings, and fly away, they may return again, as they did to many of the Roman conquerors and others; but if time, whom the poets paint with wings, to show the volubility and swiftness of it, fly from us, it will never more return unto us.

A great lady [Queen Elizabeth] of this land, on her dying bed cried out, "Call time again, call time again! A world of wealth for an inch of time!" But time past was never, nor could ever, be recalled.

The Egyptians drew the picture of time with three heads. The first was of a greedy wolf gaping for time past, because it hath ravenously devoured even the memory of so many things past recalling. The second of a crowned lion roaring for time present, because it hath the principality of all action, for which it calls aloud. And the third was of a deceitful dog, fawning for time to come, because it feeds fond men with many flattering hopes to their eternal undoing. Oh, that all this might prevail with servants to redeem time for private prayer! And if my counsel might take place, I should rather advise servants to redeem some time for private prayer from

their sleep or lawful recreations, or set meals, etc., than to spend in private prayer that time which their masters call their time, especially if their masters be unconverted and "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23), and that for these five reasons:

(1) First, because this may be *a means to prevent much sin on the master's side*. Masters that are in their unregenerate estate are very apt to storm, and take on, and let fly against God, and Christ, and religion, and profession, etc., when they see their servants spend that time in private prayer, or in any other religious exercise, which, according to their understanding, is their time and ought to be wholly spent in following their businesses. Now gracious servants should have that honorable respect, and that tender affection, and that Christian compassion to their masters' souls as to do to the utmost all that lies in them to prevent their masters from contracting guilt upon their souls or from making work for repentance, for hell, or for the Physician of souls (Jude 22–23).

The Persians, the Turks, and many Indians are so compassionate that they erect hospitals not only for lame and diseased men, but also for birds, beasts, and dogs that are either aged, starved, or hurt. Oh, then what tender compassions should gracious servants exercise towards their masters' souls, which are jewels more worth than heaven and earth!

(2) Secondly, because this may be *a means to convince the judgments and consciences of their masters* that there is some worth, some excellency, some sweetness to be found in private prayer and in other closet duties. For when masters shall observe their servants to redeem time for closet duties from their very sleep, recreations, dinners, suppers, they will be ready to conclude that certainly there is more worth, more

goodness, more sweetness, more excellency, more glory, more gain in closet duties than ever they have understood, felt, or experienced, and that their very poor servants are better and more righteous than themselves. Sozomen reports that the devout life of a poor captive Christian woman made a king and all his family embrace the faith of Jesus Christ. Good works convince more than miracles themselves.

I have read of one Pachomius, a soldier under Constantine the emperor, how that his army being almost starved for want of necessary provision, he came to a city of Christians, and they of their own charity relieved them speedily and freely. He, wondering at their free and noble charity, inquired what kind of people they were whom he saw so bountiful? It was answered that they were Christians, whose profession it is to hurt no man and do good to every man. Hereupon Pachomius, convinced of the excellency of this religion, threw away his arms and became a Christian, a saint. Look, as husbands sometimes are won by the conversation of their wives without the Word (1 Pet 3:1–2), so masters may sometimes be won by the gracious carriage and conversation of their servants without the Word. The servant's redeeming of time for private duties upon the hardest and severest terms may be so blessed to the master that it may issue in his conviction, conversion, and salvation. There is a may-be for it, and a very may-be should be a sufficient encouragement for every gracious servant to do all he can to save the soul of his master from going down into the infernal pit.

(3) Thirdly, because the servant's redeeming of time from his sleep, recreations, meals, for private prayer, will most clearly and abundantly *evidence the singular love, the great delight, and the high esteem that he hath of private prayer.* We say those children love their books well, and delight much in

learning, who will be at their books when others are gone to their beds, and who will be at their books before others can get out of their beds. Certainly, they love private prayer well and they delight much in closet communion with God who will be a-praying when others are a-sleeping and who will be addressing their souls before God in a corner before their mistress is a-dressing of herself at the glass or their fellow-servants a-dressing themselves in the shop.

(4) Fourthly, Because the servant's redeeming of time for private prayer from his sleep, set meals, recreations, etc., may be of most *use to other fellow-servants* both to awaken them and to convince them that the things of religion are of the greatest and highest importance and that there is no trade, or pleasure, or profit to that private trade that is driven between God and a man's own soul; and also to keep them from trifling or fooling away of that time which is truly and properly their masters' time, and by the royal law of heaven ought to be spent solely and wholly in their service and business. For what ingenuous servant is there in the world but will argue thus? I see that such and such of my fellow-servants will redeem time for private prayer and for other closet services from their very sleep, meals, recreations, etc., rather than they will borrow or make bold with that time which my master saith is his, etc. And why then should I be so foolish, so brutish, so mad, to trifle, or idle, or play, or toy away that time which should be spent in my master's service and for my master's advantage?

(5) Fifthly and lastly, Because the servant's redeeming of time for private prayer from his sleep, his meals, his recreations, etc., cannot but be *infinitely pleasing to God*, and that which will afford him most comfort when he comes to die. The more any poor heart acts contrary to flesh and

blood, the more he pleases God. The more any poor heart denies himself, the more he pleases God. The more any poor heart acts against the stream of sinful examples, the more he pleases God. The more difficulties and discouragements a poor heart meets with in the discharge of his duty, the more love he shows to God. And the more love a poor heart shows to God, the more he pleases God. "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD" (Jer 2:2–3). God was very highly pleased and greatly delighted with the singular love and choice affections of His people towards Him when they followed after Him and kept close to Him in that tedious and uncouth passage through the waste, howling wilderness. How all these things do comport with that poor pious servant that redeems time for private prayer upon the hardest terms imaginable I shall leave the ingenuous reader to judge. And certainly, upon a dying bed, no tongue can express nor heart conceive but he that feels it, the unspeakable comfort that closet duties will afford to him that hath been exercised in them, upon those hard terms that are under present consideration.

9. Thy Near and Dear Relation to God Calls Aloud for Private Prayer

Ninthly, I answer, If thou art a gracious servant, then the near and dear relation that is between God and thee and the choice privileges that thou art interested in call aloud for private prayer (John 8:32–33, 36). As thou art thy Master's servant,

so thou art the Lord's free man. "For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men" (1 Cor 7:22–23)—either when they command you things forbidden by Christ, or forbid you things commanded by Christ, or when they would exercise a dominion over your faith, or a lordship over your consciences. Suffer not yourselves in spiritual things to be brought into such bondage by any men or masters in the world as not to use that freedom and liberty that Christ hath purchased for you with His dearest blood (Gal 5:1; Col 2:20; Gal 2:4). No servants are to serve their masters in opposition to Christ; nor no servants are to serve their masters as spiritual masters; nor no servants are to serve their masters as supreme masters, but as subordinate masters (Eph 6:5–7). And as every gracious servant is the Lord's freeman, so every gracious servant is the Lord's friend (Isa 41:8; Jas 2:23; John 15:13–15). And as every gracious servant is the Lord's friend, so every gracious servant is the Lord's son (Gal 4:5–6; Rom 8:16). And as every gracious servant is the Lord's son, so every gracious servant is the Lord's spouse (Hos 2:19–20; 2 Cor 11:2).

And now I appeal to the consciences of all that have tasted that the Lord is gracious, whether the near and dear relation that is between the Lord and pious servants doth not call aloud upon them to take all opportunities and advantages that possibly they can to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret and to acquaint Him in a corner with all their secret wants, and weaknesses, and wishes. And as gracious servants are thus nearly and dearly related to God, so gracious servants are very highly privileged by God. Gracious servants are as much freed from the reign of sin, the dominion of

sin, and the damnatory power of sin, as gracious masters are (Rom 6:14). Gracious servants are as much freed from hell, from the curse of the law, and from the wrath of God, as their gracious masters are (Rom 8:1). Gracious servants are as much adopted, as much reconciled, as much pardoned, as much justified, and as much redeemed, as their gracious masters are (Gal 3:13). Gracious servants are as much heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, as their gracious masters are. Gracious servants are as much a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, called out of darkness into his marvelous light, as their gracious masters are. And therefore, they being all alike interested in all these great and glorious privileges which belong to saints as saints, they are, without all peradventure, alike obliged and engaged to all those duties which lie upon saints as saints, among which private prayer is one; and therefore, they are to buckle to this duty against all carnal reasons and objections whatsoever.

10. The Promised Reward Lies as Open to the Servant as to the Master

Tenthly, and lastly, I answer that the promised reward in the text lies as fair and as open to the servant as to the master, to the bond as to the free, to the peasant as to the prince. Whosoever prays to his heavenly Father in secret, be he high or low, rich or poor, honorable or base, servant or master, he shall receive an open reward. The reward in the text is not to be confined or limited to this or that sort or rank of men, but it is to be extended to all ranks and sorts of men that make conscience of private prayer, of closet duties. "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart,

as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free…Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Eph 6:5–8; Col 3:22–24).

Such servants as serve their masters faithfully, cordially, and in singleness of spirit shall receive the reward of grace and the reward of the inheritance. The meanest servant that is faithful in the service of his master shall for a recompense receive the eternal inheritance (Rom 8:15–17). The recompense of reward in the scripture last cited is not of merit but of mere grace, because the inheritance belongs only to children upon the account of their birth or adoption. Faithful servants shall of servants be made sons and so enjoy the heavenly inheritance. Christ is so noble a master that He will not suffer any service that hath been performed to men out of conscience to His command to pass unrewarded. Oh, how much more will He recompense pious servants for those spiritual services that they perform for His sake, for His glory! God is so liberal a paymaster that no man shall so much as shut the door or kindle a fire upon His altar or give a cup of cold water—one of the least, readiest, and meanest refreshments that be—but He shall be rewarded (Mal 1:10; Matt 10:42).

It is an excellent observation of Calvin upon God's rewarding of the Rechabites' obedience (Jer 35:19): "God," saith he,

"often recompenseth the shadows and seeming appearances of virtue to show that complacency He takes in the ample rewards that He hath reserved for true and sincere piety." Nebuchadnezzar, though a tyrant, yet being engaged in God's service against Tyre, he shall have Egypt as his pay for his pains at Tyre (Ezek 29:18–20). It is an ancient slur and slander that hath been cast upon God, as if He were an austere master, an illiberal lord, and as if there were nothing to be got in His service but knocks, blows, wounds, crosses, losses, etc., whereas He is a rewarder not only "of them that diligently seek him" but even of the very worst of men that do any service for Him (Heb 11:6). I have read of Herod Agrippa, the same that was smitten by the angel and eaten up of worms, because he gave not glory to God (Acts 12:23), that, being bound in chains and sent to prison by Tiberius for wishing Caius in the empire, one Thaumastus, a servant of Caius, carrying a pitcher of water, met him, and Agrippa being very thirsty desired him to give him some of his water to drink, which he willingly did, whereupon Agrippa said, "This service thou hast done in giving me drink shall do thee good another day." And he was as big and as good as his word, for afterwards, when Caius was emperor and Agrippa made king of Judea, he first got his liberty, then made him chief officer of his household, and after his decease took order that he should continue in the same office with his son. Now how much more then will the King of kings reward all those poor pious servants of His that do not only give to Him in His members cups of cold water but do also redeem time from their very rest, meals, and recreations that they may have some time to seek the face of God in a corner.

Certainly, there shall not be a sigh, a groan, a prayer, a tear let fall by a poor servant in a corner that shall not be

at last regarded and rewarded by the great God. Lyra saith that Mordecai waited six years before his good service was rewarded by king Ahasuerus. It may be God may reward thee sooner for all thy closet services; but if He do not reward thee sooner He will certainly reward thee better. He will reward thee with higher honors, with greater dignities, with more glorious robes, and with a more royal crown, even an incorruptible crown, a crown of righteousness, a crown of life, a crown of glory (1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:8; Rev 2:10; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4). And therefore, hold on and hold out in your secret retirements. Though some may deride you, and others revile you, and your carnal masters discourage you, yet God is faithful and will certainly reward you. Yea, He will openly reward you for all the secret pourings out of your souls in His bosom.

Objection 3: We Want Those Gifts and Endowments That Others Have

Some may further object and say, Oh, but we cannot pray alone; we want those gifts and endowments that others have. We are shut up and know not how to pour out our souls before God in a corner. We would willingly pray, but we want ability to pour out our souls before the Lord in secret.

1. God's Dearest Children May Sometimes Be Shut Up

First, God's dearest children may sometimes be shut up; they may with Zacharias be struck dumb for a time and not able to speak (Luke 1:20). "I am so troubled that I cannot speak…Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee" (Ps 77:4; 38:9). God's dearest children have sometimes been so shut up that they have been able to say nothing, nor to do anything but groan. A child of

God may sometimes meet with such a blow from God, from conscience, from Scripture, from Satan, from the world, that may for a time so astonish him that he may not be able to speak to God nor speak to others nor speak to his own heart. Look, as the Holy Spirit is not always a teaching Spirit, nor always a leading Spirit, nor always a comforting Spirit, nor always a sealing Spirit, nor always a witnessing Spirit, nor always an assuring Spirit to any of the saints, so He is not always a supplicating Spirit in any of the saints. When He is grieved, vexed, quenched, provoked, He may suspend His gracious influences and deny the soul His assistance. And what can a Christian then say or do?

2. There May Be the Spirit of Adoption in Sighs and Groans

Secondly, I answer, Thou canst not pray; but canst thou not sigh, nor groan neither? There may be the Spirit of adoption in sighs and groans, as well as in vocal prayer (Rom 8:26). The force, the virtue, the efficacy, the excellency of prayer doth not consist in the number and flourish of words but in the supernatural motions of the Spirit—in sighs, and groans, and pangs, and strong affections of heart that are unspeakable and unutterable. Certainly, the very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of a man's soul before the Lord, though it be but in sighs, groans, and tears (1 Sam 1:13–19). One sigh and groan from a broken heart is better pleasing to God than all human eloquence.

3. Beg of God to Teach Thee to Pray

Thirdly, I answer, Beg of God to teach thee to pray. Oh, beg the Holy Spirit Who is a Spirit of prayer. God hath promised His Holy Spirit to them that ask it. "If ye then, being evil,

know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13). "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them…And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh…I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications" (Ezek 36:26–27; 11:19; Zech 12:10).

Now gracious promises are God's bonds, and He loves to see His people put them in suit. God expects that we should be His remembrancers, and that we should pray over His promises (Isa 62:6–7; Isa 43:25–26). When He had promised great things to His people concerning justification, sanctification, and preservation, He subjoins, "I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it" (Ezek 36:37).

God looks that we should spread His gracious promises before Him as Hezekiah did Sennacherib's letter (Isa 37:14). God is never better pleased than when His people importune Him in His own words and urge Him with arguments taken from His own promises. Though God be a very affectionate father, and a very liberal father, yet He is not a prodigal father, for He will never throw away His mercies on such as will not stoutly and humbly plead out His promises with Him. God loves to take state upon Him, and will be sought unto, both for His giving in of mercies, and for His making good of precious promises. Thou sayest thou canst not pray. Why, canst thou not go into a corner and spread the promises

last cited before the Lord and tell Him how much it concerns His honor and glory, as well as thy own internal and eternal good, to make good those gracious promises that He hath made concerning His giving of His Spirit to them that ask Him and His putting His Spirit within them and His pouring out a Spirit of grace and supplication upon them?

We read of Tamar, that when Judah her father-in-law lay with her, she took as a pledge his signet, bracelets, and staff; and afterwards, when she was in great distress and ready to be burnt as an harlot, she then brought out her staff, and signet, and bracelets, and said, "By the man, whose these are, am I with child," and thereby she saved her life (Gen 38:18, 25). The promises are as so many rich mines; they are as so many choice flowers of paradise; they are the food, life, and strength of the soul. They are as a staff to support the soul, and they are as a signet and bracelets to adorn the soul, and to enrich the soul. And therefore, poor sinners should bring them forth, and lay them before the Lord, and urge God with them, there being no way on earth to save a man's soul and to prevent a burning in hell like this. Concerning precious promises, let me give you these eight hints:

First, that they are truly propounded and stated by God (Mark 10:30).

Secondly, that they shall certainly be performed, they being all made in and through Christ (2 Cor 1:20). They are made first to Christ, and then to all that have union and communion with Him.

Sertorius, saith Plutarch, paid what he promised with fair words, but God doth not do so. Men many times say and unsay; they often eat their words as soon as they have spoken them. But God will never eat the words that are gone out of His mouth. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my

pleasure…yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it" (Isa 46:10–11).

Thirdly, that they all issue from free grace, from special love, from divine goodness (Hos 14:4).

Fourthly, that they are all as unchangeable as He is that made them (Jer 31:3).

Fifthly, that they are all bottomed and founded upon the truth, faithfulness, and all-sufficiency of God (Mal 3:6).

Sixthly, that they are pledges and pawns of great things that God will do for His people in time (Heb 13:5).

Seventhly, that they are most sure and certain evidences of divine favor, and a declaration of the heart and goodwill of God to His poor people (Heb 6:12; Num 23:19).

Eighthly, that they are the price of Christ's blood.

Now, how should all these things encourage poor souls to be still a-pressing of God with His promises?

4. If Thou Canst Not Pray as Thou Wouldst, Pray as Well as Thou Canst

Fourthly, you say you cannot pray, etc. Oh, that you would leave off objecting, and fall upon praying! If you cannot pray as you would, nor as you should, pray as well as you can. Joseph's brethren stood so long dallying, and delaying, and trifling out the time, that, having a journey to go to buy corn, they might have bought and returned twice before they went and bought once. When Elijah called Elisha, he goes about the bush, and he must needs go bid his father and mother farewell before he could follow the prophet (1 Kgs 19:20). O friends! Take heed of dallying, delaying, trifling, and going about the bush, when you should be a-falling upon the work of prayer. What though with Hannah thou canst but weep out a prayer, or with Moses stammer out a prayer, or with

Hezekiah chatter out a prayer, yet do as well as thou canst, and thou shalt find acceptance with God. "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor 8:12). The publican's prayer had not much rhetoric or eloquence in it—"God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13)—and yet God accepted it. He prayed much, though he spake little, and God did not turn a deaf ear upon him. That God that once accepted a handful of meal for a sacrifice, and a gripe of goat's hair for an oblation, and the poor widow's two mites, as if they had been two millions, will certainly accept of what thou art able to do, though thou dost fall short, yea, much short, of what thou oughtest to do (Lev 2:1–2; 6:15; Luke 21:3). "Lord," saith Luther, "Thou commandest me to pray. I cannot pray as I would, yet I will obey; for though my prayer be not acceptable, yet Thine own commandment is acceptable to Thee." If weak Christians would but put forth in prayer that little strength they have, God would quickly renew their spiritual strength. He would certainly carry them on from strength to strength. He would still, by secret assistances and secret influences, help them on in their heavenly trade (Isa 49:20–22; Ps 84:7). As a loving, indulgent father will take his little child in his arms and carry him on in his way homeward when his strength begins to fail him, and he can walk no further, and the way proves dirty, slippery, or uneven, so God does by His: "I taught Ephraim also to go (as a nurse doth the infant), taking them by their arms" (Hos 11:3). When God's poor children come to a foul way, or a rough place, He takes them up in His own arms, and helps them over the quagmire of crosses, and the difficulties of duties, and over all that straitness, and narrowness, and weakness of spirit that doth attend them in their closet performances.

It is observable that when the king of Israel was to shoot the arrow he did put his hand upon the bow, and Elisha did put his hand upon the king's hand (2 Kgs 13:16). So when we go into our closets, we are to put up our hand, and then the Spirit of God likewise will put His hand upon our hand. He will put His strength to our strength, or rather to our weakness. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities" (Rom 8:26), lifts with us, or helpeth together. The Greek word συναντιλαμβάνεται doth properly signify such a help as when another man of strength and ability steppeth in to sustain the burden that lieth upon our shoulders, be it a log, or a piece of timber, setting his shoulders under it, to lift up, and bear part of it with us, or to help us as the nurse helpeth her little child, upholding it by the sleeve. When a poor Christian sets himself to closet prayer, to mourn, to believe, or to obey, etc., then the Spirit comes in with new help, and new influences, and new assistances, and so carries him on in all these noble services. That child that doth but stammer at first, in time will speak plainly and fluently. Oh, how many Christians are there that now can pray with much freedom, liberty, and fluency, who at first could only sigh out a prayer, or stammer out a prayer, or weep out a prayer!

Thou sayest thou canst not pray, but didst thou but stir up thyself to obey that command (Matt 6:6) as well as thou canst, thou dost not know but that a power may go forth with the command that may enable thee to act suitable to the command. In Matthew 9:1–9 Christ bid the palsy man rise and walk: "Take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." The palsy man might have objected, "Alas! I am carried by four. I am not able to stir a limb, much less to rise, but least of all to take up my bed and walk." Oh, but he rouseth up himself as well as he could, and a power went forth with the command

that enabled him to do what was commanded. So there was a poor man that had a withered hand, and Christ commands him to stretch forth his hand (Matt 12:10–14). He might have replied, "My hand is withered, and if I might have as many worlds as there be men in the world to stretch it forth, I could not stretch it forth. Yea, if my very life—if my very salvation—did lie upon stretching forth my withered arm, I could not stretch it forth." Oh! But he throws by all such pleas and complies with Christ's command as well as he could, and a power went forth and healed his hand.

O sirs! If you would but pray in your closets as well as you can, you do not know but that such a power and virtue might flow from Christ into your hearts as might carry you on in your closet duties, beyond expectation, even to admiration. Others have found it so, and why not you? Why not you? Well! Remember that God is no curious nor critical observer of the incongruous expressions that fall from His poor children when they are in their closet duties. He is such a Father as is very well pleased with the broken expressions and divine stammerings of His people when they are in a corner. It is not a flood of words, nor studied notions, nor seraphical expressions, nor elegant phrases in prayer that takes the ear, or that delights the heart of God, or that opens the gates of glory, or that brings down the best of blessings upon the soul, but uprightness, holiness, heavenliness, spiritualness, and brokenness of heart. These are the things that make a conquest upon God and that turn most to the soul's account.

5. The Spirit of God Is a Spirit of Prayer and Supplication

Fifthly, thou sayest thou canst not pray, but if thou art a child of God thou hast the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is

a Spirit of prayer and supplication. That all the children of God have the Spirit of God is most evident in the blessed Scriptures. Take these for a taste: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications" (Zech 12:10). "Take not thy holy spirit from me" (Ps 51:11). "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor 2:12). "Who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit" (1 Thess 4:8). "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us…Hereby we know that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 3:24; 4:13).

That all the children of God have the Spirit of God may be further made evident by an induction of these seven particulars.

[1] First, they are all sanctified by the Spirit. "Ye are sanctified…by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). I do not say that they are all equally sanctified by the Spirit, but I say they are all really sanctified by the Spirit. Though all the servants of Christ have their talents, yet not all have their ten talents, nor all have their five talents, nor all have their two talents. Some have only their one talent (Matt 25:15). Though Benjamin's mess was five times as much as his brethren's mess, yet every one of his brethren had their mess (Gen 43:32–34). So though some Christians have five times more measures of the Spirit, and more measures of light, of love, of holiness, of heavenly-mindedness, than others have, yet every Christian hath some measures of the Spirit and some measures of grace and holiness. Though some are babes in Christ and others are children in Christ, though some are young men in Christ

and others old men in Christ, yet every one of them is born of the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet 2:2; 1 John 2:12–14; John 3:8). Though none of the people of God in this life have the Spirit in perfection, yet every one of them have so much of the Spirit as will bring him to salvation. Every Christian hath so much of the Spirit as will bring Christ and his soul together; and therefore, without all peradventure every Christian hath so much of the Spirit as will at last bring heaven and his soul together.

[2] Secondly, they are all led by the Spirit. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14). Every child of God hath a twofold guide: the Word without and the Spirit within (Isa 30:20–21). How the Spirit leads by the rule of the Word, and how He leads to God, and leads to Christ, and leads to truth, and leads to righteousness, and leads to holiness, and leads to happiness, I shall not now undertake to show (Prov 6:22; Eph 5:9).

[3] Thirdly, they are all upheld and strengthened by the Spirit. "Uphold me with thy free spirit" (Ps 51:12), or underprop me or sustain me, as the Hebrew hath it, with Thy free, voluntary Spirit, or, as the Greek turns it, with Thy noble, princely Spirit. "To be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16). By "the inner man," some understand the regenerate part of man; others by "the inner man," do understand the soul with all its noble faculties and motions. Take the words which way you will, it is certain that all the spiritual might and strength that a Christian hath, he hath it from the Holy Spirit. Though the Spirit strengthens every Christian in the inner man, yet I do not say that the Spirit strengthens every Christian alike in the inward man. Some have stronger corruptions to subdue than others, and more violent temptations to withstand than others, and

greater difficulties to wrestle with than others, and choicer mercies to improve than others, and higher and harder duties of religion to manage than others, and accordingly they are more strengthened in the inner man than others.

[4] Fourthly, they are all partakers of the first fruits of the Spirit. "Ourselves…have the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23), which are but as a handful of corn in respect of the whole crop. All the grace and all the holiness which we have from the regenerating Spirit at first conversion is but a drop to that sea, a mite to those talents, which we shall receive in the life to come (2 Cor 1:22).

[5] Fifthly, they are all taught by the Spirit. "The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things" (John 14:26; Isa 59:21).

This promise primarily belongs to the apostles; secondarily to all believers.

Though these words were spoken at first to the apostles only, yet they were not spoken of the apostles only (Isa 54:13). In these words, there are three things promised to the apostles:

First, immediate illumination by the Spirit of God.

Secondly, a full knowledge of all those truths belonging to their apostolical office and that were necessary for them at that juncture of time.

Thirdly, absolute infallibility as to matter of doctrine.

There are also three things promised to all believers:

First, mediate illumination, teaching truths by the Spirit of truth in the use of the means of grace.

Secondly, knowledge of all truth necessary to salvation.

Thirdly, infallibility too, so far forth as they adhere and keep close to the Spirit's teaching in the Word.

Philo saith that the primitive Christians were called tillers, because, as husbandmen till their fields and manure their grounds, so did they teach their families and nurture their children and servants with good instructions. Oh, what choice teachings of the Spirit were these primitive Christians under, who made it so much their business, their work, to teach those that were under their charge (1 Thess 4:9; 2 Cor 3:8). "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth" (1 John 2:27). Not that we know all things simply, or that we need not a ministry to teach and instruct us, but He speaks comparatively: you shall not be so helped by any instructions without the Spirit, as with the Spirit. The Spirit shall declare the truth as it is in Jesus more clearly, more freely, more particularly, more certainly, more universally, more effectually, than any other is able to do. The Spirit, this holy unction, shall teach the saints all things; not all things knowable, for that is impossible for finite creatures to attain unto. Who knows the motions of the heavens, the influences of the stars, the nature of the creatures, or how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child? Who knows the reason why the river Nile should overflow in the summer when waters are at the lowest? Or why the loadstone should draw iron to it or incline to the pole star?

Pliny tells us of one that spent eight and fifty years in learning out the nature of the bee, and yet had not fully attained to it. How is it possible, then, for the wisest naturalist to enter into the deep things of God?

Paul, that learned his divinity among the angels, and that had the Holy Ghost for his immediate teacher, tells us plainly that he knew but in part (1 Cor 13:9–11); and oh, then, how

little a part of that part do we know! But the Spirit teacheth the saints all things; that is,

First, He teacheth them all things needful for the salvation of their souls, all things necessary to bring them to heaven (John 17:3).

Secondly, all things needful to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3).

Thirdly, all things needful to their places, callings, sexes, ages, and conditions.

Fourthly, all things needful for you to know to preserve you in the truth, and to preserve you from being deluded and seduced by those false teachers of whom He speaks (1 John 2:10, 19, 22–23, 26). And certainly this is the main thing that John hints at in that expression. The "all things" spoken of in verse 27, according to the ordinary Scripture style, must necessarily be interpreted only of all those things which are there spoken of.

[6] Sixthly, they are all comforted by the Spirit. "Walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost… For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost…And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:31; Rom 14:17; 1 Thess 1:6). Not that all Christians have always actual comfort, actual joy. Oh no! For as the air is sometimes clear and sometimes cloudy, and as the sea is sometimes ebbing and sometimes flowing, so the comforts and joys of the people of God are sometimes ebbing and sometimes flowing, sometimes clear and sometimes cloudy.

Hudson the martyr, being deserted at the stake, went from under his chain, and having prayed earnestly, was comforted immediately and suffered valiantly.

So Mr. Glover the martyr was deserted in prison, but as he was going to the stake he looked back and cried out to his friend, "He is come, He is come," meaning the Comforter, and so he laid down his life with joy.

Rachel wept and would not be comforted. She gave so much way to weeping that she would not give the least way to comfort; and so it is many times with the choicest saints. "My soul refused to be comforted" (Ps 77:2). It is not my purpose at present to insist on the several ways whereby the people of God refuse comfort and fall short of those strong consolations which God is willing that they should receive. The sun may operate where it doth not shine, and a man may be in a state of salvation and yet want consolation. A man may fear the Lord and obey the voice of His servant and yet walk in darkness and see no light (Isa 50:10). There is no Christian but may sometimes have trouble in his conscience, grief in his heart, tears in his eyes, and fears and questionings in his soul, whether God be his Father, and whether Christ be his redeemer, and whether mercy belongs to him, yea, whether any promise in the book of God belongs to him.

Joy and comfort are those dainties, those sweetmeats of heaven, that God doth not every day feast His people with (Ps 30:6–7). Every day is not a wedding day, every day is not a harvest day, and every day is not a summer's day. The fatted calf is not killed every day, nor the robe and the ring every day put on. Every day is not a festival day nor a dancing day (Luke 15:22–23; Eccl 3:4; Rom 12:15). As there is a time to sing, so there is a time to sigh. As there is a time to laugh, so there is a time to weep. And as there is a time to dance, so there is a time to mourn. All tears will never be clear wiped from our eyes until all sin be quite taken out of our hearts.

But notwithstanding all this, yet gracious souls have always sure and choice grounds of consolation. They have the promises. They have the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23). They have union with Christ. And they have right to eternal life, though they have not always sensible comforts. The children of God have always cause to exercise faith and hope on God in their darkest condition, though they have not always actual joy and consolation (Job 13:15; Ps 42:5). The Comforter always abides with the saints, though He doth not always actually comfort the saints (John 14:16). The Spirit many times carries on His sanctifying work in the soul when He doth not carry on His comforting work in the soul. The Spirit many times acts in a way of humiliation when He doth not act in a way of consolation. The Spirit many times fills the soul with godly sorrow when He doth not fill the soul with holy joy. The actings of the Spirit, as to His comforting work, are all of His own sovereign will and pleasure; and therefore, He may abide in the soul when He doth not actually comfort the soul.

[7] Seventhly, the people of God, first or last, are sealed by the Spirit. "In whom…after…ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13). The nature of sealing consists in the imparting of the image or character of the seal to the thing sealed. To seal a thing is to stamp the character of the seal on it. Now, the Spirit of God doth really and effectually communicate the image of God to us, which image consists in righteousness and true holiness. Then are we truly sealed by the Spirit of God when the Holy Ghost stamps the image of grace and holiness so obviously, so evidently, upon the soul as that the soul sees it, feels it, and can run and read it; then the soul is sealed by the Holy Spirit.

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30). The person of the Holy Ghost is here set forth in the Greek with a very great energy, such as our tongue is not able fully to express. Here are three words that have three articles, every word his several article by itself, τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, τοῦ θεοῦ: "*The* Spirit," not "*a* Spirit." And not "holy," but "*the* holy." Nor "of God," but "of *that* God." "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor 1:22).

In these scriptures, you see that the Spirit is a seal. Now, a seal among men is,

First, for secrecy.

Secondly, for distinction.

Thirdly, for authority.

Fourthly, for certainty. A writing sealed is authentic, and for ensuring.

In the three texts last cited, if you compare them together, you may observe these six things:

First, the person sealing, and that is the *Father*.

Secondly, in whom, in *Christ*.

Thirdly, with what seal, the *Spirit of promise*. There are all the persons in the Trinity making us sure of our inheritance.

Fourthly, when, *after ye believed*.

Fifthly, the end, which is twofold:

(1) *Subordinate*, and that is the certainty of our salvation;

(2) *Ultimate*, and that is the praise of His glory.

Sixthly, the time, how long this seal and earnest shall assure us, and that is, until we have the complete possession of what it is an earnest.

To prevent mistakes and disputes about the sealings of the Spirit on the one hand, and to support, comfort, and

encourage the poor people of God on the other hand, let me briefly hint at the Spirit's *special* sealing times.

[1] First, *conversion times* are often the Spirit's sealing times. Upon the prodigal's return, the fatted calf is killed, and the best robe is put upon his back, and the ring is put upon his hand, and shoes on his feet (Luke 15:22–23). Some by the robe understand the royalty of Adam, others, the righteousness of Christ. And by the ring, some understand the pledges of God's love, rings being given as pledges of love; and by the ring others understand the seal of God's Holy Spirit, men using the seal with their rings. Among the Romans the ring was an ensign of virtue, honor, and nobility, whereby they that wore them were distinguished from the common people. I think the main thing intended by the robe and the ring is to show us that God sometimes, upon the sinner's conversion and returning to Him, is graciously pleased to give him some choice manifestations of His gracious pleasure and goodwill, and to seal up to him His everlasting love and favor. And hence it comes to pass that some that are but babes in Christ (1 Pet 2:2–3; 1 John 2:12–14) are so diligent and active in religious duties, and so conscientious and dexterous in the exercise of their graces. At first conversion, God helps some of His people to read their own names written in legible letters in the Book of Life (Acts 9:3–6). No sooner are some converted but the Spirit stamps His seal upon them.

[2] Secondly, *believing times* are sealing times (Eph 1:13). When they were in the very exercise of their faith, when they were acting of their faith—for so much the original imports—the Spirit came and sealed them up to the day of redemption (Rom 15:13; 1 Pet 1:8). He that honors Christ by frequent actings of faith on Him, him will Christ honor by setting His seal and mark upon him.

[3] Thirdly, *humbling times*, mourning times, are sealing times. When a holy man was asked which were the joyfullest days, the most comfortable days, that ever he enjoyed, he answered, his mourning days. His mourning days were his joyfullest days, and therefore, he cried out, "Oh, give me my mourning days, give me my mourning days; for they were my joyfullest days." Those were days wherein God sealed up His everlasting love to his soul (Job 22:29; Isa 29:19). When the prodigal had greatly humbled himself before his father, then the best robe and ring were put upon him (Luke 15:17–24). There are none that long for the sealings of the Spirit like humble souls; nor do any set so high a price upon the sealings of the Spirit as humble souls; nor do any make so choice an improvement of the sealings of the Spirit, as humble souls. And therefore, when men's hearts are humble and low, the Spirit comes and sets the privy seal of heaven upon them.

[4] Fourthly, *sin-killing, sin-mortifying, sin-subduing times*, are the Spirit's sealing times. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, that no man knows saving he that receiveth it" (Rev 2:17).

God will give to the victorious Christian a secret love-token whereby his soul may rest assured of the unspeakable love of God and of its freedom from condemnation. White stones were of very great use among the Romans and among the Athenians, and served to acquit the accused in courts of justice. When malefactors were accused, arraigned, and condemned in their courts, they gave them a black stone in token of condemnation; but when they were acquitted, they gave them white stones in token of absolution. The Holy Ghost seems to allude to this practice. He that is victorious over his lusts shall have a new name that is better than the names of

sons and daughters (Isa 56:5); and he shall have the pardon of his sins writ in fair letters upon the white stone, so that he may run and read his absolution. The victorious Christian shall have assurance of the full discharge of all his sins. He shall have clear evidence of his justification and blessed assurance of his eternal election, all which are hidden and mysterious things to all but those that have experienced and tasted what these sweetmeats of heaven mean (1 John 1:7).

Among the Romans there were solemn feasts held in honor of those that were victorious in their sacred games. Now those that were to be admitted to those feasts were wont to have their names written on white shells and white stones, and by these tickets they were admitted. Now some think the Holy Ghost alludes to this practice and so would hint to us a privy mark whereby victorious Christians may be known and admitted as bidden guests to the heavenly banquet of the hidden manna, according to Revelation 19:9. O sirs! When predominate lusts are brought under, when bosom sins lie slain in the soul, then the Spirit comes and seals up love, and life, and glory to the soul.

[5] Fifthly, *suffering times* are sealing times (Acts 7:55–56, 59–60; Rev 1:9–10; 2 Cor 4:15–17). The primitive Christians found them so, and the suffering saints in the Marian days found them so.

When the furnace is seven times hotter than ordinary, the Spirit of the Lord comes and seals up a man's pardon in his bosom, and his peace with God, and his title to heaven. When the world frowns most, then God smiles most. When the world puts their iron chains upon the saints' legs, then God puts His golden chains about the saints' necks. When the world puts a bitter cup into one hand, then the Lord puts a cup of consolation into the other hand. When the world

cries out, "Crucify them, crucify them!" then commonly they hear that sweet voice from heaven, "These are my beloved ones in whom I am well pleased."

Blessed Bradford looked upon his sufferings as an evidence to him that he was in the right way to heaven. And saith Ignatius, "It is better for me to be a martyr than to be a monarch."

[6] Sixthly, *self-denying times* are the Spirit's sealing times (Matt 19:27–29).

First, there is sinful self, which takes in a man's lusts.

Secondly, there is natural self, which takes in a man's arts, parts, gifts, with reason.

Thirdly, there is religious self, which takes in all a man's religious duties and services, whether ordinary or extraordinary.

Fourthly, there is moral self, which includes a freedom from gross, heinous, enormous wickednesses, and a fair, sweet, harmless behavior towards men.

Fifthly, there is relative self, which takes in our nearest and dearest relations in the flesh; as wife, children, father, mother, brothers, sisters, etc. (Ps 45:7–11).

Now when a man comes thus universally to deny himself for Christ's sake, and the gospel's sake, and religion's sake, then the Spirit of the Lord comes and seals him up unto the day of redemption. This is a truth confirmed by the experiences of many martyrs now in heaven, and by the testimony of many Christians still alive.

[7] Seventhly, *sacrament times* are sealing times. In that "feast of fat things" (Isa 25:6), God by His Spirit seals up His love to His people, and His covenant to His people, and pardon of sin to His people, and heaven and happiness to His people. There are many precious souls that have found

Christ in this ordinance, and when they could not find Him in other ordinances, though they have sought Him sorrowingly. In this ordinance, many a distressed soul hath been strengthened, comforted, and sealed.

I might give you many instances. Take one for all. There was a gracious woman, who, after God had filled her soul with comfort, and sealed up His everlasting love to her, fell under former fears and trouble of spirit, and being at the Lord's supper, a little before the bread was administered to her, Satan seemed to appear to her and told her that she should not presume to eat. But at that very nick of time, the Lord was pleased to bring into her mind that passage in the Canticles, "Eat, O friends" (Song 5:1). But notwithstanding this, Satan still continued terrifying of her, and when she had eaten, he told her that she should not drink. But then the Lord brought that second clause of the verse to her remembrance: "Drink, yea, drink abundantly" (or, "be drunk," as the Hebrew hath it), "O beloved" (or, "my loves," as the Hebrew hath it—all faithful souls are Christ's loves). And so she drank also and presently was filled with such unspeakable joys that she hardly knew how she got home, which soul-ravishing joys continued for a fortnight after and filled her mouth with songs of praise, so that she could neither sleep nor eat more than she forced herself to do out of conscience of duty. At the fortnight's end, when God was pleased to abate her measure of joy, she came to a settled peace of conscience and assurance of the love of God; so that for twenty years after she had not so much as a cloud upon her spirit or the least questioning of her interest in Christ.

[8] Eighthly, when God calls His people to some *great and noble work*, when He puts them upon some high services, some difficult duties, some holy and eminent employments,

then His Spirit comes and sets His seal upon them. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee to be a prophet unto the nations" (Jer 1:5). The Lord sending the prophet Jeremiah to denounce most dreadful judgments against a rebellious people, an impudent brazen-faced nation, He assures him of his eternal election, and of His choice presence, and singular assistance in that work that He set him about (vv. 8, 17-19). Thus the Lord dealt with Peter, James, and John (Matt 17:1–6), and thus He dealt with Paul (Acts 9:1–23).

[9] Ninthly, when they are taken up into *more than ordinary communion with God*, then is the Spirit's sealing time. When was it that the spouse cried out, "My beloved is mine, and I am his!" but when Christ brought her to His banqueting house, and His banner over her was love? (Compare Song 2:16, 3–6, etc.)

[10] Tenthly and lastly, when Christians give themselves up to *private prayer*, when Christians are more than ordinarily exercised in secret prayer, in closet duties, then the Spirit comes and seals up the covenant and the love of the Father to them. When Daniel had been wrestling and weeping, and weeping and wrestling all day long with God in his closet, then the angel tells him that he was a man "greatly beloved" of God, or a man of great desires, as the original hath it (Dan 9:20–23). There was a gracious woman who, after much frequenting of sermons and walking in the ways of the Lord, fell into great desertions; but being in secret prayer God came in with abundance of light and comfort, sealing up to her soul that part of His covenant: "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them:

and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezek 11:19–20).

And thus, I have given you a brief account of the Spirit's special sealing times. Now mark, God sets this seal upon all His wares, upon all His adopted children; for sooner or later there are none of His but are sealed with this seal. God sets His seal of regeneration, He stamps His image of holiness upon all His people to difference and distinguish them from all profane, moral, and hypocritical persons in the world (John 3:3; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 12:14). Doubtless the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost, imprinting the draughts and lineaments of God's image of righteousness and holiness upon man, as a seal or signet doth leave an impression and stamp of its likeness upon the thing sealed, is the seal of the Spirit spoken of in Scripture. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim 2:19).

But to prevent mistakes, you must remember that though the Spirit of the Lord, first or last, will set His seal upon every real saint, yet the impression of that seal is not alike visible in all; for some bear this impression as babes, others as men grown up to some maturity. All God's adopted children bear this impression truly, but none of them bear it perfectly in this life. Sometimes this seal of regeneration, this seal of holiness, is so plain and obvious that a man may run and read it in himself and others. And at other times it is so obscure and dark that he can hardly discern it, either in himself or others. This seal is so lively stamped on some of God's people that it discovers itself very visibly, eminently, gloriously; but on others it is not alike visible. And thus I have made it

evident by these seven particulars that all the children of God have the Spirit of God.

Now mark, the Spirit of God that is in all the saints is a Spirit of prayer and supplication. "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). While the child is in the womb, it cannot cry; but as soon as it is born, it cries. Whilst Paul did lie in the womb of his natural estate, he could not pray; but no sooner was he born of the Spirit, but the next news is, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). Prayer is nothing but the turning of a man's inside outward before the Lord. The very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of a man's soul into the bosom of God. Prayer is nothing but the breathing that out before the Lord that was first breathed into us by the Spirit of the Lord. Prayer is nothing but a choice, a free, a sweet, and familiar intercourse of the soul with God. Certainly, it is a great work of the Spirit to help the saints to pray.

"Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6). God hath no still-born children. The gemination, "Abba, Father," notes fiducial, filial, and vehement affection. The first is an Hebrew or Syriac word, the second a Greek, whereby is signified the union of the Hebrews and Grecians, or the Jews and Gentiles, in one church. "Abba, Father." What is *Abba*? Say others in Hebrew, Father; and it is added, because in Christ the cornerstone both peoples are joined, alike becoming sons, whencesoever they come: circumcision from one place, whereupon *Abba*; uncircumcision from another, whereupon *Father* is named. The concord of the walls is the glory of the cornerstone.

The word *Abba*, say others, signifies father in the Syriac tongue, which the apostle here retaineth because it is a word

full of affection, which young children retain almost in all languages when they begin to speak. And he adds the word *Father*, not only to expound the same, but also the better to express the eager movings and the earnest and vehement desires and singular affections of believers in their crying unto God, even as Christ Himself redoubled the word *Father* to the same purpose when He was in His greatest distress (Mark 14:36). This little word *Father*, saith Luther, lisped forth in prayer by a child of God exceeds the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and all other so famed orators in the world.

It is certain that the Spirit of God helps the saints in all their communions with God, in their meditations of God, in their reading and hearing of the Word of God, in the communions one with another, and in all their solemn addresses to God. And as to this the apostle gives us a most special instance in Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

When we are to pray, there is in us sometimes an infirmity of ignorance, so that we know not what to pray for, either in regard of the matter or the manner. And there is in us at other times an infirmity of pride and conceitedness, so that we cannot pray with that humility and lowliness of spirit as we should, spiritual pride having fly-blown our prayers. Sometimes there is in us an infirmity of deadness, dullness, drowsiness, etc., so that we cannot pray with that warmth, heat, life, spirit, and fervency as we should or as we would. And at other times there is in us an infirmity of unbelief and slavish fears, so that we cannot pray with that faith and holy boldness as becomes children that draw near to a throne of grace and mercy. But now the Spirit helps these infirmities

by way of instruction, prompting and teaching us what to pray for, and how we should spell our lesson. By telling us as it were within, what we should say and how we should sigh and groan; and by rousing and quickening and stirring of us up to prayer; and by His singular influence and choice assistance opening and enlarging our hearts in prayer; and by His tuning the strings of our affections, He prepares us and fits us for the work of supplication. And therefore, every one that derides the spirit of prayer in the saints, saying, "These are the men and the women that pray by the Spirit!" blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it being a main work of the Spirit to teach the saints to pray and to help them in prayer. Now, all the saints having the Spirit, and the Spirit being a Spirit of prayer and supplication, there is no reason in the world why a saint should say, "I would pray in secret, but I cannot pray, I cannot pour out my soul nor my complaint before the Lord in a corner."

6. Thou Canst Manage Thy Worldly Business as Well as Others

Sixthly and lastly, thou sayest thou canst not pray; thou hast not the gifts and parts which others have. But thou canst manage thy callings, thy worldly business, as well as others; and why then canst thou not pray as well as others? Ah, friends! Did you but love private prayer as well as you love the world, and delight in private prayer as much as you delight in the world, and were your hearts as much set upon closet prayer as they are set upon the world, you would never say you could not pray, yea, you would as quickly pray as well as others. It is not so much from want of ability to pray in secret that you don't pray in secret, as it is from want of a will, a heart, to pray in secret, that you don't pray in secret.

Jacob's love to Rachel, and Shechem's love to Dinah, carried them through the greatest difficulties (Gen 29; 34). Were men's affections but strongly set upon private prayer, they would quickly find abilities to pray. He that sets his affections upon a virgin, though he be not learned nor eloquent, will find words enough to let her know how his heart is taken with her. The application is easy. He in Seneca complained of a thorn in his foot when his lungs were rotten. So many complain of want of ability to pray in their closets when their hearts are rotten. Sirs! Do but get better hearts, and then you will never say you can't pray. It is one of the saddest sights in all the world to see men strongly parted and gifted for all worldly businesses crying out that they can't pray, that they have no ability to pour out their souls before the Lord in secret. You have sufficient parts and gifts to tell men of your sins, your wants, your dangers, your difficulties, your mercies, your deliverances, your duties, your crosses, your losses, your enjoyments, your friends, your foes. And why then are you not ashamed to complain of your want of parts and gifts to tell those very things to God in a corner, which you can tell to men even upon the housetops?

Objection 4: God Is Well Acquainted with All Our Wants

Fourthly, some may further object and say, God is very well acquainted with all our wants, necessities, straits, trials; and there is no moving of Him to bestow any favors upon us which He doth not intend to bestow upon us, whether we pray in our closets or no; and therefore, to what purpose do you press secret prayer so hard upon us?

To this objection I shall give these answers:

1. This Objection Lies as Strong Against Family and Public Prayer

First, that this objection lies as strong against family prayer and public prayer as it doth against private prayer. God knows all thy wants and necessities, all thy straits and trials; and therefore, what needest thou pray in thy family, what needest thou attend public prayers in the communion of saints? There is no wringing of any mercy out of the hands of heaven which God doth not intend to bestow. This objection faces all kind of prayer and fights against all kinds of prayer.

2. Private Prayer Is Part of That Homage We Owe to God

Secondly, I answer that private prayer is that piece of divine worship and adoration; it is a part of that homage which we owe to God upon the account of a divine command, as I have already proved. Now, all objections must bow before the face of divine commands; as Joseph's brethren bowed before him (Gen 42:6); or as king Ahasuerus' servants bowed before Haman (Esth 3:2). Indeed, every objection that is formed up against a divine command should fall before it, as Dagon fell before the ark, or as Goliath fell before David. He that casts off private prayer under any pretense whatsoever, he casts off the dominion of God, the authority of God, and this may be as much as a man's life and soul is worth.

3. Prayer Is the Silver Channel, the Golden Pipe of Mercy

Thirdly, I answer, Though prayer be not the ground, the cause of obtaining favors and mercies from God, yet it is the means, it is the silver channel, it is the golden pipe, through which the Lord is pleased to convey to His people all temporal,

spiritual, and eternal favors (Ezek 36:26–37). God promises to give them the cream, the choicest, the sweetest of all spiritual, eternal, and temporal blessings. But mark verse 37: "I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." Though God be very prompt and ready to bestow upon His people the best and the greatest of blessings, yet He will by prayer be sought unto for the actual enjoyment of them. He that hath no heart to pray for a mercy he needs, he hath no ground to believe that ever God will give him the mercy he needs. There is no receiving without asking, no finding without seeking, no opening without knocking. The threefold promise annexed to the threefold precept in Matthew 7:7 should encourage all Christians to be instant, fervent, and constant in prayer. The proud beggar gets nothing of men, and the dumb sinner gets nothing of God. As there is no mercy too great for God to give, so there is no mercy too little for us to crave. Certainly that man hath little worth in him that thinks any mercy not worth seeking.

4. Labor to Have Thy Blessings Blessed unto Thee

Fourthly and lastly, I answer, every Christian should labor to enjoy his mercies in mercy. He should labor to have his blessings blessed unto him; he should labor to have "the good will of him that dwelt in the bush" with all he hath (Deut 33:16; Gen 22:17). Now this is an everlasting truth, a maxim to live and die with, that whatsoever mercy comes not in upon the wing of prayer is not given in mercy. Oh, how sweet is that mercy that comes flying in upon the wing of prayer! How sweet was that water to Samson which streamed to him in the channel of private prayer (Judg 15:19); he called the name of it En-hakkore, the well of him that prayed. Samson prayed as for life, and that water that was handed to him was

as sweet as life. Every mercy that is gathered by the hand of prayer is as sweet as the rose of Sharon (Song 2:1). But that mercy that comes not in at the door of prayer comes not in at the right door; and that mercy that comes not in at the right door will do a man no good. Such mercies will make themselves wings and fly from us (Prov 23:5).

Every Christian should narrowly look that all his mercies are sanctified mercies. Now, every mercy is sanctified by the Word and prayer (1 Tim 4:4–5). Prayer prepares and fits us for mercy, and mercy for us. It is prayer that gives us a right and holy use of all our mercies. Such mercies are but great miseries that come not in upon the wing of prayer. Prayerless men's mercies are all given in wrath; yea, their blessings are cursed unto them (Prov 3:33; Mal 2:2). Look, as every sacrifice was to be seasoned with salt, so every mercy is to be sanctified by prayer. Look, as gold sometimes is laid not only upon cloth and silks, but also upon silver itself, so prayer is that golden duty that must be laid not only upon all our natural and civil actions, as eating, drinking, buying, selling, etc., but also upon all our silver duties, upon all our most religious and spiritual performances, as hearing, reading, meditating, conference, church fellowship, breaking of bread, etc.

Certainly, prayer is very necessary to make every providence, and every ordinance, and every mercy to be a blessing to us. Every mercy that comes in upon the wing of private prayer is a double mercy. It is a great-bellied mercy; it is a mercy that hath many mercies in the womb of it. Happy is that Christian that can lay his hand upon every mercy that he enjoys and say of them all as once Hannah said of her Samuel, "For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him" (1 Sam 1:27).

Objection 5: I Want a Convenient Place to Retire Into

Fifthly, some may further object and say, I would drive a private trade with God, I would exercise myself in secret prayer, but I want a convenient place to retire into. I want a private corner to unbosom my soul to my Father in.

To this objection, I shall give these three short answers:

1. This Objection Concerns but a Few Christians in Our Days

First, I suppose this objection concerns but a few Christians in our days. That God that hath given a Christ to believers doth commonly give them a convenient corner to enjoy private communion with Himself in (Rom 8:32). Most Christians, I am afraid, do rather want a heart for private prayer than a convenient place for private prayer. What men set their hearts upon, they will find time and place to effect it, whether it be good or whether it be evil, whether it concerns temporals or spirituals, whether it concerns this world or another world, this life or a better life. If most men would but get better hearts, they would quickly find or make convenient places for private prayer. He who hath an inflamed love to God will certainly find out a corner to enjoy secret communion with God. True lovers will find out corners to enjoy one another in. How many men are there that can easily find out private places for their dogs to lie in, and their swine to sleep in, and their horses to stand in, and their oxen to feed in, who cannot find out a private place to seek the face of God in! But did these men but love their God, or their souls, or private prayer, or eternity, as well or better than their beasts, they

would not be such brutes but that they would quickly find out a hole, a corner, to wait upon the Lord in.

2. Peter on the House-Top, Isaac in the Field, Christ on the Mountain

Secondly, I answer, If a Christian be on the top of a house with Peter, he may pray there; or if he be walking in the field with Isaac, he may pray there; or if he be on the mountain with Christ, he may pray there; or if he be behind the door with Paul, he may pray there; or if he be waiting at table with Nehemiah, he may secretly pray there; or if he be in a wood, he may pray there, as the primitive Christians in times of persecution did; or if he be behind a tree, he may pray there; or if he be by the seaside, he may pray there, as the apostles did. It was a choice saying of Augustine, "Every saint is God's temple," saith he, "and he that carries his temple about him, may go to prayer when he pleaseth." Some saints have never had so much of heaven brought down into their hearts as when they have been with God in a corner. Oh, the secret manifestations of divine love, the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret influences, the secret communion with God, that many a precious Christian hath had in the most solitary places. It may be behind the door, or behind the wall, or behind the hedge, or behind the arbor, or behind the tree, or behind the rock, or behind the bush.

3. Thou Once Found Secret Corners Enough to Sin In

Thirdly, and lastly, didst thou never in thy unregenerate estate make use of all thy wits, and parts, and utmost endeavors, to find out convenient seasons, and secret corners, and solitary places to sin in, and to dishonor thy God in, and to undo thine own and others' souls in? Yes! I remember with

shame and blushing that it was so with me when I was dead in trespasses and sins and walked according to the course of this world (Eph 2:1–3). Oh, how much then doth it concern thee in thy renewed, sanctified, and raised estate to make use of all thy wits, and parts, and utmost endeavors to find out the fittest seasons, and the most secret corners, and solitary places thou canst to honor thy God in, and to seek the welfare of thine own and others' souls in! Oh, that men were but as serious, studious, and industrious to find out convenient seasons, secret places, to please and serve and glorify the Lord in as they have been serious, studious, and industrious to find out convenient seasons and secret places to displease and grieve the Spirit of the Lord in.

Objection 6: Our Infirmities and Weaknesses Shut Us Up

Sixthly, and lastly, others may further object and say, We would be often in private with God, we would give ourselves up to closet prayer, but that we can no sooner shut our closet doors, but a multitude of infirmities, weaknesses, and vanities do face us and rise up against us. Our hearts are full of distempers and follies; and our bodies, say some, are under great indispositions; and our souls, say others, are under present indispositions; and how then can we seek the face of God in a corner? How can we wrestle with God in our closets?

Now, to this objection I shall give these six answers.

1. By This Reasoning, Where Lives the Man or Woman That Could Pray?

If these kinds of reasonings or arguings were sufficient to shut private prayer out of doors, where lives that man or

woman, that husband or wife, that father or child, that master or servant, that would ever be found in the practice of that duty? Where is there a person under heaven whose heart is not full of infirmities, weaknesses, follies, and vanities, and whose body and soul is not too often indisposed to closet duties? "If they sin against thee, (for there is no man that sinneth not)" (1 Kgs 8:46). "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl 7:20). "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" (Prov 20:9). "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4). "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me" (Job 9:30–31). "If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse" (Job 9:20). "And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps 143:2). "For in many things we offend all" (Jas 3:2). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Such that affirm that men may be fully perfect in this life, or without sin in this life, they do affirm that which is expressly contrary to the Scriptures last cited, and to the universal experience of all saints, who daily feel and lament over that body of sin and death that they bear about with them. Yea, they do affirm that which is quite contrary to the very state or constitution of all the saints in this life. In every saint "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal 5:17). In every good man there are two men, the old man and the new. The one must be daily put on, and the other daily put off (Eph 4:22–

24). All saints have a law in their members rebelling against the law of their minds, so that the good that they would do, they do not; and the evil that they would not do, that they do (Rom 7:23, 25). They have two contrary principles in them, from whence proceed two manner of actions, motions, and inclinations, continually opposite one to another. Hence it is that there is a continual combat in them, like the struggling of the twins in Rebekah's womb.

An absolute perfection is peculiar to the triumphant state of God's elect in heaven. Heaven is the only privileged place where no unclean thing can enter in (Rev 21:27); that is the only place where neither sin nor Satan shall ever get footing. Such as dream of an absolute perfection in this life do confound and jumble heaven and earth together—the state of the church militant with the state of the church triumphant, which are certainly distinct both in time and place, and in order, measure, and concomitants (Heb 12:22–23).

This dangerous opinion of absolute perfection in this life shakes the very foundation of religion and overthrows the gospel of grace. It renders the satisfaction of Christ and all His great transactions null and void. It tells the world that there is no need of faith, of repentance, of ordinances, of watchfulness. They that say they have no sin say they have no need of the blood of Christ to cleanse them from sin (1 John 1:7). Such as say they have no sin say they have no need of faith to rest upon Christ for imputed righteousness to justify their persons. Such as say they have no sin say they have no need of Christ as king to subdue their lusts; nor a priest to expiate offences; nor as prophet, to teach and instruct them; nor as a Savior, to save them from their sins or from wrath to come (Matt 1:21; 1 Thess 1:10). They that have a perfect righteousness of their own need not be beholden

to Christ for His pure, perfect, spotless, matchless righteousness. Such as are without sin have no cause to repent of sin nor yet to watch against sin. Such as are perfect cannot say, We are unprofitable servants. But are they indeed just? Then they must live by faith (Hab 2:4). Are they men, and not angels? Then they must repent. "But now he commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). Surely the best of men are but men at the best. Oh, how bad those men must be who make God Himself a liar (1 John 1:10). But if these men are absolutely perfect, how comes it to pass that they are afflicted and diseased as other men? How comes it to pass that they eat, and drink, and sleep, and buy, and sell, and die as other men? Are these things consistent with an absolute perfection? Surely not. An absolute perfection is not a step short of heaven; it is heaven on this side heaven; and they that would obtain it must step to heaven before they have it.

2. This Objection Lies Against All Other Kinds of Prayer

Secondly, I answer, that this objection lies as strong against family prayer and against all other kind of prayer as it doth against closet prayer. He that shall upon any grounds make this objection a great bugbear to scare his soul from closet prayer, he may upon the same ground make it a great bugbear to scare his soul not only from all other kind of prayer, but from all other duties of religion also, whether private or public. The spirit of this objection fights against all religion at once; and therefore, you should say to it, as Christ said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt 16:23).

3. Infirmities Seen, Lamented, and Resisted Cannot Obstruct Prayer

Thirdly, I answer, It is not the infirmities and weaknesses of a Christian that are seen, lamented, bewailed, and resisted that can obstruct or hinder the efficacy and success of his prayers. Let me clear up this in a few instances. Jonah, you know, was a man full of sinful passions, and other weaknesses, and yet his prayer was very prevalent with God (Jonah 2:1–2, 7, 10).

So Elias' prayers were exceeding prevalent with God. He could open and shut heaven at his pleasure, and yet "subject to like passions as we are" (Jas 5:17). Elias was a man of extraordinary sanctity and holiness, a man that lived in heaven whilst he dwelt on earth. Enoch-like, he walked with God, and yet "subject to like passions as we are" (1 Kgs 19:8; Rom 11:2–3). God did in an eminent way communicate to him His counsel and secrets. He lay in the bosom of the Father, and yet "was a man subject to like passions as we are." He was a very powerful and prevalent prophet. His very name imports as much; Elijah signifies "my strong God." In 1 Kings 17:1 it is *Eli-jahu*, that is, the Lord He is my strong God, and yet "subject to like passions as we are." He was a man much in fasting and prayer; he was an inferior mediator between God and His people, and yet "subject to like passions as we are."

Now because some from hence might object and say, "No wonder if such a man as he was could by his prayers open and shut heaven at his pleasure; but I am a poor, weak, low, sinful, and unworthy creature. I am full of infirmities, weaknesses, and passions. And shall my prayers ever find access to God and acceptance with God, or gracious answers and returns from God?" Now to obviate this objection and to remove this discouragement out of the thoughts and hearts of poor sinners, the Holy Ghost addeth this clause, that he was not

a god, nor an angel, but a man, and such a man as was not exempted from common infirmities, for he had his passions, frailties, and weaknesses as well as other saints, intimating to us that infirmities in the meanest saints should no more prejudice the acceptance and success of their prayers with God than they did in Elias himself.

The word *passion* sometimes signifies, first, a motion of the sensual appetite, arising from the imagination of good or ill, with some commotion of the body. Secondly, sometimes *passions* signify sinful infirmities, sinful perturbations of the mind. And thirdly, sometimes *passion* is taken more strictly for the especial affection of sinful anger and wrath, which Chrysostom calls *brevis daemon*, a short devil. It makes a man speak he knows not what, as you may see in Jonah; and to do he knows not what, as you may see in Saul. Now in these two last senses, Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and yet a man so potent with God that by private prayer he could do even what he listed in the court of heaven.

In 1 Samuel 21, you may read of David's round lies, and of his other failings, infirmities, and unseemly carriages before Achish, king of Gath, and for which he was turned out of the king's presence, under the notion of a madman. And yet at that very time he prays and prevails with God for favor, mercy, and deliverance. "I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Ps 34:4). But when was this? Read the title of the psalm, and you shall find it: "A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed."

In Numbers 20:10–12, Moses' infirmities are pointed out. First, you have there his immoderate anger. (2) His speaking to the people when he should have spoken to the rock (v. 8). (3) His smiting of it when he should only have spoken to it

with the rod in his hand, and smiting it twice as in a pang of passion and impatience. (4) His distrusting of the Lord's word (v. 12). (5) His reviling of the people when he should have convinced them: "Hear now, ye rebels" (v. 10). (6) He seems to be so offended at his commission that he can hardly forbear murmuring: "Must we fetch…water out of this rock?" (v. 10). Mark that word, "must we." Oh, how is the meekest man in all the world (Num 12:3) transported into passion, and anger, and unbelief, and hurried into sad indecencies! And yet there was not a man on earth whose prayers were so powerful and prevalent with God as Moses' were (Ps 106:23; Exod 32:9–15; 33:11–17; 14:13–16).

So king Asa was a man full of infirmities and weaknesses. He relies on the king of Syria and not on the Lord (2 Chr 16:7–13). He is very impatient and under a great rage upon the seer's reproof. He imprisons the seer. He oppressed some of the people; or, as the Hebrew hath it, "he crushed," or he trampled upon some of the people at the same time. And being greatly diseased in his feet, he sought to the physicians and not to the Lord. And yet this man's prayer was wonderful prevalent with God (2 Chr 14:11–15).

The saints' infirmities can never make void those gracious promises by which God stands engaged to hearken to the prayers of His people (Ps 50:15; Isa 30:19; 65:24). God's hearing of our prayers doth not depend upon sanctification, but upon Christ's intercession; not upon what we are in ourselves, but upon what we are in the Lord Jesus. Both our persons and our prayers are acceptable in the beloved (Eph 1:6; 1 Pet 2:5). When God hears our prayers, it is neither for our own sakes nor yet for our prayers' sake, but it is for His own sake, and His Son's sake, and His glory's sake, and His promise's sake.

Certainly, God will never cast off His people for their infirmities.

First, it is the glory of a man to pass by infirmities (Prov 19:11). Oh, how much more, then, must it be the glory of God to pass by the infirmities of His people!

Secondly, saints are children; and what father will cast off his children for their infirmities and weaknesses (Ps 103:13–14)?

Thirdly, saints are members of Christ's body (1 Cor 12:27); and what man will cut off a member because of a scab or wart that is upon it? "What man will cut off his nose," saith Luther, "because there is some filth in it?"

Fourthly, saints are Christ's purchase; they are His possession, His inheritance. Now what man is there that will cast away, or cast off his purchase, his possession, his inheritance, because of thorns, bushes, or briars that grow upon it?

Fifthly, saints are in a marriage covenant with God (Hos 2:19–20). Now what husband is there that will cast off his wife for her failings and infirmities? So long as a man is in covenant with God, his infirmities can't cut him off from God's mercy and grace. Now it is certain a man may have very many infirmities upon him, and yet not break his covenant with God; for no sin breaks a man's covenant with God but such as unties the marriage knot. As in other marriages, every offence or infirmity doth not disannul the marriage union; it is only the breach of the marriage vow, adultery, that unties the marriage knot. So here it is only those sins which break the covenant which untie the marriage knot between God and the soul: (1) When men freely subject to any lust as a new master, or, (2) When men take another husband. Men do this when they enter into a league with sin or the world, when they make a new covenant with

hell and death (Isa 28:15, 18). Now from these mischiefs God secures His chosen ones. In a word, if God should cast off His people for their infirmities, then none of the sons or daughters of Adam could be saved. "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl 7:20). Now if God will not cast off His people for their infirmities, then certainly He will not cast off the prayers of His people because of those invincible infirmities that hang upon them; and therefore, our infirmities should not discourage us, or take us off from closet prayer, or from any other duties of religion.

4. The More Infirmities Hang upon Us, the More Cause to Keep Close

Fourthly, I answer, The more infirmities and weaknesses hang upon us, the more cause have we to keep close and constant to our closet duties. If grace be weak, the omission of private prayer will make it weaker. Look, as he that will not eat will certainly grow weaker and weaker, so he that will not pray in his closet will certainly grow weaker and weaker. If corruptions be strong, the neglect of private prayer will make them stronger. The more the remedy is neglected, the more the disease is strengthened. Whatsoever the distempers of a man's heart be, they will never be abated, but augmented, by the omission of private prayer. The more bodily infirmities hang upon us, the more need we have of the physician. And so the more sinful infirmities hang upon our souls, the more need we have of private prayer. All sinful omissions will make work for repentance, for hell, or for the physician of souls. Sinful omissions lead to sinful commissions, as you may see in the angels that fell from heaven to hell, and in Adam's fall in paradise.

Origen, going to comfort and encourage a martyr that was to be tormented, was himself apprehended by the officers and constrained either to offer to the idols or to have his body abused by a blackamore that was ready for that purpose, of which hard choice, to save his life, he bowed unto the idol. But afterwards, making a sad confession of his foul fact, he said that he had gone forth that morning before he had been with God in his closet, and so peremptorily concludes that his neglect of prayer was the cause of his falling into that great sin.

The neglect of one day, of one duty, of one hour, would undo us forever if we had not "an advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1–2). Those years, those months, those weeks, those days, those hours that are not filled up with God, with Christ, with grace, with duty will certainly be filled up with vanity and folly. All omissions of duty will more and more unfit the soul for duty. A key thrown aside gathers rust; a pump not used will be hardly got to go; and armor not used will be hardly made bright. Look, as sinful commissions will stab the soul, so sinful omissions will starve the soul. Such as live in the neglect of private prayer may well cry out, "Our leanness, our leanness!" (Isa 24:16; Job 16:8). And therefore, away with all these pleas and reasonings about infirmities, and weaknesses, and indispositions, and address yourselves to closet prayer.

5. Thy Distemper Hinders Not Thy Buying, Selling, and Getting Gain

Fifthly, I answer, It may be thy distemper and indisposition of body is not so great but that thou canst buy, sell, and get gain. Notwithstanding thy aching head, and thy shooting back,

and thy pained sides, and thy feeble knees, yet thou canst, with Martha, cumber thyself about thy worldly affairs.

In Song of Solomon 5:2, Christ calls upon His spouse to open the door and let Him in. But sin and shifting coming into the world together, see how poorly and unworthily she labors to shift Christ off: "I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" (v. 3). Rather than she will make no excuse for herself, she will make a silly excuse, a worthless excuse. She was no longer a child, and what a great business had it been for her to have risen to have let in such a guest that brings everything with Him that heart can wish or need require (Rev 3:17–18)? She was not grown so decrepit with old age but that she was able to make herself ready. At least, she might easily have slipped on her morning coat and stepped to the door without any danger of taking cold, or of being wet to the skin, and so have let in Him Who never comes empty-handed (Rev 22:12)—yea, Who was now come full of the dew of divine blessings to enrich her, for so some sense those words, "My head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night" (Song 5:2). Oh, the frivolous pretenses and idle excuses that even gracious persons are apt sometimes to take up to overcolor their neglect of duty!

But some may say, It may be the spouse of Christ was asleep. Oh, no! For she saith, "I sleep, but my heart waketh" (v. 2). She slept with open eyes, as the lion doth. She slept but half-sleep. Though her outward man was drowsy, yet her inward man was wakeful. Though the flesh took a nap, yet her spirit did not nod.

Oh, but it may be Christ made no noise. He gave no notice that He was at the door. O yes! He knocked, He knocked and banged by the hammer of His Word and the hand of

His Spirit. He knocked by outward corrections and inward admonitions. He knocked by providences, and He knocked by mercies. His importunity and vehemence for admission was very great.

Oh, but it may be He did but only knock. He should have called as well as knocked; for none but madmen would open their doors in the night, except they knew the voice of Him that knocketh. Oh, yes! He did not only knock but called also.

Oh, but it may be she did not know His voice; and therefore, she would not open. No chaste wife will at unseasonable hours arise and open her doors unto a stranger, especially in her husband's absence. Oh, yes, she knew His voice: "It is the voice of my beloved that knocketh" (v. 2). She was not so fast asleep but that she knew the voice of her beloved from all other voices and could tell every tittle that He said. The calls of Christ were so strong, so loud, and His pulsations so mighty, that she could not but know and confess that it was the voice of her beloved, though she was not so respectful and dutiful as to obey that voice.

Oh, but it may be Christ knocked and called, like a friend in his journey, only to inquire how it was with her, or to speak to her at the window. Oh, no! He speaks plainly, He speaks with authority: "Open to me" (v. 2).

Oh, but it may be she had no power to open the door. Oh, yes, for when He commands His people to open He lends them a key to open the door that He may enter in (Phil 1:6, 13; 1 Cor 15:10). Infused grace is a living principle that will enable the soul to open to Christ. If a man be not a free agent to work and act by the helps of grace received, to what purpose are counsels, commands, exhortations, and directions given to perform this, and that, and the other work? And certainly, it is our greatest honor and happiness in this world

to cooperate with God in those things which concern His own glory and our own internal and eternal good.

Oh, but it may be Christ had given His spouse some distaste, or it may be He had let fall some hard words or some unkind speeches which made her a little froward and pettish. Oh, no! For He owns her as His beloved and courts her highly with the most winning and amicable terms of love: "My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled," or "my perfect one." He calls her so for her dovelike simplicity, purity, and integrity. All these endearing and honoring titles are the rhetoric of divine love and should have been as so many sacred engagements upon her to open to her beloved.

Oh, but it may be Christ was too quick for her; it may be He gave but a knock and a call and was gone before she could rise and open the door. O no! Christ stayed until His head was filled with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night, which most passionate expression notes the tender goodness, patience, and gentleness of our Lord Jesus, Who endures far greater and harder things for His spouse's sake than ever Jacob did for his Rachel's sake. After Christ had suffered much for her sake and waited her leisure a long while, she very unkindly, and very unmannerly, and unworthily turns her back upon all His sweet and comfortable compellations and blessed and bleeding embracements, and turns Him off to look [for] His lodging in some other place, so that He might well have said, Is this thy kindness to thy friend, thy husband, thy Lord, to suffer Him to stand bareheaded, and that in foul weather, yea, in the nighttime, wooing, entreating, and beseeching admittance; and yet to turn Him off as one in Whom thy soul could take no pleasure?

Now, if you will but seriously weigh all these circumstances in the balance of the sanctuary, you may run and read

the fault and folly, the weakness and madness, the slightness and laziness of the spouse. And by her you may make a judgment of those sad and sinful distempers that may seize upon the best of saints and see how ready the flesh is to frame excuses, and all to keep the soul off from duty and the doors fast bolted against the Lord Jesus.

It is sad when men are well enough to sit, chat, and trade in their shops, but are not well enough to pray in their closets. Certainly, that man's heart is not right with God, at least at this time, who, under all his bodily distempers, can maintain and keep up his public trade with men but is not well enough to maintain his private trade with heaven.

Our bodies are but dirt, handsomely tempered, and artificially formed; we derive our pedigree from the dirt and are akin to clay. One calls the body "the blot of nature"; another calls it "the soul's beast," "a sack of dung," "worms' meat"; another calls it "a prison," "a sepulchre"; and Paul calls it "a body of vileness." Now for a man to make so much ado about the distempers of his body to excuse the neglects of his soul is an evil made up of many evils. But really, sir, I am so ill, and my body is so distempered and indisposed that I am not able to mind or meddle with the least things of the world! Well! If this be so, then know that God hath on purpose knocked thee off from the things of this world that thou mayest look the more effectually after the things of another world. The design of God in all the distempers that are upon thy body is to wind thee more off from thy worldly trade and to work thee to follow thine heavenly trade more close. Many a man had never found the way to his closet if God by bodily distempers had not turned him out of his shop, his trade, his business, his all, etc.

Well, Christians, remember this once for all, if your indisposition to closet prayer doth really arise from bodily distempers then you may be confident that the Lord will pity you much, and bear with you much, and kindly accept of a little. You know how affectionately parents and ingenuous masters do carry it towards their children and servants when they are under bodily distempers and indisposition; and you may be confident that God will never carry it worse towards you than they do towards them. Ponder often upon Ezek 34:4, 16, 21–22.

6. A Distinction: Contracted and Involuntary Indisposition

Sixthly, and lastly, I shall answer this objection by way of distinction, thus:

First, there is a contracted indisposition to private prayer, and there is an involuntary indisposition to private prayer. There is a contracted indisposition, and that is when a man, by his willful sinning against light, knowledge, conviction, etc., contracts that guilt that lies as a load upon his conscience. Now guilt makes the soul shy of God; and the greater the guilt is, the more shy the soul is of drawing near to God in a corner. The child that is sensibly under guilt hides himself, as Adam did, in the day from his father's eye, and at night he slips to bed to avoid either a chiding or a whipping from his father (Gen 3:7–8). Guilt makes a man fly from God and fly from prayer. It is a hard thing to look God in the face when guilt stares a man in the face (Job 11:14–15). Guilt makes a man a terror to himself (Jer 20:3–4). Now when a man is a terror to himself, he is neither fit to live, nor fit to die, nor fit to pray. When poison gets into the body, it works upon the spirits, and it weakens the spirits, and it endangers life, and

unfits and indisposes a man to all natural actions. It is so here. When guilt lies heavy upon the conscience, it works upon the soul, it weakens the soul, it endangers the soul, and it doth wonderfully unfit and indispose the soul to all holy actions. Guilt fights against our souls, our consciences, our comforts, our duties, yea, and our very graces also (1 Pet 2:11).

There is nothing that wounds and lames our graces like guilt. There is nothing that weakens and wastes our graces like guilt. There is nothing that hinders the activity of our graces like guilt; nor is there anything that clouds our evidences of grace like guilt. Look, what water is to the fire, that our sinnings are to our graces, evidences, and duties. Guilt is like Prometheus' vulture, that ever lies gnawing. It is better with Evagrius to lie on a bed of straw with a good conscience than to lie on a bed of down with a guilty conscience. What the probationer disciple said to our Savior—"Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest" (Matt 8:19)—that a guilty conscience saith to the sinner, "Whithersoever thou goest, I will follow thee. If thou goest to a fast, I will follow thee, and fill thy mind with black and dismal apprehensions of God. If thou goest to a feast, I will follow thee, and shew thee the handwriting on the wall (Dan 5:5). If thou goest abroad, I will follow thee, and make thee afraid of every leaf that wags. Thou shalt look upon every bush as an armed man, and upon every man as a devil. If thou stayest at home, I will follow thee from room to room, and fill thee with horror and terror. If thou liest down to rest, I will follow thee with fearful dreams and tormenting apparitions. If thou goest into thy closet, I will follow thee, and make thy very closet a hell to hold thee."

It is storied of King Richard the Third, that after he had murdered his two nephews in the Tower, guilt lay so hard

upon his conscience that his sleeps were very unquiet; for he would often leap out of his bed in the dark; and catching his sword in his hand, which hung by his bedside, he would go distractedly about his chamber seeking for the traitor.

So Charles the Ninth of France, after he had made the streets of Paris run down with the blood of the Protestants, he could seldom take any sound sleep nor could he endure to be awakened out of his sleep without music.

Judge Morgan, that passed the sentence of condemnation upon Jane Grey, a virtuous lady, shortly after fell mad and in his raving cried out continually, "Take away the Lady Jane from me, take away the Lady Jane from me," and in that horror ended his wretched life.

James Abyes, going to execution for Christ's sake, as he went along, he gave his money and his clothes to one and another until he had given all away to his shirt, whereupon one of the sheriff's men fell a-scoffing and deriding of him and told him that he was a madman and an heretic and not to be believed. But as soon as the good man was executed, this wretch was struck mad and threw away his clothes and cried out that James Abyes was a good man and gone to heaven, but he was a wicked man and was damned; and thus he continued crying out until his death. Certainly he that derides or smites a man for walking according to the Word of the Lord, the Lord will, first or last, so smite and wound that man's conscience that all the physicians in the world shall not heal it.

Now if thy indisposition to private prayer springs from contracting guilt upon thy conscience, then thy best way is speedily to renew thy repentance, and greatly to judge and humble thine own soul, and so to act faith afresh upon the blood of Christ, both for pardoning mercy and for purging

grace. When a man is stung with guilt, it is his highest wisdom in the world to look up to the brazen serpent, and not to spend his time or create torments to his own soul by perpetual poring upon his guilt. When guilt upon the conscience works a man to water the earth with tears and to make heaven ring with his groans, then it works kindly. When the sense of guilt drives a man to God, to duty, to the throne of grace, then it will not be long night with that man. He that thinks to shift off private prayer under the pretense of guilt doth but in that increase his own guilt. Neglect of duty will never get guilt off the conscience.

But then there is an *involuntary* indisposition to private prayer, as in a sick man who would work and walk, but cannot, being hindered by his disease; or as it is with a man that hath a great chain on his leg, he would very fain walk or get away, but his chain hinders him. Now if your indisposition to private prayer be an involuntary indisposition, then God will in mercy, in course, both pardon it and remove it.

Secondly, there is a *total* indisposition to private prayer, and there is a *partial* indisposition to private prayer. A total indisposition to private prayer is when a man hath no mind at all to private prayer, nor no will at all to private prayer, nor no love at all to private prayer, nor no delight, nor no heart at all to private prayer (Jer 4:22; 44:17–19). Now where this frame of heart is, there all is naught, very naught, stark naught. A partial indisposition to private prayer is when a man hath some will to private prayer, though not such a will as once he had; and some mind to private prayer, though not such a mind as once he had; and some affections to private prayer, though not such warm and burning affections as once he had. Now if your indisposition to private prayer be total, then you must wait upon the Lord in all His appointments

for a changed nature and for union with Christ. But if your indisposition to private prayer be only partial, then the Lord will certainly pardon it and, in the very use of holy means, in time remove it.

Thirdly and lastly, there is a *transient*, accidental, occasional, or fleeting indisposition to private prayer; and there is a *customary*, a constant, or permanent indisposition to private prayer.

Now a transient, accidental, occasional, or fleeting indisposition to that which is good may be found upon the best of saints, as you may see in Moses (Exod 4:10–14), and in Jeremiah (Jer 1:5–8, 17–19; 20:9), and in Jonah (Jon 1), and in David (Ps 39:2–3). Now if this be the indisposition that thou art under, then thou mayest be confident that it will certainly work off by degrees as theirs did that I have last cited.

But then there is a customary, a constant, or permanent indisposition to private prayer, and to all other holy duties of religion (Isa 65:2). Now if this be the indisposition that thou art under, then I may safely conclude that thou art in the very "gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:21–23). And thy work lies not in complaining of thy indisposition but in repenting and believing, and in laboring for a change of thy heart and state; for until thy heart and thy state be changed, thou wilt remain forever indisposed both to closet prayer and to all other duties of religion and godliness. To see a sinner sailing hell-ward with wind and tide on his side, to alter his course, and tack about for heaven, to see the earthly man become heavenly, the carnal man become spiritual, the proud man become humble, the vain man become serious, to see a sinner move contrary to himself in the ways of Christ and holiness, is as strange as to see the earth fly upward, or the bowl run contrary to its own bias. And yet a divine power

of God upon the soul can effect it; and this must be effected before the sinner will be graciously inclined and sincerely disposed to closet prayer. And let thus much suffice by way of answer to this objection also.

3. Advice and Counsel in Eleven Particulars

Now, for the better management of this great duty, closet prayer, I beseech you take my advice and counsel in these eleven following particulars:

a. Be Frequent in Closet Prayer, and Not Now and Then Only

First, be frequent in closet prayer, and not now and then only. He will never make any yearnings of closet prayer that is not frequent in closet prayer. Now, that this counsel may stick, consider,

[1] First, other eminent servants of the Lord have been frequent in this blessed work. "Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night" (Neh 1:6). So Daniel: "he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (Dan 6:10). So David: "My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up" (Ps 5:3). "But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee" (Ps 88:13). "I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried" (Ps 119:147). "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud" (Ps 55:17). Yea, he was *vir orationis*, "a man of prayer," for his frequency in it. "For my love they

are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer" (Ps 109:4), or, as the Hebrew may be read, "But I am a man of prayer."

Of Carolus Magnus it was said, *Carolus plus cum Deo quam hominibus loquitur*, that he spake more with God than with men.

[2] Secondly, consider the blessed Scripture doth not only enjoin this duty but it requires frequency in it also (Luke 18:1; 1 Thess 5:17; Col 4:2). In the former part of this discourse, I have given light into these scriptures; and therefore, the bare citing of them must now suffice.

[3] Thirdly, Christ was frequent in private prayer, as you may easily see by comparing of these scriptures together (Mark 1:35; Matt 14:23; Luke 22:39; John 18:2). In my second argument for private prayer, you may see these scriptures opened and amplified.

[4] Fourthly, consider that you have the examples of the very worst of men in this case. Papists are frequent in their private devotions. And the Mahomedans, what occasion soever they have, either by profit or pleasure, to divert them, will yet pray five times every day. Yea, the very heathens sacrificed to Hercules morning and evening upon the great altar at Rome. Now, shall blind nature do more than grace?

[5] Fifthly, consider you cannot have too frequent communion with God. You cannot have too frequent intercourse with Jesus. You cannot have your hearts too frequently filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory and with that peace that passes understanding. You cannot have heaven too frequently brought down into your hearts, nor you cannot have your hearts too frequently carried up to heaven. And therefore, you cannot be too frequent in closet prayer.

[6] Sixthly, consider that you are under frequent wants, and frequent sins, and frequent snares, and frequent temp-

tations, and frequent allurements, and frequent trials, and frequent cares, and frequent fears, and frequent favors (1 Pet 5:8; Job 1:7). And therefore, you had need be frequent with God in your closets.

[7] Seventhly, consider you are the favorites of heaven, you are greatly beloved, you are highly honored, you are exceedingly esteemed and valued in the court of the Most High. And remember that the petitions of many weak Christians, and of many benighted Christians, and of many tempted Christians, and of many clouded Christians, and of many staggering Christians, and of many doubting Christians, and of many bewildered Christians, and of many fainting Christians, etc., are put into your hands for a quick and speedy dispatch to the throne of grace. So that you had need be frequent in your closets and improve your interest in heaven, or else many of these poor hearts may be wronged, betrayed, and prejudiced by your neglect. Such as are favorites in princes' courts, if they are active, diligent, careful, and watchful, they may do much good for others, they may come as often as they please into their prince's presence, and with Queen Esther have for asking what they please, both for themselves and others (Est 7). Oh, what a world of good may such do for others that are God's favorites, if they would be but frequent with God in their closets!

O sirs! If you have not that love, that regard, that pity, that compassion to your own souls, as you should have, yet, oh, let not others suffer by your neglect of private prayer! Oh, let not Zion suffer! Oh, let not any particular saint suffer by your being found seldom in your closets.

Certainly, it might have gone better with the churches of Christ, and with the concernments of Christ, and with many

of the poor people of Christ, if most Christians had been more frequent with God in their closets.

[8] Eighthly and lastly, consider that this liberty to approach nigh to God in your closets cost Christ His dearest blood (Eph 2:13; Heb 10:20). Now, he that is not frequent with God in his closet tells all about him that he sets no great value upon that liberty that Christ hath purchased with His blood. The incomparable, the unparalleled price which Christ hath paid down upon the nail above sixteen hundred years ago, that we might have liberty and free access to His Father in our closets, argues very strongly, yea, irrefragably, the superlative excellency of that liberty (1 Pet 1:19). Oh, therefore let us improve to purpose this blessed purchase of our Lord Jesus by being frequent with God in our closets.

It is disputed by some whether one drop of Christ's blood was sufficient for the pardon of our sins and redemption of our souls. My intention is not to dispute but to offer a few things to your consideration:

First, it must be granted that by reason of the hypostatical union a drop of Christ's blood was of an inestimable worth and excellency; and the value of His passion is to be measured by the dignity of His person.

Secondly, a proportion was to be observed betwixt the punishment due to men and that which was suffered for man. That His sufferings might be satisfactory, two things were necessary: *poenae gravitas*, gravity of the punishment, as well as *personae dignitas*, dignity of the person.

That the least drop of Christ's blood was not sufficient for the redemption of our souls may thus appear:

First, if it were, then the circumcision of Christ was enough, for there was a drop, if not many drops, of blood shed.

Secondly, then His being crowned with a crown of thorns was sufficient, for it is most probable that they drew blood from Him.

Thirdly, then all Christ's sufferings besides were superfluous and vain.

Fourthly, then God was unjust and unrighteous to take more than was due to His justice. But for any man to affirm that God hath taken beyond what was His just due is high blasphemy.

Fifthly, then Christ was weak and imprudent to pay more than He needed, for what need was there of His dearest heart blood if a drop from His hand would have saved our souls? Let schoolmen fancy what they please, it is certain that not one dram of that bitter cup that Christ drunk off could be abated in order to His Father's full satisfaction and man's eternal redemption. Christ hath given under His own hand that it was necessary that He should suffer many things (Luke 24:26; 17:25). O sirs! Shall Christ shed not only a few drops of blood, but His very heart blood, to purchase you a freedom and liberty to be as often in your closets with His Father as you please; and will you only now and then give God a visit in private? The Lord forbid.

b. Take the Fittest Seasons and Opportunities for Closet Prayer

My second advice and counsel is this: Take *the fittest seasons and opportunities* that possibly you can for closet prayer. Many take unfit seasons for private prayer, which do more obstruct the importunity of the soul in prayer than all the suggestions and instigations of Satan. As,

First, when the body is drowsy and sleepy; this is a very unfit season for closet prayer (Song 3:1). Take heed of laying cushions of sloth under your knees, or pillows of idleness under your elbows, or of mixing nods with your petitions, or of being drowsily devoted when you draw near to God in your closets.

Secondly, when a man's head and heart is filled with worldly cares and distractions; this is a very unfit season for closet prayer (1 Cor 7:35; Ezek 33:31).

When Dinah must needs be gadding abroad to see fashions, Shechem, prince of that country, meets with her and forces her virginity. So when our hearts, Dinah-like, must needs be a-roving and gadding abroad after the things of the world, then Satan, the prince of the air, usually seizes upon us, commits a rape upon our souls, and either leads us off from prayer, or else he doth so distract us from prayer, that it were better not to have prayed at all than to have offered the sacrifice of foolish and distracted prayer.

I have read a story how that one offered to give his horse to his fellow upon condition he would but say the Lord's Prayer and think upon nothing but God. The proffer was accepted, and he began, "'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name' (Matt 6:9)…But I must have the bridle too," said he. "No, nor the horse either," said the other, "for thou hast lost both already." The application is easy.

Certainly, the most free and lively season for closet prayer is the mornings, before a man's spirit be blunted or cooled, deadened, damped, or flatted by worldly businesses. A man should speak with God in his closet before he speaks with his worldly affairs and occasions. A man should say to all his worldly business, as Abraham said unto his young men, when he went to offer up his only Isaac, "Abide ye here…and

I…will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Gen 22:5). He that will attend closet prayer without distraction or disturbance must not first slip out of the world into his closet, but he must first slip into his closet before he be compassed about with a crowd of worldly employments.

It was a precept of Pythagoras that when we enter the temple to worship God, we must not so much as speak or think of any worldly business, lest we make God's service an idle, perfunctory, and lazy recreation. The same I may say of closet prayer.

Jerome complains very much of his distractions, dullness, and indisposedness to prayer, and chides himself thus, "What! Dost thou think that Jonah prayed thus when he was in the whale's belly; or Daniel when he was among the lions; or the thief when he was upon the cross?"

Thirdly, when men or women are under rash and passionate distempers (1 Tim 2:8), for when passions are up, holy affections are down, and this is a very unfit season for closet prayer. For such prayers will never reach God's ear which do not first warm our own hearts. In the Muscovy churches, if the minister mistake in reading, or stammer in pronouncing his words, or speak any word that is not well heard, the hearers do very much blame him and are ready to take the book from him, as unworthy to read therein. And certainly, God is no less offended with the giddy, rash, passionate, precipitate, and inconsiderate prayers of those who, without a deliberate understanding, do send their petitions to heaven in post-haste. Solomon's advice is worthy of all commendation and acceptation: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God" (Eccl 5:2)—or as the Hebrew may be read, "Let not thy heart through haste be so troubled or disturbed, as to tumble over, and throw

out words without wisdom or premeditation." Good men are apt many times to be too hasty, rash, and unadvised in their prayers, complaints, and deprecations. Witness David, Job, Jeremiah, Jonah, and the disciples.

No Christian to him that doth wisely and seriously weigh over his prayers and praises before he pours out his soul before the Lord. He never repents of his requests who first duly deliberates what to request. But he that blurts out whatsoever lies uppermost, and that brings into the presence of God his rash, raw, tumultuary, and indigested petitions, confessions, complaints, etc., he doth but provoke God, he doth but brawl with God, instead of praying to Him or wrestling with Him. Suitors at court observe their fittest times and seasons of begging. They commonly take that very nick of time when they have the king in a good mood, and so seldom or never come off but with good success.

Sometimes God strongly inclines the heart to closet prayer. Sometimes He brings the heart beforehand into a praying frame; sometimes both body and soul are more enlivened, quickened, raised, and divinely inflamed than at other times. Sometimes conscience is more stirring, working, and tender. Oh, now strike while the iron is hot! Oh, now lay hold on all such blessed opportunities by applying of thyself to private prayer. O sirs! Can you take your fittest times, seasons, and opportunities for ploughing, and sowing, and reaping, and buying and selling, and eating, and drinking, and marrying, and cannot you as well take your fittest times and seasons to seek the Lord in your closets? Must the best God be put off with the least and worst of your time? The Lord forbid. Neglect not the seasons of grace; slip not your opportunities for closet prayer. Thousands have lost their seasons and their souls together.

c. Perform Not Closet Duties Merely to Still Your Consciences

My third advice and counsel is this: Be marvelous careful that you do not perform closet duties merely to still your consciences. You must perform them out of conscience, but you must not perform them only to quiet conscience. Some have such a light set up in their understandings that they cannot omit closet prayer, but conscience is upon their backs, conscience is still upbraiding and disquieting of them; and therefore, they are afraid to neglect closet prayer, lest conscience should question, arraign, and condemn them for their neglects. Sometimes when men have greatly sinned against the Lord, conscience becomes impatient and is still accusing, condemning, and terrifying of them. And now in these agonies they will run to their closets, and cry, and pray, and mourn, and confess, and bitterly bewail their transgressions. But all this is only to quiet their consciences. And sometimes they find, upon their performance of closet duties, that their consciences are a little allayed and quieted; and for this very end and purpose do they take up closet prayer as a charm to allay their consciences. And when the storm is over, and their consciences quieted, then they lay aside closet prayer—as the monk did the net when the fish was caught—and are ready to transgress again. O sirs! Take heed of this, for this is but plain hypocrisy, and will be bitterness in the end. He that performs closet prayer only to bribe his conscience that it may not be clamorous, or to stop the mouth of conscience that it may not accuse him for sin, he will at length venture upon such a trade, such a course of sinning against conscience, as will certainly turn his troubled conscience into a seared conscience (1 Tim 4:2). And a seared conscience is like a

sleepy lion; when he awakes, he roars, and tears his prey in pieces; and so will a seared conscience, when it is awakened, roar and tear the secure sinner in pieces.

When Dionysius's conscience was awakened, he was so troubled with fear and horror of conscience that, not daring to trust his best friends with a razor, he used to singe his beard with burning coals, as Cicero reports. All the mercy that a seared, a benumbed, conscience doth afford the sinner, when it doth most befriend him, when it deals most seemingly kind with him, is this: that it will not cut that it may kill; it will not convince that it may confound; it will not accuse that it may condemn. It will spare the sinner a while that it may torment him forever; it will spare him here that it may gnaw him hereafter. It will not strike until it be too late for the sinner to ward off the blow. Oh, cruel mercy, to observe the sin and let alone the sinner until the gates of mercy be shut upon him and hell stands gaping to devour him. "Sin *lieth* at the door" (Gen 4:7). The Hebrew word *robets* signifies to lie down, or couch, like some wild beast at the mouth of his cave, as if he were asleep, but indeed watcheth and waketh, and is ready to fly at all that come near it. O sirs! Sin is rather *couchant* (lying down) than *dormant* (sleeping). It sleeps dog's sleep that it may take the sinner at the greater advantage and fly the more furiously in his face.

d. Take Heed of Resting and Trusting upon Closet Duties

My fourth advice and counsel is this: Take heed of resting upon closet duties; take heed of trusting in closet duties. Noah's dove made use of her wings, but she did not trust in her wings, but in the ark. So you must make use of closet

duties, but you must not trust in your closet duties, but in Jesus, of Whom the ark was but a type.

There are many that go a round of duties as mill horses go their round in a mill, and rest upon them when they have done, using the means as mediators, and so fall short of Christ and heaven at once. Closet duties rested in will as eternally undo a man as the greatest and foulest enormities. Open wickedness slays her thousands, but a secret resting upon duties slays her ten thousands. Multitudes bleed inwardly of this disease and die forever. Open profaneness is the broad, dirty way that leads to hell, but closet duties rested in is a sure way, though a cleaner way, to hell. Profane persons and formal professors shall meet at last in one hell. Ah, Christians! Do not make closet duties your money, lest you and your money perish together.

The phoenix gathers sweet odoriferous sticks in Arabia together, and then blows them with her wings and burns herself with them. So do many shining professors burn themselves by resting in their duties and services. You know, in Noah's Flood all that were not in the ark, though they climbed up the tallest trees and the highest mountains and hills, yet were really drowned. So let men climb up to this duty and that, yet, if they don't get into Christ, they will be really damned. It is not thy closet, but thy Christ, that must save thee. If a man be not interested in Christ, he may perish with "Our Father" in his mouth. It is as natural to a man to rest in his duties as it is for him to rest in his bed.

This was Bernard's temptation, who, being a little assisted in duty, could stroke his own head with *bene fecisti Bernard*, "O Bernard, this was gallantly done, now cheer up thyself." Ah, how apt is man, when he hath been a little assisted, heated, melted, enlarged, in a way of duty, to go away and

stroke himself, bless himself, hug himself, and warm himself with the sparks, with the fire of his own kindling (Isa 50:11).

Adam was to win life and wear it; he was to be saved by his doings. Do this and live (Gen 2:2). Hence it is that all his posterity are so prone to seek for salvation by doing (Acts 2:37). "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17–20). Like father, like son. But if our own duties or doings were sufficient to save us, to what purpose did Christ leave His Father's bosom, and lay down His dearest life?

Closet duties rested in may pacify conscience for a time, but this will not always hold. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb: yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound" (Hos 5:13).

If we rest on closet duties, or on anything else on this side Christ, we shall find them as weak as the Assyrian, or as Jareb. We shall find to our cost that they cannot help us nor heal us; they cannot comfort us nor cure us of our wounds. As creatures were never true to any that have trusted in them, so duties. When the Israelites were in great distress, the Lord bids them, "Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you," saith God, "in the time of your tribulation" (Judg 10:14). O sirs! If, when you are under distress of conscience, or lying upon a dying bed, God should say to you, Go to your closet prayers and performances that you have made and rested in; go to your closet tears that you have shed and rested in, and let them save you and deliver you, oh, what miserable saviors and comforters would they be unto you! Look, what the ark of God was to the Philistines (1 Sam 5), that closet duties are to Satan. He trembles every time he sees a poor sinner go into his closet and come out of

his closet, resting and glorying in Jesus, and not in his duties. But when he sees a poor creature confide in his closet duties and rest upon his closet duties, then he rejoiceth; then he claps his hands and sings, "Aha! So would I have it."

Oh, rest not on anything on this side Jesus Christ. Say to your graces, say to your duties, say to your holiness, You are not my savior, you are not my mediator; and therefore, you are not to be trusted to, you are not to be rested in. It is my duty to perform closet duties, but it is my sin to rely upon them, or to put confidence in them. Do them I must, but glory in them I must not. He that rests in his closet duties makes a savior of his closet duties. Let all your closet duties lead you to Jesus and leave you more in communion with Him and in dependence upon Him; and then thrice happy will you be (Heb 7:25). Let all thy closet prayers and tears, thy closet fastings and meltings, be a star to guide thee to Jesus, a Jacob's ladder by which thou mayest ascend into the bosom of eternal loves; and then thou art safe forever.

Ah! It is sad to think how most men have forgotten their resting-place, as the Lord complains: "My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace" (Jer 50:6). Ah! How many poor souls are there that wander from mountain to hill, from one duty to another, and here they will rest, and there they will rest, and all on this side their resting-place! O sirs! It is God Himself that is your resting-place. It is His free grace, it is His singular mercy, it is His infinite love that is your resting-place. It is the bosom of Christ, the favor of Christ, the satisfaction of Christ, and the pure, perfect, spotless, matchless, and glorious righteousness of Christ that is your resting-place. And therefore, say to

all your closet duties and performances, Farewell! Prayer, farewell! Reading, farewell! Fasting, farewell! Tears, farewell! Sighs and groans, farewell! Meltings and humblings, I will never trust more to you. I will never rest more on you, but I will now return to my resting-place. I will now rest only in God and Christ. I will now rest wholly in God and Christ. I will now rest forever in God and Christ.

It was the saying of a precious saint that he was more afraid of his duties than of his sins; for the one made him often proud, the other made him always humble.

e. Labor to Bring Your Hearts into All Your Closet Prayers

My fifth advice and counsel is this: Labor to bring your hearts into all your closet prayers and performances. Look that your tongues and your hearts keep time and tune. "Give ear unto my prayer, that goeth not out of feigned lips" (Ps 17:1), or, as it is in the Hebrew, "without lips of deceit." Heart and tongue must go together; word and work, lip and life, prayer and practice, must echo one to another, or else thy prayers and thy soul will be lost together. The labor of the lips and the travail of the heart must go together.

The Egyptians of all fruits made choice of the peach to consecrate to their goddess, and for no other cause but that the fruit thereof is like to one's heart, and the leaf to one's tongue. These very heathens, in the worship of their gods, thought it necessary that men's hearts and tongues should go together. Ah, Christians! When in your closet duties your hearts and your tongues go together, then you make that sweet and delightful melody that is most taking and pleasing to the King of kings. The very soul of prayer lies in the

pouring out of the soul before God (1 Sam 1:15). "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me" (Ps 42:4). So the Israelites poured out their souls like water before the Lord. So the church: "The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early" (Isa 26:8–9). "Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" (Lam 3:41). "Let us draw near with a true heart" (Heb 10:22). "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit" (Rom 1:9). "I will pray with the spirit, and…sing with the spirit" (1 Cor 14:15). "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit" (Phil 3:3).

Under the law the inward parts were only to be offered to God in sacrifice; the skin belonged to the priests. Whence we may easily gather that truth in the inward parts is that which is most pleasing in a sacrifice. When the Athenians would know of the oracle the cause of their often unprosperous success in battle against the Lacedaemonians, seeing they offered the choicest things they could get in sacrifice to the gods, which their enemies did not, the oracle gave them this answer: the gods were better pleased with their inward supplication without ambition than with all their outward pomp in costly sacrifices.

Ah, sirs! The reason why so many are so unsuccessful in their closet duties and services is because there is no more of their hearts in them. No man can make sure work or happy work in prayer but he that makes heart work on it. When a man's heart is in his prayers then great and sweet will be his returns from heaven. That is no prayer in which the heart of the person bears no part. When the soul is separated from the body the man is dead, and so when the heart is separated from the lip in prayer the prayer is dead.

The Jews at this day write upon the walls of their synagogues these words, *Tephillah belo cavannah ceguph belo neshamah*; that is, a prayer without the heart, or without the intention of the affection, is like a body without a soul.

In the Law of Moses, the priest was commanded to wash the inwards and the feet of the sacrifices in water; and this was done, saith Philo, "not without a mystery, to teach us to keep our hearts and affections clean when we draw nigh to God." In all your closet duties God looks first and most to your hearts: "My son, give me thy heart" (Prov 23:26). It is not a piece, it is not a corner of the heart, that will satisfy the Maker of the heart. The heart is a treasure, a bed of spices, a royal throne wherein He delights. God looks not at the elegancy of your prayers to see how neat they are, nor yet at the geometry of your prayers to see how long they are, nor yet at the arithmetic of your prayers to see how many they are, nor yet at the music of your prayers, nor yet at the sweetness of your voice, nor yet at the logic of your prayers, but at the sincerity of your prayers, how hearty they are. There is no prayer acknowledged, approved, accepted, recorded, or rewarded by God, but that wherein the heart is, sincerely and wholly. The true mother would not have the child divided. As God loves "a broken and a contrite heart," so He loathes a divided heart (Ps 51:17; Jas 1:8).

God neither loves halting nor halving. He will be served truly and totally. The royal law is, "Thou shalt love and serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul." Among the heathens, when the beasts were cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart, and if the heart was naught, the sacrifice was rejected. Verily, God rejects all those services and sacrifices wherein the heart is not, as you may see by comparing these scriptures together

(Prov 21:27; Isa 1:11–12; 29:13; Matt 15:7–9; Ezek 33:30–32; Zech 7:4–6; 2 Chr 25:1–2; Ps 78:36–37). Prayer without the heart is but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Prayer is only lovely and weighty as the heart is in it and not otherwise. It is not the lifting up of the voice, the wringing of the hands, the beating of the breasts, an affected tone, studied notions, nor seraphical expressions, but the stirrings of the heart that God looks at in prayer. God hears no more than the heart speaks. If the heart be dumb, God will certainly be deaf. No prayer takes with God but that which is the travail of the heart.

The same day Julius Caesar came to the imperial dignity, sitting in his golden chair, he offered a beast in sacrifice to the gods. But when the beast was opened, it was without a heart, which the soothsayers looked upon as an ill omen. It is a sad omen that thou wilt rather provoke the Lord than prevail with Him, who art habitually heartless in thy closet duties. Of the heart, God seemeth to say to us, as Joseph did to his brethren concerning Benjamin, "Ye shall not see my face without it."

It was the speech of blessed Bradford that he would never leave a duty until he had brought his heart into the frame of the duty; he would not leave confession of sin until his heart was broken for sin. He would not leave petitioning for grace until his heart was quickened and enlivened in a hopeful expectation of more grace. He would not leave gratulation until his heart was enlarged with the sense of the mercies he enjoyed and quickened in the return of praise.

f. Be Fervent, Be Warm, Be Importunate with God

My sixth advice and counsel is this: Be fervent, be warm, be importunate with God in all your closet duties and performances. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas 5:16)—or, as the Greek hath it, "the working prayer." That is, such working prayer as sets the whole man on work, as sets all the faculties of the soul and all the graces in the soul at work. The word signifies such a working as notes the liveliest activity that can be. Certainly, all those usual phrases of crying, wrestling, and striving with God which are scattered up and down in Scripture do strongly argue that holy importunity and sacred violence that the saints of old have expressed in their addresses to God.

Fervency feathers the wings of prayer and makes them fly the swifter to heaven. An arrow, if it be drawn up but a little way, flies not far; but if it be drawn up to the head, it will fly far and pierce deeply. So fervent prayer flies as high as heaven and will certainly bring down blessings from thence. Cold prayers bespeak a denial, but fervent prayers offer a sacred violence both to heaven and earth. Look, as in a painted fire there is no heat; so in a cold prayer there is no heat, no warmth, no omnipotence, no devotion, no blessing. Cold prayers are like arrows without heads, as swords without edges, as birds without wings. They pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Such prayers as have no heavenly fire in them do always freeze before they reach as high as heaven. But fervent prayer is very prevalent with God.

"Peter, therefore, was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing" (Acts 12:5). The Greek word ἐκτενής signifies instant prayer, earnest prayer, stretched out prayer—

prayer stretched out upon the tenters, as it were. These gracious souls did in prayer strain and stretch themselves as men do that are running in a race. They prayed with all the strength of their souls and with all the fervency of their spirits; and accordingly they carried the day with God, as you may see in the following verses.

"Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night" (Acts 26:7), or rather as the Greek hath it, ἐν ἐκτενείᾳ, "in a stretched out manner, serving God day and night." These twelve tribes, or the godly Jews of the twelve tribes of Israel, stretched out their hearts, their affections, their graces, to the utmost in prayer. In all your private retirements do as the twelve tribes did.

"Fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Rom 12:11). The Greek word ζέοντες signifies "seething hot." God loves to see His people zealous and warm in His service. Without fervency of spirit no service finds acceptance in heaven. God is a pure act, and He loves that His people should be lively and active in His service.

"Continuing instant in prayer" (Rom 12:12); προσκαρτεροῦντες, continuing with all your might in prayer. It is a metaphor from hunting dogs that will never give over the game until they have got it.

"That ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Rom 15:30); συναγωνίσασθαι, strive mightily, strive as champions strive, even to an agony, as the word imports. It is a military word and notes such fervent wrestling or striving as is for life and death.

"Always labouring fervently for you in prayers" (Col 4:12). The Greek word ἀγωνιζόμενος that is here used, signifies to strive or wrestle as those do that strive for mastery. It notes the vehemence and fervor of Epaphras' prayers for the

Colossians. Look, as the wrestlers do bend, and writhe, and stretch, and strain every joint of their bodies that they may be victorious, so Epaphras did bend, and writhe, and stretch, and strain every joint of his soul—if I may so speak—that he might be victorious with God upon the Colossians' account.

So, when Jacob was with God alone, ah, how earnest and fervent was he in his wrestlings with God (Gen 32:24–27; Hos 12:4–5). He wrestles and weeps, and weeps and wrestles. He tugs hard with God, he holds his hold, and he will not let God go, until as a prince he had prevailed with Him.

Fervent prayer is the soul's contention, the soul struggling with God. It is a sweating work, it is the sweat and blood of the soul, it is a laying out to the uttermost all the strength and powers of the soul. He that would gain victory over God in private prayer must strain every string of his heart. He must, in beseeching God, besiege Him, and so get the better of Him. He must be like importunate beggars that will not be put off with frowns, or silence, or sad answers. Those that would be masters of their requests must, like the importunate widow, press God so far as to put Him to an holy blush, as I may say with reverence. They must with an holy impudence, as Basil speaks, make God ashamed to look them in the face if He should deny the importunity of their souls.

Had Abraham had a little more of this impudence, saith one, when he made suit for Sodom, it might have done well. Abraham brought down the price to ten righteous, and there his modesty stayed him. Had he gone lower, God only knows what might have been done, for God went not away, saith the text, until "he had left communing with Abraham" (Gen 18:33). That is, until Abraham had no more to say to God. Abraham left over asking before God left over granting. He

left over praying before God left over bating; and so Sodom was lost.

Oh, the heavenly fire, the holy fervency that was in Daniel's closet prayer! "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake" (Dan 9:19). Look, as there be two kinds of antidotes against poison, hot and cold, so there are two kinds of antidotes against all the troubles of this life, fervent prayers and holy patience—the one hot, the other cold; the one quickening, and the other quenching. And holy Daniel made use of them both. Fervency to prayer is as the fire was to the spices in the censer, or as wings to the bird, or as oil to the wheels; and this Daniel found by experience.

God looks not for any James with horny knees through assiduity of prayer; nor for any Bartholomew with a century of prayers for the morning and as many for the evening; but for fervency of spirit in prayer, which alone carries all with God. Feeble prayers, like weak pangs, go over and never bring a mercy to the birth. Cold prayers are still-born children in whom the Father of spirits can take no pleasure. Look, as a painted man is no man, and as painted fire is no fire, so a cold prayer is no prayer. Such prayers never win upon the heart of God that do not first warm our own hearts. As a body without a soul, much wood without a fire, a bullet in a gun without powder, so are all prayers without fervency of spirit.

Luther terms prayer *bombarda Christianorum*, the gun or cannon of Christians or the Christian's gunshot.

The hottest springs send forth their waters by ebullitions. Cold prayers make a smoke, a smother in the eyes of God. Lazy prayers never procure noble answers. Lazy beggars may starve for all their begging (Isa 1:15; 65:5).

Such as have a male in their flock and offer to the Lord a female; such as offer to the Lord the torn and the lame and the sick; such as turn off God with their cold, lazy, sleepy, and formal devotions are condemned, cast, and cursed by God (Mal 1:13–14). David compares his prayers to incense, and no incense was offered without fire (Ps 141:2). It was that that made the smoke of it to ascend. It is only fervent prayer that hits the mark and that pierces the walls of heaven, though made of brass and iron like those of Gaza (Isa 45:2). While the child only whimpers and whines in the cradle, the mother lets it alone; but when once it sets up its note, and cries outright, then she runs and takes it up. So it is with a Christian: "This poor man cried" (Ps 34:6). There is his fervency: he cried. But it was silently and secretly in the presence of King Achish, as Moses did at the Red Sea, and as Nehemiah did in the presence of the king of Persia. "And the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps 34:6). Here is his prevalence. So Latimer plied the throne of grace with great fervency, crying out, "Once again, Lord, once again restore the gospel to England," and God heard him.

Hudson the martyr, deserted at the stake, went from under his chain; and having prayed fervently, he was comforted immediately and suffered valiantly.

I have read of one Giles of Brussels, a Dutch martyr, who was so fervent in his prayer, kneeling by himself in some secret place of the prison where he was, that he seemed to forget himself; and being called to his meat, he neither heard nor saw who stood by him until he was lifted up by the arms; and then he would speak gently to them, as one awaked out of a trance.

So Gregory Nazianzen, speaking of his sister Gorgonia, saith that in the vehemence of her prayer she came to a

religious impudence with God, so as to threaten heaven and tell God that she would never depart from His altar until she had her petition granted.

Let us make it our business to follow these noble examples as ever we would so prince it in prayer as to prevail with God. An importunate soul in prayer is like the poor beggar that prays and knocks, that prays and waits, that prays and works, that knocks and knits, that begs and patches, and will not stir from the door until he hath an alms. Well, friends, remember this: God respects no more lukewarm prayers than He doth lukewarm persons, and they are such that He hath threatened to spue out of His mouth. Those prayers that are but lip-labor are lost labor; and therefore, in all your closet prayers look to the fervency of your spirits.

g. Be Constant, as Well as Fervent, in Closet Prayer

My seventh advice and counsel is this: Be constant, as well as fervent, in closet prayer. Look that you hold on and hold out and that you persevere to the end in private prayer. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). A man must always pray habitually, though not actually. He must have his heart in a praying disposition in all estates and conditions. Though closet prayer may have an intermission, yet it must never have a cessation. "And he spake a parable unto them, to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1), or, as the Greek hath it, "not to shrink back, as sluggards in work or cowards in war." Closet prayer is a fire like that on the altar that was never to go out day nor night. "Night and day praying exceedingly" (1 Thess 3:10). Paul speaks like a man made up all of prayer, like a man

that minded nothing so much as prayer. "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance" (Eph 6:18). Calvin makes this difference between "praying always" in the beginning of this verse and "praying with perseverance" in the end of this verse. "By 'praying always,'" saith he, "he exhorts us to pray in prosperity as well as in adversity, and not to quit the duty of prayer in a prosperous estate, because we are not driven to it by outward pressing necessities and miseries. And by 'praying with perseverance,' he admonisheth us that we be not weary of the work, but continue instant and constant in its performance, though we have not presently what we pray for." So that "praying always" is opposed to a neglect of the duty in its proper times and seasons, and "praying with perseverance" is opposed to a fainting in our spirits in respect of this or that particular suit or request that we put up to God. When God turns a deaf ear to our prayers, we must not fret nor faint. We must not be dismayed nor discouraged, but we must hold up and hold on in the duty of prayer with invincible patience, courage, and constancy, as the church did (Lam 3:8, 44, 55–57). "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2). We must be constant and instant in closet prayer; we must wait upon it and lay all aside for it. He that is only in his closet by fits and starts will neither glorify God nor advantage his own soul. If we do not make a trade of closet prayer, we shall never make any earnings of closet prayer. Look, as they that get money by their iron mills do keep a continual fire in their iron mills, so they that will get any soul good by closet duties, they must keep close and constant to closet duties. The hypocrite is only constant in inconstancy; he is only in his closet by fits and starts. Now and then, when he is in a good mood, you shall

find him step into his closet, but he never holds it. "Will he always call upon God?" (Job 27:10), or, as the Hebrew hath it, "Will he in every time call upon God?" When they are under the smarting rod, or when they are upon the tormenting rack, or when they are under grievous wants, or when they are struck with panic-fears, etc., then you shall have them run to their closets, as Joab ran to the horns of the altar when he was in danger of death. But they never persevere; they never hold out to the end. And therefore, in the end they lose both their closet prayers and their souls together (Isa 26:16; Ps 78:34; Zech 7:5).

It was a most profane and blasphemous speech of that atheistical wretch that told God "that he was no common beggar, and that he never troubled Him before with prayer, and if He would but hear him that time, he would never trouble Him again."

Closet prayer is a hard work; and a man must tug hard at it and stick close to it as Jacob did if ever he intends to make any internal or eternal advantages by it (Gen 32). Daniel chose rather to run the hazard of his life than to give over praying in his chamber (Dan 6). It is not he that begins in the spirit and ends in the flesh (Gal 3:3); it is not he that puts his hand to the plough and looks back (Luke 9:62); but he that perseveres to the end in prayer, that shall be saved and crowned (Matt 24:13). It is he that perseveres in well doing that shall eat of the hidden manna, and that shall have the white stone, "and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows saving him that receiveth it" (Rev 2:17). Those precious, praying, mourning souls in Ezekiel 9:4, 6 that were marked to be preserved in Jerusalem were distinguished, say some of the learned, by the character ת, *tau*, last of all the Hebrew letters, to teach them that they must hold out and

hold on to the end in well doing. It is constancy in closet duty that crowns the Christian and commends the duty.

But would God have His people to cast off their callings, and to cast off all care of their relations, and shut themselves up in their closets, and there spend their whole time in secret prayer? Oh, no! Every duty must have its time and place. And as one friend must not shut out another, so one duty must not shut out another (Eccl 3:1). The duties of my particular calling as I am a man must not shut out the duties of my general calling as I am a Christian. And the duties of my general calling as I am a Christian must not shut out the duties of my particular calling as I am a man. But that you may be fully satisfied in this case, you must remember that a man may be said to pray always,

[1] First, when his heart is always in a praying frame. Look, as a man may be truly said to give always whose heart is always in a giving frame, and to suffer always whose heart is always in a suffering frame—"For thy sake are we killed all the day long" (Ps 44:22)—and to sin always whose heart is always in a sinning frame (2 Pet 2:14; Jer 9:3), so a man may be as truly said to pray always whose heart is always in a praying frame.

[2] Secondly, a man prays always when he takes hold on every fit season and opportunity for the pouring out of his soul before the Lord in his closet. To pray always is ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ, to pray in every opportunity; but of this before.

It is observed by some of Proteus that he was wont to give certain oracles, but it was hard to make him speak and deliver them, but he would turn himself into several shapes and forms. Yet if they would hold out and press him hard without fear, into whatsoever form or shape he appeared, they were sure to have satisfactory oracles. So if we continue constant

in our closet wrestlings with God, if we hold on in private prayer, though God should appear to us in the form or shape of a judge, an enemy, a stranger, we shall certainly speed at last. "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour" (Matt 15:28).

The philosopher being asked in his old age why he did not give over his practice and take his ease, answered, "When a man is to run a race of forty furlongs, would you have him sit down at the nine and thirtieth, and so lose the prize, the crown for which he ran?" O sirs! If you hold not out to the end in closet prayer you will certainly lose the heavenly prize, the crown of life, the crown of righteousness, the crown of glory.

To continue in giving glory to God in this way of duty is as necessary and requisite as to begin to give glory to God in this way of duty; for though the beginning be more than half, yet the end is more than all. The finish crowns the work. The God of all perfections looks that our *ultimum vitae*, our life's end, should be His *optimum gloria*, His best glory, that our last works should be our best works, and that we should persevere in closet prayer to the end (Rev 2:10).

h. Thirst and Long After Communion with God

My eighth advice and counsel is this: In all your closet prayers, thirst and long after communion with God. In all your private retirements, take up in nothing below fellowship with God, in nothing below a sweet and spiritual enjoyment of God (Song 3:1–3; Ps 73:28). "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Ps 27:4).

The temple of the Lord without communion with the Lord of the temple will not satisfy David's soul.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps 42:1–2). The hart, as Aristotle and others observe, is of all creatures most hot and dry of itself; but especially when it is chased and hunted, then it is extreme thirsty. The female is here meant, as the Greek article, ἡ ἔλαφος, *he elaphos*, doth manifest. Now, in the females the passions of thirst are stronger, as the naturalists observe. By this David discovers what a vehement and inflamed thirst there was in his soul after communion with God; and as nothing could satisfy the hunted hart but the water brooks, so nothing could satisfy his soul but the enjoyments of God.

"Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy" (Ps 43:4). The altar of God is here put for the worship of God. Now, it is not barely the worship of God, but communion with God in His worship, that was David's exceeding joy. "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary" (Ps 63:1–2). David's soul did not thirst after a crown, a kingdom, or any worldly greatness or glory, but after a choice and sweet enjoyment of God in his wilderness condition. Never did any woman with child long more after this or that than David's soul did long to enjoy sensible communion with God in the midst of all his sorrows and sufferings. "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God" (Ps 84:2). By "the courts of the LORD," we are to understand the ordinances. Now, these

without communion with God would never have satisfied David's soul.

I commend that speech of Bernard, *Nunquam abs te, absque te recedo*: I never come to Thee, but by Thee; I never come from Thee, without Thee.

Whenever you go into your closets, press hard after real and sensible communion with God, that so you may come out of your closets with some shines of God upon your spirits, as Moses came down from the mount with his face shining (Exod 34:29–35). Oh, do not take up in your closet prayers, or tears, or joys, or enlargements; but labor and long to enjoy that inward and close fellowship with God in your closets as may leave such a choice and sweet savor of God, both upon your hearts and lives, as others may be forced to say, Surely these have been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). It is sad when Christians return from their closets to their shops, their trades, their families, their commerce without the least visible rays of divine glory upon them.

O sirs! Closet prayer will be found to be but a dry, sapless, lifeless, heartless, comfortless thing, if you do not enjoy communion with God in it. Communion with God is the very life, soul, and crown of all your closet duties; and therefore, press after it as for life. When you go into your closets, let everything go that may hinder your fruition of Christ, and let everything be embraced that makes way for your enjoyment of Christ. Oh, let closet prayer be a golden bridge, a wherry, a chariot to convey your souls over to God, and to bring you into a more intimate communion with God. Let no closet duty satisfy you or content you wherein you have not conversed with God as a child converseth with his father, or as a wife converseth with her husband, or as a friend converseth with his friend, even face to face. Nothing speaks

out more unsoundness, falseness, and baseness of heart than this, when men make duty the end of duty; prayer the end of prayer; than when men can begin a duty, and go on in a duty, and close up a duty, and bless and stroke themselves after a duty, and yet never enjoy the least communion with God in the duty.

Question: But how shall a man know when he hath a real communion with God in a duty or no? This is a very noble and necessary question, and accordingly it calls for a clear and satisfactory answer; and therefore, thus:

1. A Man May Have Communion with God in Sorrow and Tears

First, A man may have communion with God in sorrow and tears, when he hath not communion with God in joy, delight (Ps 51:17). A man may have communion with God in a heart-humbling, a heart-melting, and a heart-abasing way, when he hath not communion with God in a heart-reviving, a heart-cheering, and a heart-comforting way.

It is a very great mistake among many tender-spirited Christians to think that they have no communion with God in their closets except they meet with God embracing and kissing (Song 2:4–6), cheering and comforting up their souls. When they find God raising the springs of joy and comfort in their souls; when they find God a-speaking peace unto them; when they find the singular sensible presence of God cheering, refreshing, and enlarging of them in their closets, oh, then they are willing to grant that they have had sweet communion with God in their closets. But if God meets with them in their closets, and only breaks their hearts for sin, and from sin, if He meets with them and only makes His power and His presence manifest in debasing and casting

down of their souls, upon the sight and sense of their strong corruptions and many imperfections, how unwilling are they to believe that they have had any communion with God!

Well, friends, remember this once for all: that a Christian may have as real communion with God in a heart-humbling way as he can have in a heart-comforting way. A Christian may have as choice communion with God when his eyes are full of tears as he can have when his heart is full of joy (John 20:11–19). Sometimes God meets with a poor Christian in his closet and exceedingly breaks him and humbles him, and at other times He meets with the same Christian in his closet and mightily cheers him and comforts him. Sometimes God meets with a poor soul in his closet, and there He sweetly quiets him and stills him. And at other times He meets with the same soul in his closet, and then He greatly revives him and quickens him.

God doth not always come upon the soul one way. He doth not always come in at one and the same door (John 3:8). We sometimes look for a friend to come in at the fore-door, and then he comes in at the back door. And at other times, when we look for him at the back door, then he comes in at the fore-door. And just so it is with God's coming into His people's souls. Sometimes they go into their closets and look that God will come in at the fore-door of joy and comfort, and then God comes in at the back door of sorrow and grief. And at other times, when they look that God should come in at the back door of humiliation, breaking, and melting their hearts, then God comes in at the fore-door of joy and consolation, cheering and rejoicing their souls.

2. All Christians Do Not Enjoy a Like Communion in Their Closets

Secondly, I answer, that all Christians do not enjoy a like communion with God in their closets. Some enjoy much communion with God in their closets, and others enjoy but little communion with God in their closets.

Moses had a more clear, glorious, and constant communion with God in his days than any others had in those times wherein he lived (Exod 33:11; Deut 5:4; Num 12:7–8). God spake to none "face to face" as He did to Moses. And Abraham (Gen 18), in his time, had a more close, friendly, and intimate communion with God than holy Lot or any others had in that day. And though all the disciples, Judas excepted, had sweet communion with Christ in the days of His flesh, yet Peter, James, and John had a more clear, choice, and full communion with Him than the rest had (Matt 17:1–4). Among all the disciples, John had most bosom communion with Christ. He was the greatest favorite in Christ's court. He leaned on Christ's bosom, he could say anything to Christ, and he could know anything of Christ, and he could have anything of Christ (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:20). Now that all Christians do not enjoy communion with God alike in their closets may be thus made evident:

First, all Christians do not *prepare* alike to enjoy closet communion with God; and therefore, all Christians do not enjoy communion with God alike in their closets (Eccl 5:1; Ps 10:17). Commonly, he that prepares and fits himself most for closet communion with God, he is the man that enjoys most closet communion with God (2 Chr 30:17–20).

Secondly, All Christians do not alike *prize* communion with God in their closets. Some prize communion with God in their closets before all and above all other things, as that

noble marquis said, "Cursed be he that prefers all the world to one hour's communion with God." They look upon it as that pearl of price, for the enjoyment of which they are ready to sell all and part with all. Others prize it at a lower rate, and so enjoy less of it than those that set a higher price and value upon it (Job 23:12; Ps 119:127; Matt 13:45–46).

Thirdly, all Christians do not alike *press* after communion with God in their closets. Some press after communion with God in their closets as a condemned man presses after a pardon, or as a close prisoner presses after enlargement, or as a poor beggar presses after an alms (Ps 63:8; Isa 26:8–9). Now, you know these press on with the greatest earnestness, the greatest fervency, and the greatest importunity imaginable. But others press after communion with God in their closets more coldly, more carelessly, more slightly, more lazily: "I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?" (Song 5:3). Now, they that press hardest after communion with God in their closets, they are usually blessed with the highest degrees of closet communion with God.

Fourthly, all Christians do not alike *improve* their communion with God in their closets; and therefore, all Christians do not enjoy communion with God alike in their closets. Some Christians do make a more wise, a more humble, a more holy, a more faithful, a more fruitful, and a more constant improvement of their closet communion with God than others do; and therefore, they are blessed with higher degrees of communion with God than others are. Some Christians do more improve their closet communion with God against the world, the flesh, and the devil than others do; and therefore, no wonder if they do enjoy more communion with God in their closets than others do.

Fifthly, all Christians do not alike *need* communion with God in their closets; and therefore, all Christians have not a like communion with God in their closets. All Christians have not a like place in the mystical body of Christ (1 Cor 12:14ff): some rule, and others are ruled. Now, every man stands in more or less need of communion with God according to the place that he bears in the body of Christ. Again, all Christians have not alike burdens to bear, nor alike difficulties to encounter with, nor alike dangers to escape, nor alike temptations to wrestle with, nor alike passions and corruptions to mortify, nor alike mercies and experiences to improve; and therefore, all Christians do not need alike communion with God in their closets. Now, commonly God lets Himself out more or less in ways of communion according as the various necessities and conditions of His people do require.

Sixthly and lastly, all Christians do not alike *meet with outward interruptions*, nor inward interruptions; and therefore, all Christians have not alike communion with God in their closets. Some Christians meet with a world of outward and inward interruptions more than others do. Some Christians' outward callings, relations, conditions, and stations do afford more plentiful matter and occasions to interrupt them in their closet communion with God than other Christians' callings, relations, conditions, and stations do. Besides, Satan is more busy with some Christians than he is with other Christians; and corruptions work more strongly and violently in some Christians than they do in other Christians. And let me add this to all the rest, that the very natural tempers of some Christians are more averse to closet duties than the natural tempers of other Christians are. And therefore, all Christians have not alike communion with God in their closets, but

some have more and some have less according as God in His infinite wisdom sees best.

Now, let no Christian say that he hath no communion with God in closet prayer because he hath not such a full, such a choice, such a sweet, such a sensible, and such a constant communion with God in closet prayer as such and such saints have had, or as such and such saints now have, for all saints do not alike enjoy communion with God in their closets. Some have more, some have less. Some have a higher degree, others a lower. Some are rapt up in the third heaven, when others are but rapt up in the clouds. What man is there so childish and babyish as to argue thus, that he hath no wisdom because he hath not the wisdom of Solomon; or, that he hath no strength, because he hath not the strength of Samson; or, that he hath no life, because he hath not the swiftness of Ahimaaz (2 Sam 18:23); or, that he hath no estate, because he hath not the riches of Dives? And yet so childish and babyish many weak Christians are as to argue thus: that they have no communion with God in their closets because they have not such high, such comfortable, and such constant communion with God in their closets as such and such saints have had, or as such and such saints now have. Whereas they should seriously consider that though some saints have a great communion with God, yet other saints have but a small communion with God; and though some Christians have a strong communion with God, yet other Christians have but a weak communion with God; and though some of the people of God have a very close and near communion with God, yet others of the people of God have but a more remote communion with God; and though some of God's servants have a daily, constant, and uninterrupted communion with

God, yet others of His servants have but a more transient and inconstant communion with God.

3. When a Man Acts Grace in Closet Duties

Thirdly, I answer, When a man acts grace in closet duties, then certainly he hath communion with God in closet duties (2 Tim 1:17; 1 Tim 2:8). When a man in closet duties acts faith on God, or faith on the promises, or faith on the blood of Christ; or when a man in private duties acts repentance for sin, or love to Jesus Christ, or sets up God as the object of his fear, or as the object of his joy, then he hath communion with God, then he hath fellowship with the Father and with the Son (1 John 1:3). An unregenerate man may act gifts and parts in a duty, but he cannot act grace in a duty. For no man can act grace in a duty but he that hath grace in his soul. And hence it comes to pass that unsanctified persons under the highest activity of their arts, parts, and gifts in religious duties enjoy no communion with God at all. Witness the scribes and Pharisees, Demas, Judas, Simon Magus, etc. (Isa 1:11–13). As ever you would have an evidence of your communion with God in closet duties, carefully look to the activity of your graces, carefully stir up the grace of God which is in you (2 Tim 1:6).

4. When He Gives God the Glory of All His Actings

Fourthly, I answer, When a man hath communion with God in his closet, then he gives God the glory of all his actings and activities (Ps 115:1). Communion with God always helps a man to set the crown of praise and honor upon the head of God. Witness that gracious and grateful doxology of David and his people in 1 Chronicles 29:13, "Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."

Men that enjoy no communion with God in religious duties are still a-sacrificing unto their own net, and a-burning incense unto their own drag (Hab 1:16). They are still a-blessing themselves, and a-stroking of themselves, and applauding themselves. They think the garland of praise, the crown of honor, becomes no head but their own (Luke 18:11–12). But now, men that enjoy communion with God in religious duties, they will uncrown themselves to crown God, they will uncrown their duties to crown the God of their duties, they will uncrown their arts, parts, gifts, and enlargements to set the crown of praise upon the head of God alone (Acts 3:11–13, 16; Rev 4:10–11; 5:11–12). Thou thinkest that thou hast communion with God in closet duties. Yea, thou sayest that thou hast communion with God in closet duties; but on whose head dost thou put the garland of praise (Ps 148:13)? If on God's head, thou hast communion with God; if on thine own head, thou hast no communion with God. As all the rivers run into the sea, and all the lines meet in the center, so, when all our closet duties terminate and center in the advance of God's glory, then have we communion with God in them.

Constantine did use to write the name of Christ over his door. When a man hath communion with Christ in a duty, then he will write the name of Christ, the honor of Christ, upon his duty. Some say that the name of Jesus was engraven upon the heart of Ignatius. Sure I am, when a man hath communion with God in a duty, then you shall find the honor and glory of Jesus engraven upon that duty.

5. When Closet Duties Leave the Soul in a Better Frame

Fifthly, I answer, When the performance of closet duties leaves the soul in a better frame, then a man hath commu-

nion with God in them. When a man comes off from closet duties in a more holy frame, or in a more humble frame, or in a more spiritual frame, or in a more watchful frame, or in a more heavenly frame, or in a more broken frame, or in a more quickened and enlivened frame, then certainly he hath had communion with God in those duties. When a man comes out of his closet and finds the frame of his heart to be more strongly set against sin than ever, and to be more highly resolved to walk with God than ever, and to be more eminently crucified to the world than ever, and to be more divinely fixed against temptations than ever, then without all peradventure he hath had communion with God in his closet.

6. When Closet Duties Fit a Man for the Duties Next His Hand

Sixthly, I answer, When closet duties fit a man for those other duties that lie next his hand, then doubtless he hath had communion with God in them. When private duties fit a man for public duties, or when private duties fit a man for the duties of his place, calling, and condition, wherein God hath set him, then certainly he hath had fellowship with God in them (Eccl 9:10). When a man in closet duties finds more spiritual strength and power to perform the duties that are next incumbent upon him, then assuredly he hath met with God. When private prayer fits me more for family prayer or public prayer, then I may safely conclude that God hath drawn near to my soul in private prayer. Or when one closet duty fits me for another closet duty, as when praying fits me for reading, or reading for praying; or when the more external duties in my closet (reading or praying) fit me for those more spiritual and internal duties (self-examination, holy meditation, soul-humiliation), then I may rest satisfied

that there hath been some choice intercourse between God and my soul. When the more I pray in my closet the more fit I am to pray in my closet; and the more I read in my closet the more fit I am to read in my closet; and the more I meditate in my closet the more fit I am to meditate in my closet; and the more I search and examine my heart in my closet the more fit I am to search and examine my heart in my closet; and the more I humble and abase my soul in my closet the more fit I am to humble and abase my soul in my closet, then I may be confident that I have had communion with God in my closet.

7. Private Communion with God Is Soul-Humbling and Soul-Abasing

Seventhly, I answer, That all private communion with God is very soul-humbling and soul-abasing. Abraham was a man that had much private communion with God, and a man that was very vile and low in his own eyes. "And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes" (Gen 18:27). "In respect of my original," saith Abraham, "I am but base dust and ashes. And in respect of my deserts, I deserve to be burnt to ashes." There are none so humble as they that have nearest communion with God (Gen 28:10–18). Jacob was a man that had much private communion with God, and a man that was very little in his own eyes. "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant" (Gen 32:10), or, as the Hebrew hath it, "I am less than all thy mercies." When Jacob had to deal with Laban, he pleads his merit; but when he hath to do with God, he debaseth himself below the least of His mercies (Gen 31:38–41). Moses was a man that had much private communion with God, as I have formerly evidenced, and a man that was

the meekest and humblest person in all the world. "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num 12:3).

Josephus, writing of Moses, saith, if he may be believed, "that he was so free from passions that he knew no such thing in his own soul. He only knew passions by their names and saw them in others but felt them not in himself." And so, when the glory of God appeared to him, he falls upon his face (Num 16:22) in token of humility and self-abasing. David was a man that had much private communion with God, as is granted on all hands; and how greatly doth he debase himself and vilify himself! "The king of Israel is come out to seek a flea" (1 Sam 26:20); and what more weak and contemptible than a flea? "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea" (1 Sam 24:14). As if David had said, "It is not worth the while, the labor. It is below the dignity and honor of the king of Israel to take such pains and to pursue so violently after such a poor nothing as I am, who hath no more strength nor power to bite or hurt than a dead dog or a poor flea hath." "But I am a worm, and no man" (Ps 22:6). Now, what is weaker, what less regarded, what more despicable, what more trampled underfoot than a poor worm? The Hebrew word *tolagnath* that is here rendered "worm," signifies a very little worm, such as breed in scarlet, which are so little that a man can scarcely see them or perceive them. Thus you see that holy David debaseth himself below a worm, yea, below the least of worms. No man sets so low a value upon himself as he doth who hath most private communion with God. The four and twenty elders cast down their crowns at the feet of Jesus Christ (Rev 4:10–11). Their crowns note all their inward and outward dignities, excellencies, and glories. And the casting

down of their crowns notes their great humility and self-debasement. When Christians, in their closets and out of their closets, can cast down their crowns, their duties, their services, their graces, their enlargements, their enjoyments at the feet of Jesus Christ and sit down debasing and lessening of themselves, then certainly they have had a very near and sweet communion with God.

Chrysostom hath a remarkable saying of humility: "Suppose," saith he, "that a man were defiled with all manner of sin and enormity, yet humble, and another man enriched with gifts, graces, and duties, yet proud. The humble sinner were in a safer condition than this proud saint."

When a man can come off from closet duties and say, as Ignatius once said of himself, *Non sum dignus dici minimus*, I am not worthy to be called the least, then certainly he hath had fellowship with God in them. All the communion that the creature hath with God in his closet is very soul-humbling and soul-abasing. In all a man's communion with God, some beams, some rays of the glory and majesty of God will shine forth upon his soul. Now all divine manifestations are very humbling and abasing, as you may clearly see in those two great instances of Job and Isaiah. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5–6). "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple… Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isa 6:1, 5). What sweet communion had Elijah with God in the low cave!

There was a gentlewoman, of no ordinary quality or breeding, who, being much troubled in mind and sadly deserted by God, could not be drawn by her husband or any other Christian friends either to hear or read anything that might work for her spiritual advantage. At last, her husband prevailed so far with her by much importunity that she was willing he should read one chapter in the Bible to her. So, he read Isaiah 57, and he came to the 15th verse: "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "Oh," says she, "Is it so, that God dwells with a contrite and humble spirit? Then I am sure He dwells with me, for my heart is broken into a thousand pieces. Oh, happy text and happy time, that ever I should hear such comfort!" And she was thereupon recovered. The more communion any man hath with God, the more humble and broken his heart will be.

Holy Bradford was a man that had much private communion with God, and he would many times subscribe himself in his letters, "John the hypocrite, and a very painted sepulchre." Agur was one of the wisest and holiest men on the earth in his days, and he condemned himself for being "more brutish than any man," and not having "the understanding of a man" (Prov 30:2). How sweet is the smell of the lowly violet, that hides his head, above all the gaudy tulips that be in your garden. The lowly Christian is the most amiable and the loveliest Christian. When a man can come out of his closet and cry out with Augustine, "I hate that which I am, and love and desire that which I am not. O wretched man that I am, in whom the cross of Christ hath not yet eaten out the poisonous and the bitter taste of the first tree." Or, as another

saith, "Lord, I see, and yet am blind. I will, and yet rebel. I hate, and yet I love. I follow, and yet I fall. I press forward, yet I faint. I wrestle, yet I halt;" then he may be confident that he hath had communion with God in his closet. He that comes off from closet duties in a self-debasing way, and in laying of himself low at the foot of God, he certainly hath had communion with God; but when men come out of their closets with their hearts swelled and lifted up, as the hearts of the Pharisees were (Luke 18:11–12), it is evident that they have had no communion with God. God hath not been near to their souls, who say, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou" (Isa 65:5).

8. When It Wounds and Weakens His Beloved Corruption

Eighthly, and lastly, when a man finds such a secret virtue and power running through his closet duties as wounds and weakens his beloved corruption, as breaks the strength and the power of his special sin, as sets his heart more fully, resolutely, and constantly against his darling lust, as stirs up a greater rage, and a more bitter hatred, and a more fierce indignation against the toad in the bosom, then certainly he hath had communion with God in his closet duties.

Consult this scripture: "In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats" (Isa 2:20). In the day wherein God should take these poor hearts into communion with Himself, their hearts should be filled with such rage and indignation against their most delectable and desirable idols that they should take not only those made of trees and stones, but even their most precious and costly idols, those that were made of silver and gold, and cast them

to the moles and to the bats, to note their horrible hatred and indignation against them. Idolatry was the darling sin of the Jews. Their hearts were so exceedingly affected and delighted with their idols that they did not care what they spent upon them. "They lavish gold out of the bag, and weigh silver in the balance, and hire a goldsmith; and he maketh it a god: they fall down, yea, they worship" (Isa 46:6). The word here used for *lavish* in the Hebrew signifies properly to waste or spend riotously. They set so light by their treasure that they cared not what they spent upon their idols. God gave them gold and silver as pledges of His favor and bounty, and they lavish it out upon their idols, as if God had hired them to be wicked. Oh, but when God should come and take these poor wretches into a close and near communion with Himself, then you shall find their wrath and rage to rise against their idols, as you may see in Isaiah 30:19–21. Their communion with God is more than hinted; but mark verse 22, "Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence." None defile, deface, detest, and disgrace their idols like those that are taken into communion with God. Fellowship with God will make a man cast away, as a menstruous cloth, those very idols in which he hath most delighted and with which he hath been most pleased and enamored.

Idols were Ephraim's bosom sin. "Ephraim is joined," or glued, as the Hebrew hath it, "to idols: let him alone" (Hos 4:17). Oh! But when you find Ephraim taken into close communion with God, as you do in Hosea 14:4–7, then you shall find another spirit upon him. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hos 14:8). I have had too much to do with them already. I will never have to do

with them anymore. Oh! How doth my soul detest and abhor them and rise up against them. Oh! How do I now more loathe and abominate them than ever I have formerly loved them or delighted in them! After the return of the Jews out of Babylon, they so hated and abhorred idols that in the time of the Romans they chose rather to die than suffer the eagle, which was the imperial arms, to be set up in their temple.

Though closet duties are weak in themselves, yet when a man hath communion with God in them then they prove exceeding powerful to the casting down of strongholds, and vain imaginations, and every high thing and thought, "that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor 10:4–5). When a man comes out of his closet with a heart more fully and steadfastly set against every known sin, but especially against his bosom sin, his darling-sin, his Delilah that he played and sported himself most with, and that he hath hugged with pleasure and delight in his bosom, then certainly he hath had private communion with God.

After Moses had enjoyed forty days' private communion with God in the mount, how did his heart rise and his anger wax hot against the molten calf that his people had made! "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it" (Exod 32:19–20). Moses had never more intimate fellowship with God than now, and he never discovered so much holy zeal, anger, and indignation against sin as now. When a man comes off from the mount of closet duties with a greater hatred, anger, wrath, and indignation against bosom

sins, darling sins, complexion sins, that were once as dear to him as right hands or right eyes, or as Delilah was to Samson, or Herodias to Herod, or Isaac to Abraham, or Joseph to Jacob, then certainly he hath had communion with God in those duties. When a man finds his beloved sins, his Delilahs, which, like the prince of devils, command all other sins, to fall before his closet duties, as Dagon fell before the ark, or as Goliath fell before David, then assuredly he hath had fellowship with God in them. Pliny writes of some families that had privy marks on their bodies, peculiar to those of that line. Certainly, there are no families, no persons, but have some sin or sins, some privy marks on their souls, that may in a peculiar way be called theirs. Now when in private duties they find the bent of their hearts, and the purposes, resolutions, and inclinations of their souls more raised, inflamed, and set against these, they may safely and comfortably conclude, that they have had communion with God in them. O sirs! There is no bosom sin so sweet or profitable that is worth burning in hell for, or worth shutting out of heaven for; and therefore, in all your private duties and services, labor after that communion with God in them that may break the neck and heart of your most bosom sins. When Darius fled before Alexander, that he might run the faster out of danger, he threw away his massy crown from his head. As ever you would be safe from eternal danger, throw away your golden and your silver idols; throw away your bosom sins, your darling lusts.

And thus I have done with the answers to that noble and necessary question that was last proposed.

i. Look That the Glory of God Be Your Ultimate End

My ninth advice and counsel is this: In all your closet duties, look that your ends be right; look that the glory of God be your ultimate end, the mark, the white, that you have in your eye. There is a great truth in that old saying, *Quod non actibus, sed finibus pensantur officia*, "Duties are esteemed not by their acts but by their ends."

Look, as the shining sun puts out the light of the fire, so the glory of God must consume all other ends. There may be *malum opus in bona materia* (a bad work in a good matter), as in Jehu's zeal. Two things make a good Christian, good actions and good aims. And though a good aim doth not make a bad action good, as in Uzzah, yet a bad aim makes a good action bad, as in Jehu, whose justice was approved but his policy punished. God writes a nothing upon all those services wherein men's ends are not right. "They obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do" (Jer 32:23). "All this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God" (Dan 9:13). The Jews were very much in religious duties and services, witness Isa 1:11–15; Isa 58:1–3; Zech 7:5–6. I might produce a hundred more witnesses to confirm it, were it necessary; but because they did not aim at the glory of God in what they did, therefore the Lord writes a nothing upon all their duties and services. It was Ephraim's folly that he brought forth fruit unto himself (Hos 10:1). And it was the Pharisees' hypocrisy that in all their duties and services they looked at the praise of men. "Verily," saith Christ, "they have their reward" (Matt 6:1–5). A poor, a pitiful reward indeed! Such men shall be sure to fall short of

divine acceptance and of a glorious recompense, that are not able to look above the praises of men. Woe to that man that, with Augustus, is ambitious to go off the stage of duty with a plaudit. Peter was not himself when he denied his Lord and cursed himself to get credit amongst a cursed crew. As ever you would ask and have, speak and speed, seek and find, look that the glory of the Lord be engraven upon all your closet duties.

He shall be sure to speed best whose heart is set most upon glorifying of God in all his secret retirements. When God crowns us, He doth but crown His own gifts in us; and when we give God the glory of all we do, we do but give Him the glory that is due unto His name; for it is He, and He alone, that works all our works in us and for us. All closet duties are good or bad as the mark is at which the soul aims. He that makes God the object of closet prayer, but not the end of closet prayer, doth but lose his prayer and take pains to undo himself. God will be Alexander or Nemo; He will be all in all, or he will be nothing at all.

Such prayers never reach the ear of God, nor delight the heart of God, nor shall ever be lodged in the bosom of God, that are not directed to the glory of God. The end must be as noble as the means, or else a man may be undone after all his doings. A man's most glorious actions will at last be found to be but glorious sins if he hath made himself, and not the glory of God, the end of those actions.

j. Offer All Your Closet Prayers in Christ's Name, and in His Alone

My tenth advice and counsel is this: Be sure that you offer all your closet prayers in Christ's name, and in His alone. "And

whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13–14). "That whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full…At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you" (John 16:23–24, 26). O sirs! This is your privilege as well as your comfort, that you never deal with God but by a mediator. When you appear before God, Jesus Christ appears with you, and He appears for you; when you do *invocare*, call on, pray, then He doth *advocare*, call out to, advocate. When you put up your petitions, then He doth make intercession for you. Christ gives you a commission to put His name upon all your requests; and whatsoever prayer comes up with this name upon it, He will procure it an answer.

In the state of innocence, man might worship God without a mediator; but since sin hath made so wide a breach between God and man, God will accept of no worship from man, but what is offered up by the hand of a mediator. Now this mediator is Christ alone. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). One mediator, not of redemption only, as the papists grant, but of intercession also, which they deny.

The papists make saints and angels co-mediators with Christ; but in this, as in other things, they fight against clear Scripture light. The apostle plainly tells us that the office of intercession pertaineth unto Christ as part of His mediation (Heb 7:25); and it is certain that we need no other master of requests in heaven but the man Christ Jesus, Who being

so near to the Father, and so dear to the Father, and so much in with the Father, can doubtless carry anything with the Father that makes for His glory and our good. This was typified in the law. The high priest alone did enter into the sanctuary and carry the names of the children of Israel before the Lord, whilst the people stood all without. This pointed out Christ's mediation (Exod 28:29). In Leviticus 16:13–14, you read of two things: first, of the cloud of incense that covered the mercy-seat; secondly, of the blood of the bullock, that was sprinkled before the mercy-seat. Now that blood typified Christ's satisfaction, and the cloud of incense His intercession.

Some of the learned think that Christ intercedes only by virtue of His merits; others, that it is done only with His mouth. I conjecture it may be done both ways, the rather because Christ hath a tongue, as also a whole body, but glorified, in heaven; and is it likely that that mouth which pleaded so much for us on earth should be altogether silent for us in heaven?

There is no coming to the Father but by the Son (John 14:6). Christ is the true Jacob's ladder by which we must ascend to heaven. Joseph, you know, commanded his brethren that as ever they looked for any good from him or to see his face with joy, that they should be sure to bring their brother Benjamin along with them. O sirs! As ever you would be prevalent with God, as ever you would have sweet, choice, and comfortable returns from heaven to all your closet prayers, be sure that you bring your elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the arms of your faith. Be sure that you treat and trade with God only in the name of the Lord Jesus.

It is a notable speech that Luther hath upon the 130th Psalm: "Often and willingly," saith he, "do I inculcate this, that

you should shut your eyes, and your ears, and say, you know no God out of Christ, none but He that was in the lap of Mary and sucked her breasts." *Dulce nomen Christi* (Sweet is the name of Christ). He means none out of Him. When you go to closet prayer, look that you pray not in your own names, but in the name of Christ; and that you plead not in your own names, but in the name of Christ; and that you believe and hope not in your own names, but in the name of Christ; and that you look not to speed in your own names, but in the name of Christ. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col 3:17). Whatsoever we do, we are to do it by the authority of Christ, and through the assistance of Christ, and in the name of Christ, and for the sake and glory of Christ.

Christ's name is so precious and powerful with the Father that it will carry any suit, obtain any request at His hands. Jesus, in the China tongue, signifies the rising sun. When a man writes the name of Jesus upon his closet prayers, then he shall be sure to speed. Though God will not give a man a drop, a sip, a crumb, a crust, for his own sake, yet for Jesus' sake He will give the best, the choicest, and the greatest blessings that heaven affords. That name is still mighty and powerful, prevalent and precious before the Lord. The prayers that were offered up with the incense upon the altar were pleasing (Rev 8:3) and came up with acceptance (v. 4). Joseph's brethren were kindly used for Benjamin's sake.

O sirs! All our duties and services are accepted of the Father, not for their own sakes, nor for our sakes, but for Christ's sake. There are no prayers that are either heard, owned, accepted, regarded, or rewarded, but such as Christ puts His hand to. If Christ doth not mingle His blood with our sacrifices, our services, they will be lost, and never ascend

as incense before the Lord. No coin is current that hath not Caesar's stamp upon it; and no prayers go current in heaven that have not the stamp of Christ upon them. There is nothing more pleasing to our heavenly Father than to use the mediation of His Son. Such shall be sure to find most favor and to speed best in the court of heaven who still present themselves before the Father with Christ in their arms.

k. Narrowly Watch What Becomes of Your Private Prayers

My eleventh and last advice and counsel is this: When you come out of your closets, narrowly watch what becomes of your private prayers. Look at what door, in what way, and by what hand the Lord shall please to give you an answer to the secret desires of your souls in a corner. It hath been the custom of the people of God to look after their prayers, to see what success they have had, to observe what entertainment they have found in heaven.

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up" (Ps 5:3). In the words you may observe two things: first, David's posture in prayer; secondly, his practice after prayer. First, his posture in prayer: I will "direct my prayer unto thee." Secondly, his practice after prayer, and I "will look up." The prophet, in these words, makes use of two military words. First, he would not only pray, but marshal up his prayers, he would put them in battle-array; so much the Hebrew word *gnarach*, translated "direct," imports. Secondly, when he had done this, then he would be as a spy upon his watch-tower, to see whether he prevailed, whether he got the day or no; and so much the Hebrew word *tsaphah*, translated "look up,"

imports. When David had set his prayers, his petitions, in rank and file, in good array, then he was resolved he would look abroad, he would look about him, to see at what door God would send in an answer of prayer. He is either a fool or a madman, he is either very weak or very wicked, that prays and prays but never looks after his prayers, that shoots many an arrow towards heaven but never minds where his arrows alight.

"I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints" (Ps 85:8). If David would have God to hearken to his prayers he must then hearken to what God will speak, and upon this point it seems he was fully resolved. The prophet's prayer you have in the seven first verses of this psalm, and his gracious resolution you have in the eighth verse. "I will hear what God the LORD will speak." As if he had said, "Certainly it will not be long before the Lord will give me a gracious answer, a seasonable and a suitable return to my present prayers."

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications…I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning" (Ps 130:1–2, 5–6). Those that watch abroad in dangerous times and tedious weather look frequently after peep of day. How doth the weary sentinel that is wet with the rain of heaven or with the dew of the night wait and watch, look and long, for the morning light. Now this was the frame and temper of David's spirit when he came off from praying; he falls a-waiting for a gracious answer. Shall the husbandman wait for the precious fruits of the earth, and shall the merchantman wait for the return of

his ships, and shall the wife wait for the return of her husband that is gone a long journey, and shall not a Christian wait for the return of his prayers (Jas 5:7–8)? Noah patiently waited for the return of the dove to the ark with an olive branch in its mouth, so must you patiently wait for the return of your prayers. When children shoot their arrows, they never mind where they fall; but when prudent archers shoot their arrows up into the air, they stand and watch where they fall. You must deal by your prayers as prudent archers do by their arrows.

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me" (Hab 2:1). The prophet, in the former chapter, having been very earnest in his expostulations, and very fervent in his supplications, he gets now upon his watchtower to see what becomes of his prayers. He stands as a sentinel and watches as vigilantly and as carefully as a spy, a scout, earnestly longing to hear and see the event, the issue, and success of his prayers.

That Christian that in prayer hath one eye upon a divine precept and another upon a gracious promise, that Christian will be sure to look after his prayers. He that prays and waits, and waits and prays, shall be sure to speed. He shall never fail of rich returns (Ps 40:1–4). He that can want as well as wait, and he that can be contented that God is glorified though he be not gratified; he that dares not antedate God's promises, but patiently waits for the accomplishment of them, he may be confident that he shall have seasonable and suitable answers to all those prayers that he hath posted away to heaven. Though God seldom comes at our time, yet He never fails to come at His own time. "He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry" (Heb 10:37). The mercies of God are not styled "the swift," but "the sure" mercies of David (Isa 55:3).

He that makes as much conscience to look after his prayers as to pray shall shortly clap his hands for joy and cry out with that blessed martyr, "He is come, Austin, He is come, He is come."

Certainly, there is little worth in that man's heart or in that man's prayers who keeps up a trade of prayer but never looks what becomes of his prayers. When you are in your closets, marshal your prayers. See that every prayer keeps his place and ground, and when you come out of your closets then look up for an answer. Only take heed that you be not too hasty and hot with God. Though mercy in the promise be yours, yet the time of giving it out is the Lord's. And therefore, you must wait as well as pray.

And thus much by way of counsel and advice for the better carrying on of closet prayer.

4. Means, Rules, and Directions

I have now but one thing more to do before I shut up this discourse, and that is, to lay down some means, rules, or directions that may be of use to help you on in a faithful and conscientious discharge of this great duty of closet prayer. And therefore, thus,

a. Take Heed of an Idle and Slothful Spirit

First, as ever you would give up yourselves to private prayer, take heed of an idle and slothful spirit. If Adam in the state of innocence must work and dress the garden, and if after his Fall when he was monarch of all the world he must yet labor, why should any be idle or slothful? Idleness is a sin against the law of creation. God creating man to labor, the idle person violates this law of creation; for by his idleness he casts off the authority of his Creator Who made him for labor. Idleness is a contradiction to the principles of our creation. Man in innocence should have been freed from weariness but not from employment; he was to dress the garden by divine appointment. "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen 2:15). All weariness in labor, and all vexing, tiring, and tormenting labor, came in by the Fall. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" (Gen 3:19). The bread of idleness is neither sweet nor sure. "An idle soul shall suffer hunger," saith Solomon

(Prov 19:15). An idle life and an holy heart are far enough asunder. "By doing nothing," saith the heathen man, "men learn to do evil things." It is easy slipping out of an idle life into an evil and wicked life. Yea, an idle life is of itself evil, for man was made to be active, not to be idle. The Cyclops thought man's happiness did consist *in nihil agendo*, in doing nothing, but no excellent thing can be the child of idleness. Idleness is a mother-sin, a breeding-sin. It is *pulvinar diaboli*, the devil's cushion, on which he sits, and the devil's anvil on which he frames very great and very many sins (Eph 4:28; 2 Thess 3:10, 12). Look, as toads and serpents breed most in standing waters, so sin thrives most in idle persons. Idleness is that which provokes the Lord to forsake men's bodies and the devil to possess their souls.

No man hath less means to preserve his body and more temptations to infect his soul than an idle person. Oh, shake off sloth! The sluggish Christian will be sleeping, or idling, or trifling, when he should be in his closet a-praying. Sloth is the green-sickness of the soul; get it cured, or it will be your eternal bane. Of all devils, it is the idle devil that keeps men most out of their closets. There is nothing that gives the devil so much advantage against us as idleness. It was good counsel that Jerome gave to his friend, *Facito aliquid operis, ut te semper Diabolus inveniat occupatum*, "Do some work so that the devil always finds you busy," that when the devil comes with a temptation you may answer him you are not at leisure.

It was the speech of Mr. Greenham, a famous and painful preacher of this nation, that when the devil tempted a poor soul, she came to him for advice how she might resist the temptation, and he gave her this answer: "Never be idle but be always well employed. For in my own experience, I have

found it, when the devil came to tempt me, I told him that I was not at leisure to hearken to his temptations; and by this means I resisted all his assaults." Idleness is the hour of temptation; and an idle person is the devil's tennis-ball, tossed by him at his pleasure.

"He that labors," said the old hermit, "is tempted but by one devil, but he that is idle is assaulted by all." Cupid complained that he could never fasten upon the Muses because he could never find them idle. The fowler bends his bow and spreads his net for birds when they are set, not when they are upon the wing. So Satan shoots his most fiery darts at men when they are most idle and slothful. And this the Sodomites found by woeful experience (Ezek 16:49), when God rained hell out of heaven upon them, both for their idleness, and for those other sins of theirs, which their idleness did expose them to.

It was said of Rome that during the time of their wars with Carthage and other enemies in Africa, they knew not what vice meant; but no sooner had they got the conquest but through idleness they came to ruin. Idleness is a sin, not only against the law of grace, but also against the light of nature. You cannot look any way, but every creature checks and upbraids your idleness and sloth. If you look up to the heavens, there you shall find all their glorious lights constant in their motions. The sun "rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race" (Ps 19:5; 104:23). The winds blow, the waters run, the earth brings forth her pleasant and delightful fruits. All the fish in the sea, fowls in the air, and beasts in the fields and on the mountains have their motions and operations, all which call aloud upon man not to be idle, but active.

Solomon sends the sluggard to the ant to learn industry (Prov 6:6). The ant is a very little creature but exceeding laborious. Nature hath put an instinct into her to be very

busy and active all the summer; she is early and late at it and will not lose an hour unless the weather hinder. And the prophet Jeremiah sends the Jews to school to learn to wait and observe of the stork, the turtle dove, the crane, and the swallow (Jer 8:7). And our Savior sends us to the sparrows and lilies to learn attendance upon providence (Matt 6:26, 28). And let me send you to the busy bee to learn activity and industry. Though the bee be little in bulk, yet it is great in service. She flies far, examines the fields, hedges, trees, orchards, gardens, and loads herself with honey and wax, and then returns to her hive.

Now how should the activity of these creatures put the idle person to a blush. O sirs! Man is the most noble creature, into whom God hath put principles of the greatest activity, as capable of the greatest and highest enjoyments; and therefore, idleness is a forgetting man's dignity, a forsaking of that rank that God hath set him in, and a debasing of himself below the least and meanest creatures, who constantly in their order obediently serve the law of their creation. Nay, if you look up to the blessed angels above you, you shall still find them active and serviceable. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb 1:14). And if you look down to the angels of darkness below you, oh, how laborious and industrious are they to destroy and damn your precious and immortal souls (1 Pet 5:8)!

For a close, remember that idleness is so great an evil that it hath been condemned and severely punished by the very worst of men. Among the Egyptians, idleness was a capital crime. Among the Lucans, he that lent money to an idle person was to lose it. By Solon's law, idle persons were to suffer death. And Seneca had rather be sick than idle.

The Lacedaemonians called men to an account for their idle hours. Among the Corinthians, idle persons were delivered to the *carnifex*, the executioner.

Antoninus Pius, being emperor, caused the roofs and coverings of all such houses as were known to receive in idle people to be taken away, affirming that nothing was more uncomely, or absurd to be suffered, than such idle caterpillars and slow-worms to have their food and nourishment from that commonwealth in the maintenance of which there was no supply from their industry and labor. All which should steel us and arm us against sloth and idleness. I have the longer insisted on this because there is not a greater hindrance to closet prayer than sloth and idleness. Slothful and idle persons commonly lie so long a-bed and spend so much precious time between the comb and the glass, and in eating, drinking, sporting, and trifling, etc., that they can find no time for private prayer. Certainly, such as had rather go sleeping to hell than sweating to heaven will never care much for closet prayer. And therefore, shun sloth and idleness as you would shun a lion in the way, poison in your meat, or coals in your bosom, or else you will never find time to wait upon God in your closets.

b. Take Heed of Spending Your Precious Time about Circumstantials

Secondly, take heed of spending too much of your precious time about circumstantials, about the little things of religion, as "mint and anise and cummin" (Matt 23:23), or in searching into the circumstances of worship, or in standing stoutly for this or that ceremony, and in the mean while neglect the studying of the covenant of grace, or about inquiring what

fruit that was that Adam ate in Paradise, or in inquiring after the authors of such and such books, whose names God in His infinite wisdom hath concealed, or in inquiring what God did before the world was made. When one asked Augustine that question, he answered that he was preparing hell for such busy questionists as he was. It was a saying of Luther, "From a vain-glorious doctor, from a contentious pastor, and from unprofitable questions, the good Lord deliver His church."

It is one of Satan's great designs to hinder men in the great and weighty duties of religion by busying them most about the lowest and least matters of religion. Satan is never better pleased than when he sees Christians puzzled and perplexed about those things in religion that are of no great moment or importance (Col 2:21). Such as negotiate and trade in religion more for a good name than a good life, for a good report than a good conscience, for to humor others than to honor God, etc., such will take no pleasure in closet duties. Such as are more busied about ceremonies than substances, about the form of godliness than the power (2 Tim 3:5), such will never make it their business to be much with God in their closets, as is evident in the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 6:1–6). Such as are more taken up with the outward dress and garb of religion than they are with the spirit, power, and life of religion—such will never affect to drive a secret trade heavenwards (Luke 11:34–40). There cannot be a surer nor a greater character of an hypocrite than to make a great deal of stir about little things in religion and in the mean while neglect the great and main things in religion. Such as these have all along in the Scripture discovered a strangeness and a perfect carelessness as to closet duties. I never knew any man hot and zealous about circumstantials, about the little things of religion, that was ever famous for closet prayer.

c. Take Heed of Curiosity in Searching Dark and Abstruse Truths

Thirdly, take heed of curiosity, and of spending too much of your precious time in searching into those dark, abstruse, mysterious, and hidden truths and things of God and religion that lie most remote from the understanding of the best and wisest of men. Curiosity is the spiritual adultery of the soul. Curiosity is a spiritual drunkenness; for look, as the drunkard is never satisfied unless he see the bottom of the cup, be it never so deep, so those that are troubled with the itch of curiosity will say they can never be satisfied until they come to the bottom of the most deep and profound things of God. They love to pry into God's secrets and to scan the mysteries of religion by their weak, shallow reason and to be wise above what is written. Curious searchers into the deep mysterious things of God will make all God's depths to be shallows rather than they will be thought not able to fathom them by the short line of their own reason.

Oh, that men would once learn to be contentedly ignorant where God would not have them knowing! Oh, that men were once so humble as to account it no disparagement to them to acknowledge some depths in God and in the blessed Scripture, which their shallow reason cannot fathom! They are only a company of fools in folio that affect to know more than God would have them. Did not Adam's tree of knowledge make him and his posterity mere fools? He that goes to school to his own reason hath a fool for his schoolmaster. The ready way to grow stark blind is to be still prying and gazing upon the body of the sun; so the ready way to spiritual blindness is to be still prying into the most secret and hidden things of God (Deut 29:29). Are there not many

who, by prying long into the secrets of nature, are become archenemies to the grace of God (Rom 9:20)? Oh, that we were wise to admire those deep mysteries which we cannot understand and to adore those depths and counsels which we cannot reach (Rom 11:33).

Oh, let us check our curiosity in the things of God and sit down satisfied and contented to resolve many of God's actions into some hidden causes which lie secret in the abyss of His eternal knowledge and infallible will. Christ, when He was on earth, very frequently, severely, and sharply condemned curious inquirers, as is evident by these scriptures (John 21:22; Acts 1:6–7; Luke 13:23–24). And the great reason why our Savior did so frequently check this humor of curiosity was because the great indulgers of it were too frequent neglecters of the more great, necessary, and important points of religion.

Curiosity is one of Satan's most dangerous engines by which he keeps many souls out of their closets, yea, out of heaven. When many a poor soul begins in good earnest to look towards heaven and to apply himself to closet duties, then Satan begins to bestir himself and to labor with all his might so to busy the poor soul with vain inquiries and curious speculations and unprofitable curiosities that the soul hath no time for closet prayer. Ah! How well might it have been with many a man had he but spent one quarter of that time in closet prayer that he hath spent in curious inquiries after things that have not been fundamental to his happiness.

The heathenish priests affected curiosity; they had their mythologies and strange canting expressions of their imaginary inaccessible deities, to amaze and amuse their blind superstitious followers, and thereby to hold up their popish and apish idolatries in greater veneration. Oh, that there were

none of this heathenish spirit among many in these days who have their faces toward heaven! Ah! How many are there that busy themselves more in searching after the reasons of the irrecoverableness of man's Fall than they do to recover themselves out of their fallen estate! Ah, how many are there that busy themselves more about the apostasy of the angels than they do about securing their interest in Christ! And what a deal of precious time have some spent in discovering the natures, distinctions, properties, and orders of angels.

That high-soaring, counterfeit Dionysius describes the hierarchy of angels as exactly as if he had dwelt among them. He saith there are nine orders of them, which he grounds upon nine words which are found partly in the Old Testament and partly in the New: as seraphims, cherubims, thrones, powers, hosts, dominions, principalities, archangels, and angels. And at large he describes their several natures, distinctions, and properties, as that the first three orders are for immediate attendance on the Almighty, and the next three orders for the general government of the creatures, and the last three orders for the particular good of God's elect; that the archangel surpasses the beauty of angels ten times, principalities surpass the archangels twenty times, and that powers surpass the principalities forty times, etc. How he came by this learning is not known, and yet this hierarchy in these nine several orders hath passed for current through many ages of the church.

The Platonics were the first that divided the angels into three orders, as, some above heaven, called *supercoelestes*; others in heaven, called *coelestes*; and others under heaven, called *subcoelestes*, and accordingly they assign them several offices. As,

First, they above heaven, I mean this visible heaven, continually stand before God, as they say, praising, and lauding, and magnifying of His name.

Secondly, they in heaven are there seated to move, rule, and govern the stars.

Thirdly, they under heaven are some to rule kingdoms, others provinces, others cities, others particular men.

Several Christian writers that have written on the hierarchy of angels follow these opinions. Now, if we should take these surmises for real truths, then it will follow that the highest angels do not minister to the saints but only and immediately to God Himself, which is expressly contrary to several scriptures, as you may see by these among others (Jude 9; Luke 1:19, 26; Zech 4:10; Rev 5:6; Heb 1:14). When I was upon the ministration of the blessed angels, I did then prove in several exercises, as some of you may remember, that all the angels in heaven were commanded and commissionated by God to be serviceable and useful to the heirs of salvation. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb 1:14).

The devil knows he is no loser, and the curious soul but a very little gainer, if he can but persuade him to spend most of his precious time in studying and poring upon the most dark, mysterious, and hidden things of God. He that affects to read the Revelation of John more than his plain epistles, or Daniel's prophecies more than David's psalms, and is more busy about reconciling difficult scriptures than he is about mortifying of unruly lusts, or that is set more upon vain speculations than upon things that make most for edification, he is not the man that is cut out for closet prayer.

Such as affect sublime notions, obscure expressions, and are men of abstracted conceits are but a company of wise

fools that will never take any delight to be with God in a corner. Had many men spent but half that time in secret prayer that they have spent in seeking after the philosopher's stone, how happy might they have been! Oh, how holy, how happy, how heavenly, how humble, how wise, how knowing, might many men have been had they spent but half that time in closet prayer that they have spent in searching after those things that are "hard to be understood" (2 Pet 3:16)!

d. Take Heed of Engaging in a Crowd of Worldly Businesses

Fourthly, take heed of engaging yourselves in a crowd of worldly businesses. Many have so much to do on earth that they have no time to look up to heaven. As much earth puts out the fire, so much worldly business puts out the fire of heavenly affections. Look, as the earth swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16:32), so much worldly business swallows up so much precious time that many men have no leisure to be with God in their closets. "This business is to be done, and that business cannot be omitted, and the other necessary occasion must be attended, so that I have no leisure to step out of my shop into my closet," saith the earthly-minded man (Phil 3:19).

Thus, a crowd of worldly businesses crowds closet prayer quite out of doors. Many drive so great a trade in their shops that their private trade to heaven is quite laid by. There is nothing that hath kept men more from Christ and closet prayer than the shop, the exchange, the farm, and the oxen (Luke 14:16–22). The stars which have least circuit are nearest the pole; and men that are least perplexed with worldly businesses are commonly nearest to God, to Christ,

to heaven, and so the fitter for closet prayer. It is sad when men grasp so much business that they can have no leisure for communion with God in a corner. The noise is such in a mill as hinders all private intercourse between man and man; and so a multitude of worldly businesses make such a noise as that it hinders all private intercourse between God and the soul. If a man of much business should now and then slide into his closet, yet his head and his heart will be so filled and distracted with the thoughts of his employments that God shall have little of him but his bodily presence, or, at most, but bodily exercise, which profits little (1 Tim 4:8). If Christ blamed Martha for the multitude of her domestical employments (Luke 10:40–42), though they were undertaken for the immediate service and entertainment of Himself, because they hindered her in her soul-concernments, oh, how will He one day blame all those who, by running themselves into a crowd of worldly businesses, do cut themselves off from all opportunities of pouring out their souls before Him in secret.

e. Take Heed of Secret Sins

Fifthly, take heed of secret sins. There is no greater hindrance to secret prayer in all the world than secret sins; therefore, stand upon your watch and arm yourselves with all your might against them. There is an antipathy between secret sinning and secret praying, partly from guilt, which makes the soul shy of coming under God's secret eye; and partly from those fears, doubts, disputes, and disorders that secret sins raise in the heart. Light is not more opposite to darkness, Christ to Belial, nor heaven to hell, than secret prayer is to secret sins; and therefore, whatever you do, look that you keep clear of secret sins. To that purpose consider these four things:

1. God Is Privy to Our Most Secret Sins

First, that God is privy to our most secret sins. His eye is as much upon secret sins as it is upon open sins. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Ps 90:8). God hath an eye upon our inmost evils; He seeth all that is done in the dark. "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD" (Jer 23:24). "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov 15:3). To say that God doth not see the most secret sins of the children of men is not only derogatory to His omniscience but also to His mercy; for how can God pardon those sins which He doth not see to be sins? There is no cloud, nor curtain, nor moment of darkness, that can stand betwixt the eyes of God and the ways of men. "The ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings" (Prov 5:21). In this scripture, Solomon mainly speaks of the ways of the adulterer, which usually are plotted with the most cunning secrecy, yet God seeth all those ways. Look, as no boldness can exempt the adulterer from the justice of God, so no secrecy can hide him from the eye of God. Though men labor to hide their ways from others and from themselves yet it is but labor in vain to endeavor to hide them from God. Men that labor to hide God from themselves can never hide themselves from God.

I have read that Paphnutius converted Thais and Ephron, two famous strumpets, from uncleanness only with this argument, "That God seeth all things in the dark, when the doors are fast, the windows shut, and the curtains drawn." "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened (anatomized) unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13). It is an

allusion to the priests under the law, who, when they killed a beast, all things that were within the beast were laid open and naked before the priest that he might see what was sound and what was corrupted. Though evil be done out of the eye of all the world, yet it is naked and manifest in His sight with Whom we have to do.

Those sins which lie closest and are most secretly lurking in the heart are as obvious and odious to God as those that are most fairly written upon a man's forehead. God is πανόφθαλμος, "all eye"; so that He sees all the most secret turnings and windings of our hearts. Our most secret sins are as plainly seen by Him as anything can be by us at noonday. "If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Ps 139:11–12). It is not the thickest clouds that can bar out His observance, Whose eyes fill heaven and earth. What is the curtain, or the darkest night, or the double lock, or the secret chamber, to Him Who clearly observes all things in a perfect nakedness. God hath an eye upon the most inward intentions of the heart and the most subtle motions of the spirit. Those philosophers were out that held the eye and care of God descended no lower than the heavens. Certainly, there is not a creature, not a thought, not a thing but lies open to the all-seeing eye of God. The Lord knows our secret sinnings as exactly as our visible sinnings. "He knoweth the secrets of the heart" (Ps 44:21). Would not a malefactor speak truly at the bar did he know, did he believe, that the judge had windows that did look into his breast?

Athenodorus, a heathen, could say that all men ought to be careful in the actions of their life because God was everywhere and beheld all that was done.

Zeno, a wise heathen, affirmed that God beheld even the thoughts.

It was an excellent saying of Ambrose, "If thou canst not hide thyself from the sun, which is God's minister of light, how impossible will it be to hide thyself from Him Whose eyes are ten thousand times brighter than the sun." Though a sinner may baffle his conscience, yet he cannot baffle the eye of God's omniscience. Oh, that poor souls would remember that as they are never out of the reach of God's hand, so they are never from under the view of His eye. God is *totus oculus*, "all eye." "For mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes" (Jer 16:17). "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings. There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves" (Job 34:21–22). "For thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer 32:19).

You know what Ahasuerus, that great monarch, said concerning Haman, when coming in he found him cast upon the queen's bed on which she sat. "What?" saith he, "Will he force the queen…before me in the house?" (Esth 7:8). There was the killing emphasis in the words "before me." "Will he force the queen…*before me*." What, will he dare to commit such villainy, and I stand and look on? O sirs! To sin in the sight of God, to do wickedly under the eye of God, is a thing that He looks upon as the greatest affront, and as the highest indignity that can possibly be done unto Him. What, saith He, wilt thou be drunk before Me? Wilt thou swear and blaspheme before Me? Wilt thou be wanton and unclean before Me? Wilt thou be unjust and unrighteous under Mine eye? Wilt thou profane My Sabbaths, and pollute My ordinances

before My face? Wilt thou despise and persecute My servants in My presence?

This, then, is the killing aggravation of all sin, that it is done before the face of God, that it is committed in the royal presence of the King of kings—whereas the very consideration of God's omnipresence should bravely arm us against sin and Satan. The consideration of His all-seeing eye should make us shun all occasions of sin and make us shy of all appearances of sin. Shall the eye of the master keep the scholar from blotting his copy? Shall the eye of the judge keep the malefactor from picking and stealing? Shall the eye of the master keep the servant from idling and trifling? Shall the eye of the father keep the child from wandering and gadding? Shall the eye of the husband keep the wife from extravagancies and indecencies? Shall the sharp eye of wise Cato, or the quick eye of a near neighbor, or the severe eye of a bosom friend keep thee from many enormities and vanities? And shall not the strict, the pure, the jealous eye of an all-seeing God keep thee from sinning in the secret chamber when all curtains are drawn, doors bolted, and everyone in the house a-bed or abroad but thee and thy Delilah? Oh, what dreadful atheism is bound up in that man's heart who is more afraid of the eye of his father, his pastor, his child, his servant, than he is of the eye, the presence, of the eternal God? Oh, that all whom this concerns would take such serious notice of it as to judge themselves severely for it, as to mourn bitterly over it, as to strive mightily in prayer with God both for the pardon of it and for power against it.

The apostle sadly complains of some in his time who wallowed in secret sins. "For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret" (Eph 5:12). He speaks of such as lived in secret fornications and unclean-

ness. There were many that had put on a form of godliness who yet did allow themselves in the secret actings of abominable wickedness and filthiness, as if there were no God to behold them, nor conscience to accuse them, nor Judgment Day to arraign them, nor justice to condemn them, nor hell to torment them. Oh! How infinitely odious must they be in the eyes of a holy God who can highly court and compliment Him in public and yet are so bold as to provoke Him to His face in private. These are like those whores who pretend a great deal of affection and respect to their husbands abroad and yet at home will play the harlots before their husbands' eyes.

Such as perform religious duties only to cloak and color over their secret filthinesses, their secret wickednesses; such as pretend to pay their vows and yet wait for the twilight (Prov 7:13–15; Job 24:15); such as commit wickedness in a corner and yet with the harlot wipe their mouths and say, "What have we done?"—such shall at last find the chambers, the stones out of the wall, the beam out of the timber, the seats they sit on, and the beds they lie on, to witness against all their wanton dalliances, and lascivious carriages in secret (Hab 2:11). "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb 13:4). He will sentence them Himself. And why but because such sinners carry it so closely and craftily that oftentimes none but God can find them out? Magistrates often neglect the punishing of such sinners when their secret wickedness is made known; and therefore, God Himself will sit in judgment upon them. Though they may escape the eyes of men, yet they shall never escape the judgment of God. Heart iniquities fall not under any human sentence. Usually, whoremongers and adulterers are marvelous close and secret and subtle to conceal their abominable filthiness; therefore

the harlot is said to be subtle of heart (Prov 7:10). The Hebrew by Rabbi Solomon is translated *munito corde*, "and having her heart fenced." "For," saith he, "as a city is environed with fortifications, so her heart is fortified round about with subtilty." Or else it may be rendered *occlusa corde*, "fast shut up in the heart, even as close as a besieged city," that is, "most secret in the subtilty of her heart, how open soever she be in the boldness of her outward carriage." So the prophet Agur reckoneth the way of a man with a maid and the way of an adulterous woman among those things which neither himself nor any other man was possibly able to discover and find out, and compares it to the way of three things which no wit nor industry of man is able to descry. But yet God seeth all and will bring them to the bar for all (Prov 30:19–20).

2. Secret Sins Shall Be Revealed

Secondly, consider that secret sins shall be revealed. The most hidden works of darkness shall be openly manifested, for though the actings of sin be in the dark, yet the judgings of sin shall be in the light. "For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad" (Luke 8:17). The slanders of the Jews concerning the magical arts of Christ and His apostles, the horrible lies of the pagans concerning the incestuous copulations of the Christians and their drinking man's blood, were in time discovered what they were. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl 12:14). Mark, he doth not say "some work," but "every work"; and not only works, but secrets; and not only secrets, but every secret; and not only secret good things but evil too. Whether good works or ill works, whether secret or open, all must be brought

to judgment. The books of God's omniscience and man's conscience shall then be opened; and then secret sins shall be as legible in thy forehead as if they were written with the most glittering sunbeams upon a wall of crystal. All men's secret sins are printed in heaven, and God will at last read them aloud in the ears of all the world. "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor 4:5).

Look, as there are a world of flies and motes in the air which we never see until the sun shines, so there are many thousand thousands of proud thoughts, and unclean thoughts, and worldly thoughts, and malicious thoughts, and envious thoughts, and bloody thoughts, which the world sees not, knows not. But in the Great Day, when the counsels of all hearts shall be manifest, then all shall out, then all shall appear, both to the upper and the lower world. In the great day all masks, vizards, and hoods shall be pulled off, and then all shall out. All that ever thou hast done in the secret chamber, in the dark corner, shall be made known to men and angels, yea, to the whole court of heaven and to all the world beside. "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Rom 2:16). In this Great Day, God will judge not only our words but our works, not only our open works but also our secret works and ways. When Jehoiakim was dead there was found the characters, superstitious marks, and prints of his sorcery upon his body (2 Chr 36:8), which shows how deeply idolatry was rooted in his heart, seeing he bare the marks in his flesh during his life. He being a king bore it out bravely and kept all close; but when he was dead, then all came out, then the marks of his abominable idolatry appeared upon his body. Though sinners, though the greatest

of sinners, may hide and keep close their horrid abominations for a time; yet there will come a time when all shall out, when all their secret marks and secret abominations shall be obvious to all the world.

But sinners may be ready to object and say, "Let us but alone in our secret sins until that day, and then we shall do well enough." And therefore,

3. God Many Times Discovers Secret Sins Even in This Life

In the third place, consider that God many times doth, even in this life, discover and make known to the world men's secret sins (Isa 41:21–23).

God loves to act suitable to His own names. Now, to be "a revealer of secrets" is one of His names (Dan 2:47); and accordingly, even in this world, He often brings to light the most hidden things of darkness.

Of all the glorious attributes of God, there is none that suffers so deeply by secret sins as the attribute of His omniscience; and therefore, in this world God often stands up to vindicate the honor of that attribute by unmasking of sinners and by bringing to the light all those secret paths and ways of wickedness wherein they have long walked undiscovered. It was for the honor of this blessed attribute of God that the secret-plotted sin of Ananias and Sapphira was so openly discovered (Acts 5:1–12). "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

Joseph's brethren for a long time hid their malice, their craft, their cruelty, their envy, their treachery, in selling their brother into Egypt; but at last by amazing and amusing providences all was brought to light (Gen 42:21–22; 50:15–22). Conscience, that for a time may seem to be asleep, yet

will in time awake and make the sinner know that he is as faithful in recording as he is fearful in accusing; and this Joseph's brethren found by sad experience.

So Gehazi, he sins secretly, he lies fearfully, and after all he defends it stoutly. But at last all comes out, and instead of being clothed richly, he and his posterity were clothed with a leprosy forever. And instead of two changes of garments, God hangs them up in chains as a monument of His wrath to all generations (2 Kgs 5:20ff).

So Achan secretly and sacrilegiously steals a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels' weight, and hides them in the earth in the midst of his tent, and by reason of this, Israel flies before their enemies. But at last Achan is taken, and all comes out, and his golden wedge proved a wedge to cleave him, and his Babylonish garment a garment to shroud him (Josh 7). Joshua makes a bonfire of all that he had secretly and sinfully stolen and in it burns him and his children and all that he had. Oh, how openly, how severely, doth God sometimes punish men for their most secret iniquity!

The same you may see in that great instance of David. "Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword (this was done in a secret letter), and hast taken his wife to be thy wife…Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before

the sun" (2 Sam 12:9–12; 16:22). David was very studious and very industrious to hide his sin and to save his credit, but the covering made of Uriah's blood was too short and too narrow to hide his folly with Bathsheba; and therefore, when he had done all he could his sin was tossed like a ball from man to man through court, city, and country.

I have read of one Parthenius, a murderer, treasurer to Theodobert king of France, who, having traitorously slain an especial friend of his called Ausanius with his wife Papianilla, when no man suspected or accused him thereof, he detected and accused himself after this strange manner. As he slept in his bed, suddenly he roared out most pitifully, crying for help, or else he perished; and being demanded what he ailed, he, half asleep, answered that his friend Ausanius and his wife, whom he had slain long ago, summoned him to judgment before God. Upon which confession he was apprehended and, after due examination, stoned to death. Thus the terrors and horrors of his own conscience discovered that secret wickedness which none could prove against him.

I have read how that Mahomet the great Turk had with great rewards procured two Turks to undertake to kill Scanderbeg. These traitors came to Scanderbeg making such a show of the detestation both of Mahomet's tyrannical government and vain superstition that they were both by Scanderbeg and others reputed to be indeed the men they desired to be accounted; and so after they had learned the principles of the Christian religion, they were both, by their own desire, baptized. Soon after, by a providence, it so fell out that these two traitors fell at variance betwixt themselves, by which means the plot came to be discovered; and after due examination and confession of the fact, they were presently condemned and executed.

Conscience is God's spy in the bosom. Conscience, as a scribe, a register, sits in the closet of your hearts with pen in hand and makes a diurnal of all your secret ways and secret crimes which are above the cognizance of men. Conscience sets down the time when, the place where, the manner how, and the persons with whom such and such secret wickednesses have been committed—and that so clear and evident that, go where you will and do what you can, the characters of them shall never be cancelled or razed out until God appear in judgment.

Let a man sin in the closest retirement that human policy can contrive; let him take all the ways he can to hide his sins, to cloak and cover his sin, as Adam did, yet conscience will so play the judge that it will bring in the evidence, produce the law, urge the penalty, and pass the sentence of condemnation upon him. There is many a man who makes a fair profession and who hath a great name in the world who yet is αὐτοκατάκριτος, self-condemned for those secret sins which are not obvious to the eyes of man nor punishable by the laws or hands of men. Yea, many times in this life, God raiseth such a hell of horror and terror in many men's consciences by reason of their secret sins that they can have no rest nor quiet, neither at bed nor at board, neither lying down nor rising up. Fain would they conceal their sins, unwilling they are that the world should know how vile they have been in secret. But conscience being upon the rack and still a-gnawing, accusing, and condemning of them, they can hold no longer. Now all must out, and now those sins that were most secret and concealed come to be published upon the housetop.

Some that have been under anguish of conscience, others that have been smitten with a frenzy, and many in their very

sleep, have been often the blazers and proclaimers of their own secret filthiness and wickedness. In those cases, God hath made many a secret sinner cry out with the leper, "Unclean, unclean" (Lev 13:45), and with Judas before all present, "I have sinned, I have sinned" (Matt 27:4). Many times in this life, God doth very strangely and wonderfully discover those secret works of darkness in which persons have lived long undiscovered.

A Pythagorean bought a pair of shoes upon trust. The shoemaker dies; he is glad, thinks them gained. But a while after his conscience flies upon him and becomes a continual chider and tormentor of him. He hereupon repairs to the house of the dead, casts in his money with these words: "There, take thy due; thou livest to me, though dead to all besides." But,

4. Secret Sins Are in Some Respects More Dangerous Than Open Sins

Fourthly, consider that secret sins are in some respects more dangerous than open sins. Many a man bleeds to death inwardly, and no man perceives it. The more inward and secret the disease is, the more the man is in danger to lose his life. There are no fevers so dangerous as those that prey upon the spirits and inward parts; so there are no sins so dangerous and pernicious to the souls of men as those that are most inward and secret. Secret sins often reign in the souls of men most powerfully when least apparently.

First, consider that he who sins secretly deprives himself of those helps and remedies which, by a divine blessing, might arm him against sin, yea, make him victorious over sin, to wit, the prayers, counsels, reproofs, examples, and encouragements of friends, relations. A man's house may be

on fire, but whilst it is all inward, help comes not in. But when the fire flames out, when it catcheth the outside of the house, then help runs in; then help on all hands is ready. He that sins in secret debars himself of all public remedy and takes great pains to damn his soul in a corner and to go to hell in the dark.

Secondly, secret sins will make way for public sins. He that makes no conscience of sinning in the secret chamber will ere long, with Absalom, be ready to spread a tent upon the top of the house and to go in to his concubines in the sight of all Israel (2 Sam 12:11). Such as have made no conscience of stealing a few pins or pence or a few shillings in private have in time come to be so bold as to take a purse on the road at high noon. The cockatrice must be crushed in the egg, else it will soon become a serpent. The very thought of sin, if not thought on, will break forth into action, action into custom, custom into habit, and then both body and soul are irrecoverably lost to all eternity.

If Satan can but wound our heel, as the poets feign of Achilles, he will make a hard shift, but he will send death from the heel to the heart. If this subtle serpent can but wriggle in his tail by an ill thought, he will soon get in his head by a worse action. Hence it is that Christ calls hatred murder, and a wanton eye adultery. Secret hatred often issues in open murder, and secret wanton glances of the eye do often issue in visible adultery. If Amnon be sick with the sinful conceptions of incestuous lust, how will his soul be in pain and travail until he hath brought forth! And how many are there that in secret have taken now and then but one cup more than enough, who now may be seen at high noon reeling against every post. Look, as secret diseases in the body, if not cured, will in time openly break forth, so secret sins in

the soul, if not pardoned and purged, will in time be openly revealed. Covetousness was Judas' secret sin; and no sooner doth an occasion or a temptation present itself, but he is very ready and forward to betray and sell his Lord and Master for thirty pieces of silver before all the world. "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin" (Jas 1:15)—and that thus:

First, sin hath its conception, and that is delight.

And then its formation, and that is design.

And then its birth, and that is action.

And then its growth, and that is custom.

And then its end, and that is damnation.

Thirdly, secret sinning puts far more respect and fear upon men than upon God. Thou wilt be unjust in secret, and wanton in secret, and unclean in secret, and treacherous in secret, and why but because thou art afraid that such or such men should know it, or that such and such friends should know it, or that such and such relations should know it? Ah! Poor wretch, art thou afraid of the eye of a man, "of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass" (Isa 51:12)? And yet not tremble under His eye "whose eyes are as a flame of fire," sharp and terrible, such as pierce into the inward parts (Rev 1:14; Heb 4:12–13)? Ah! How full of atheism is that man's heart that tacitly saith, "If my sins be but hid from the eyes of the world I do not care though the Lord knows them, though the Lord strictly observes them, though the Lord sets a mark, a memorandum, upon them." What is this, O man, but to brave it out with God, and to tempt Him, and provoke Him to His very face Who "is light, and in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5)? Ah! Sinner, sinner, can man damn thee? Can man disinherit thee? Can man fill thy conscience with horrors and terrors? Can man make thy life a very hell? Can man bar the gates of glory

against thee? Can man speak thee into the grave by a word of his mouth? And after all, can man cast thee into endless, easeless, and remediless torments? Oh, no! Can God do all this? Oh, yes! Why, then, doth not thy heart stand more in awe of the eye of the great God than it doth of the eye of a poor, weak, mortal man?

I have insisted the longer on this particular because there is not any one thing in all the world that doth more hinder secret communion with God and secret prayer than secret sins. And oh, that you would all make it your great business to watch against secret sins, and to pray against secret sins, and to mourn over secret sins, and deeply to judge and condemn yourselves for secret sins, and carefully and conscientiously to shun and avoid all occasions and provocations that may be as fuel to secret sins.

Certainly, there are no men or women that are so sincere and serious in closet prayer, or that are so frequent, so fervent, so constant in closet prayer, or that are so delightful, so resolute, so undaunted, or so unwearied in closet prayer, as those that keep themselves most clear and free from secret sins.

For a close, remember this: that though secret sins are in some respects more dangerous than other sins are, yet in three respects they are not so bad nor so dangerous as other sins are.

First, in that they do not so scandalize religion as open sins do.

Secondly, in that they do not shame, grieve, and wound the hearts of the saints as open sins do.

Thirdly, in that they are not so infectious to others, nor such provocations to others to sin against the Lord as open sins are.

And thus you may see what those things are that you must carefully take heed of, as ever you would addict yourselves to closet prayer.

5. Other Things to Apply Yourselves To

And as you must take heed of these five things, so there are several other things that you must carefully and conscientiously apply yourselves to, as ever you would be found faithful and constant in this great duty of closet prayer.

Now they are these:

a. Lament Greatly and Mourn Bitterly over the Neglect of This Duty

First, lament greatly and mourn bitterly over the neglect of this choice duty. He that doth not make conscience of mourning over the neglect of this duty will never make conscience of performing this duty. Oh, that your heads were waters, and your eyes a fountain of tears, that you might weep day and night for the great neglect of closet prayer (Jer 9:1). He that mourns most for the neglect of this duty will be found most in the practice of this duty. He that makes most conscience to accuse, arraign, and condemn himself for neglecting closet prayer, he will make most conscience of giving himself up to closet prayer. It is said of Adam that he turned his face towards the garden of Eden and from his heart bitterly lamented his great fall. Oh, that you would turn your faces towards your closets and bitterly lament your rarely going into them.

b. Make Private Prayer Your Constant Trade

Secondly, habituate yourselves, accustom yourselves, to closet prayer. Make private prayer your constant trade. Frequency begets familiarity, and familiarity confidence. We can go freely and boldly into that friend's house whom we often visit. What we are habituated to we do with ease and delight. A man that is habituated or accustomed to write, to read, to ride, to run, or to play on this or that musical instrument, he doth it all with delight and ease. And so a man that doth habituate himself to closet prayer will manage it with delight and ease.

c. Keep a Diary of All Your Closet Experiences

Thirdly, keep a diary of all your closet experiences (Deut 7:18–19; Ps 66:12). Oh, carefully record and book down all your closet mercies! Oh, be often in reading over your closet experiences, and be often in meditating and in pondering upon your closet experiences! There is no way like this to inflame your love to closet prayer and to engage your hearts in this secret trade of private prayer.

Oh, remember that at such a time you went into your closets with hard hearts and dry eyes, but before you came out of your closets, ah, how sweetly, how evangelically, how powerfully were you melted and humbled before the Lord (Ps 6:6; 39:12; 56:8). Oh, remember how that at another time you went into your closets clouded and benighted but came out of your closets with as glorious a shine of God upon your souls as Moses had upon his face when he came down from the mount from communing with God (Exod 34:28–29)! Oh, remember how often you have gone into your closets with cold, frozen spirits, but before you came out of your closets

what a fire hath God kindled in your souls, what a spirit of burning have you found in your hearts (Luke 24:31–32; Isa 4:4)! Oh, remember how often you have gone into your closets straitened and shut up, but before you have come out, how have your souls been like the chariots of Amminadib (Song 6:12)! Oh, remember what power God hath given you against corruptions in your closets, and what strength God hath given you against temptations in your closets! Oh, remember the sweet discoveries of divine love that you have had when in your closets! Oh, remember the secret visits, the secret kisses, the secret embraces, the secret whispers, the secret love-tokens that Christ hath given you in your closets! Oh, seriously ponder upon these things, and then closet duties will be sweet unto you!

It was a sweet saying of Bernard, "O saint, knowest thou not that thy husband Christ is bashful and will not be familiar in company? Retire thyself by meditation into thy closet, or into the fields, and there thou shalt have Christ's embraces." *Meditatio nutrix orationis*, "Meditation is the nurse of prayer." Oh, the more any man meditates upon his closet experiences, the more he shall find his heart engaged to closet duties. The more you ponder upon closet experiences, the sweeter will closet experiences be to your souls. And the sweeter closet experiences are to your souls, the more your souls will delight to be with God in your closets.

Pliny tells us of one Messala Corvinus, whose memory was so bad that he forgot his own name. And I am afraid that many of your memories are so bad that you forget your closet mercies, your closet experiences.

I have read of such a pestilential disease once at Athens as took away the memories of those that were infected with it, so that they forgot their own names. Oh, that I had not

cause to fear that some pestilential disease or other hath so taken away the memories of many that they have quite forgot their closet experiences. Well, friends, remember this, though stony hearts are bad, yet iron memories are good. And oh, that you would all labor after iron memories, that so you may remember and ponder upon your closet experiences. I have read of the heathens how they made use of white and black stones for these two ends: first, they gave them to persons at their arraignment before the judges. If any were condemned to death, they gave him a black stone, but if absolved and set free, a white stone. To which custom the Holy Ghost seems to allude in Revelation 2:17, "To him that overcometh will I give…a white stone." A second use of those stones was this: that by them they might keep an account of all the good days or evil days they had met withal in their lives. Hence, Giacopo Senzaro having been long in love, and much crossed about his match, he filled a pot full of black stones, putting only one white stone among them, and being asked the reason, answered, "There will come one white day," meaning his marriage day, "which will make amends for all my black days."

Ah, friends! How often hath God given you the white stone in your closets! Certainly, you have had more white stones than black stones. Your closet mercies and experiences have been more than your public crosses and miseries. O sirs! Did you but reckon your good days according to the white stones you have had in your closets, it would make you more in love with closet prayer than ever.

d. Spend Not So Much Time in Public Duties That None Is Left for Private

Fourthly, be sure that you do not spend so much of your precious time in public duties and ordinances as that you can spare none for private duties, for secret services. Though Pharaoh's kine ate up one another, yet our duties must not eat up one another (Gen 41:4). Public duties must not eat up family duties; family duties must not eat up public duties; neither of them must eat up closet duties. The wisdom of a Christian doth most eminently sparkle and shine in giving every duty its proper time and place. I was going to say that either he was no Christian, or at least no excellent Christian, that is all eye to read, or all ear to hear, or all tongue to speak, or all knee to bow, to kneel, to pray (Eccl 8:5). Ah! How many are there that spend so much time in hearing of this man and that, and in running up and down from meeting to meeting, that they have no time to meet with God in their closets. O sirs! Your duties are never so amiable and lovely, they are never so orient and beautiful, as when they are seasonably and orderly performed.

Oh, how wise are the men of this world so to order all their civil affairs that no one business shall interfere with another. They set apart for each business a convenient proportion of time. They allot an hour for one business, two for another, three for another, etc. Oh, that we were as wise for our souls, as wise for eternity, as they are for this world. Oh, that our hearts would so consult with our heads, that we may never want a convenient time to seek God in a corner! That devil that loves to set one man against another, and one nation against another, and one Christian against another, that devil loves to set one ordinance against another, and one duty

against another. Hence it is that on the one hand he works some to cry up public prayers in opposition to secret prayer. And on the other hand, he works others to cry up private duties in opposition to all public duties. Whereas all Christians stand obliged by God so to manage one sort of duties as not to shut out another sort of duties. Every Christian must find time and room for every duty incumbent upon him.

e. Love Christ with a More Inflamed Love

Fifthly, love Christ with a more inflamed love. Oh, strengthen your love to Christ, and your love to closet duties. Lovers love much to be alone, to be in a corner together (Song 7:10–12). Certainly, the more any man loves the Lord Jesus, the more he will delight to be with Christ in a corner. There was a great deal of love between Jonathan and David (1 Sam 18-20); and according to their love, so was their private converse, their secret communion one with another. They were always best when in the field together, or when in a corner together, or when behind the door together, or when locked up together. And just so would it be with you, did you but love the Lord Jesus Christ with a more raised and a more inflamed love. You would be always best when you were most with Christ in a corner.

Divine love is like a rod of myrtle, which, as Pliny reports, makes the traveler that carries it in his hand so lively and cheerful that he never faints or grows weary. Ah friends, did you but love the Lord Jesus with a stronger, with a more raised love, you would never faint in closet duties nor would you ever grow weary of closet duties. Look, as the Israelites removed their tents from Mithcah to Hashmonah, from sweetness to swiftness, as the words import (Num 33:29), so the sweetness of divine love will make a man move swiftly

on in a way of closet duties. Divine love will make all closet duties easier to the soul and more pleasant and delightful to the soul. And therefore, do all you can to strengthen your love to Christ and your love to closet work.

It was observed among the primitive Christians that they were so full of love one to another that they could be acquainted one with another as well in half an hour as in half a year. O sirs, if your hearts were but more full of love to Christ and closet duties, you would quickly be better acquainted with them, you would quickly know what secret communion with Christ behind the door means.

f. Be Fixedly Resolved to Keep Close to Closet Duties

Sixthly, be highly, thoroughly, and fixedly resolved, in the strength of Christ, to keep close to closet duties in the face of all difficulties and discouragements that you may meet withal (Ps 44:17–20). A man of no resolution, or of weak resolution, will be won with a nut and lost with an apple. Satan, and the world, and carnal relations, and your own hearts will cast in many things to discourage you and take you off from closet prayer. But be ye nobly and firmly resolved to keep close to your closets, let the world, the flesh, and the devil do and say what they can. Daniel was a man of an invincible resolution. Rather than he would omit praying in his chamber, he would be cast into the den of lions. Of all the duties of religion, Satan is the most deadly enemy to this of secret prayer, partly because secret prayer spoils him in his most secret designs, plots, and contrivances against the soul; and partly because secret prayer is so musical and delightful to God; and partly because secret prayer is of such rare use and advantage to the

soul; and partly because it lays not the soul so open to pride, vain-glory, and worldly applause as prayer in the synagogue doth. And therefore, he had rather that a man should pray a thousand times in the synagogues, in the corner of the streets, or behind a pillar, than that he should pray once in his closet. And therefore, you had need to steel your hearts with holy courage and resolution that whatever suggestions, temptations, oppositions, or objections you may encounter with, that yet you will keep close to closet prayer.

There is not any better bulwark in the day of battle than a heroic resolution of heart before the day of battle. Sanctified resolutions do exceedingly weaken and discourage Satan in his assaults. They do greatly daunt and dishearten him in all his undertakings against the soul. That man will never long be quiet in his closet who is not steadfastly resolved to seek the Lord in a corner, though all the powers of darkness should make head against him. O sirs! Divine fortitude, holy resolutions, will make you like a wall of brass that no arrows can pierce. They will make you like armor of proof that no shot can hurt. They will make you like that angel that rolled away the stone from before the door of the sepulcher (Matt 28:2). They will either enable you to remove the greatest mountains of oppositions that lie between you and closet prayer, or else they will enable you to step over them.

Luther was a man of great resolution and a man that spent much time in closet prayer. And such another was Nehemiah, who met with so much opposition that had he not been steeled by a strong and obstinate resolution he could never have rebuilt the temple but would have sunk in the midst of his works. Now, he was a man for private prayer as I have shown in the beginning of this treatise. Who more resolute than David? And who more for secret prayer than David?

The same I might say of Paul, Basil, and many others who have been famous in their generations.

O sirs! Sanctified resolutions for closet prayer will chain you faster to closet prayer than ever Ulysses' resolutions did chain him to the mast of the ship. It was a noble resolution that kept Ruth close to her mother when her sister Orpah only compliments her, kisses her, and takes her leave of her (Ruth 1:10–20). Be but nobly resolved for closet prayer, and then you will keep close to it when others only court it and take their leave of it.

In the Salentine country, there is mention made of a lake that is still brimful. If you put in never so much, it never runs over; if you draw out never so much, it is still full. The resolution of every Christian for closet prayer should be like this lake, still brimful. Tide life tide death, come honor or reproach, come loss or gain, come liberty or bonds, come what can come, the true-bred Christian must be fully and constantly resolved to keep close to his closet.

g. Labor for a Greater Effusion of the Holy Spirit

Seventhly, labor for a greater effusion of the Holy Spirit; for the greater measure any man hath of the Spirit of God, the more that man will delight to be with God in secret. "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications…And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart; The family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of Shimei apart, and their wives apart; All the families that remain, every family apart, and their wives apart" (Zech 12:10, 12–14). Mark, in the last of the last days, when men shall

be generally under a greater effusion of the Holy Spirit than ever (Joel 2:28–29; Isa 44:3), then they shall be more given up to secret prayer than ever. There will never be such praying apart, and such mourning apart, as there will be when the Lord shall pour out most richly, gloriously, abundantly, of His Spirit upon His poor people. Now, everyone shall pour out his tears and his soul before God in a corner to show the soundness of their sorrow and to show their sincerity by their secrecy, for *Ille dolet vere, qui sine teste dolet*, "He grieves with a witness that grieves without a witness."

Certainly, the more any man is now under the blessed pouring out of the Spirit of Christ, the more that man gives himself up to secret communion with Christ. Every man is more or less with Christ in his closet as he is more or less under the anointings of the Spirit of Christ. The more any man hath of the Spirit of Christ, the more he loves Christ; and the more any man loves Christ, the more he delights to be with Christ alone. Lovers love to be alone. The more any man hath of the Spirit of Christ, the more his heart will be set to please Christ. Now, nothing pleaseth Christ more than the secret prayers of His people. "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely" (Song 2:14). And therefore, such a one will be much in secret prayer. The more any man hath of the Spirit of Christ, the more his heart will be set upon glorifying and exalting Christ. Now, nothing glorifies Christ more, nor exalts him more, than secret prayer; and therefore, the more any man hath of the Spirit of Christ, the more that man will be found in secret prayer.

There are many persons who say they would be more in their closets than they are, but that they meet with many

hindrances, many occasions, many diversions, many temptations, many oppositions, many difficulties, many discouragements which prevent them. Ah, friends! Had you a greater measure of the Holy Spirit upon you, none of these things should ever be able to hinder your secret trade heavenward. Had you a richer anointing of the Spirit upon you, you would never plead, "There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets" (Prov 26:13). But were there a thousand lions between you and your closets, you would either step over them or make your way through them that so you might enjoy communion with Christ in your closets.

h. Be Frequent in the Serious Consideration of Eternity

Eighthly and lastly, as ever you would keep close to private prayer, be frequent in the serious consideration of eternity. Oh, see eternity standing at the end of every closet prayer, and this will make you pray to purpose in your closets.

O sirs! Every work you do is a step to a blessed or to a cursed eternity. Every motion, every action in this life, is a step toward eternity. As every step that a traveler takes brings him forward to his journey's end, so every step that a man takes in the secret ways of righteousness and holiness, such as closet duties are, they bring him nearer to his journey's end. They bring him nearer to a blessed eternity. Look, as every step the sinner takes in a way of wickedness brings him nearer to hell, so every step that a saint takes in a way of holiness brings him nearer to heaven. Look, as every step that a wicked man takes in the ways of unrighteousness brings him nearer to a cursed eternity, so every step that a

godly man takes in a way of righteousness brings him nearer to a blessed eternity.

Zeuxis, the famous painter, was so exceeding careful and cautious in drawing all his lines that he would let no piece of his go abroad into the world to be seen of men until he had turned it over and over, and viewed it on this side and that side, again and again, to see if he could spy any fault in it. And being asked the reason why he was so curious and so long in drawing his lines, answered, *Aeternitati pingo*, "I paint for eternity." O sirs! We all pray for eternity, we fast for eternity, we read for eternity, we hear for eternity, we wait for eternity, we weep for eternity. And therefore, oh, how curiously, how exactly, how wisely, how faithfully, how carefully, how diligently, how unweariedly should we be in all our closet duties and services, seeing that all we do is in order to eternity! Friends! You must all ere long be eternally blessed or eternally cursed; eternally happy or eternally miserable; eternally saved or eternally damned; eternally accepted or eternally rejected. And therefore, what infinite cause have you frequently to shut your closet doors and to plead mightily with God in a corner for the lives of your poor, precious, and immortal souls, that they may be eternally saved in the Great Day of our Lord Jesus. O sirs! When any hindrances to closet prayer present themselves to you, seriously remember eternity, and that will remove them.

It is related of one Pachomius that whensoever he felt any unlawful desires to arise in his mind, he was wont to drive them away with the remembrance of eternity.

The same author relates a story out of *Benedictus Rhexanus* of an ungodly fellow who on a certain night could not sleep, who, upon the serious consideration of death and eternity and the damned lying in hell, could not be at rest, but eternity

did still run in his mind. Fain would he have shaken off the thoughts thereof as gnawing worms. Therefore, he followed sports, pastimes, merry-meetings, and sought out companions like himself, and sat oftentimes so long at his cups that he laid his conscience asleep, and so seemed to take some rest. But when he was awakened, his conscience flew in his face and would still be suggesting sad thoughts of eternity to him. Of all things in the world, he could not bear to be kept awake in the night. But so it happened that being sick he was kept awake one night and could not sleep at all, whereupon these thoughts rise in him: "What? Is it so tedious then to be kept from sleep one night and to lie a few hours in the dark? Oh, what is it then to be kept in torments and everlasting darkness! I am here in my own house upon a soft bed in the dark, kept from sleep but one night. But to lie in flames and endless misery, how dreadful must that needs be!" These and such like meditations were the happy means of this young man's conversion.

I have read a notable story of one Theodorus, a Christian young man in Egypt, who, when there was a great deal of feasting, mirth, and music in his father's house, withdrew himself from all the company, and being got alone, he thus thought with himself, "Here is content and delight enough for the flesh. I may have what I desire, but how long will this last? This will not hold out long." Then falling down upon his knees before the Lord in secret, he said, "Lord, my heart is open unto Thee. I indeed know not what to ask but only this: Lord, let me not die eternally. O Lord, Thou knowest I love Thee. Let me live eternally to praise Thee."

If there be any way or means on earth to bring us upon our knees before God in secret, it is the serious and solemn thoughts of eternity. Oh, that the fear of eternity might fall

upon all your souls! Oh, that you would all seriously consider that after a short time is expired you must all enter upon an eternal estate! Oh, consider that eternity is an infinite, endless, bottomless gulf which no line can fathom, no time can reach, no age can extend to, no tongue can express. It is a duration always present, a being always in being. It is *unum perpetuum hodie*, "one perpetual day," which shall never see light. O sirs! This is, and must be, for a lamentation: that eternity is a thing that most men never think of or else very slenderly—a snatch and away, as dogs are said to lap and away at the river Nile. But as ever you would have your hearts chained to your closets and to closet duties—as the men of Tyrus chained their god Apollo to a post that they might be sure of him—then seriously and frequently ponder upon eternity, and with those forty valiant martyrs be still a crying out, ὦ ἀϊδιότης, ὦ ἀϊδιότης, "O eternity, eternity!"

Mr. Wood, after some holy discourse, fell a-musing and cried out before all present for near half a quarter of an hour together, "Forever, forever, forever." Augustine's prayer was, "Hack me, hew me, burn me here, but spare me hereafter, spare me hereafter." Certainly, if Christians would but spend one quarter of an hour every day in the solemn thoughts of eternity, it would make them more in love with closet prayer than ever. Yea, it would make them more fearful of omitting closet prayer than ever and more careful and conscientious in the discharge of all closet duties than ever.

And thus, according to my weak measure, I have given out all that at present the Lord hath graciously given in to my poor soul concerning this most necessary, most glorious, and most useful point of points: closet prayer. I shall, by assisting grace, follow this poor piece with my prayers that it may be

so blessed from on high as that it may work mightily to the internal and eternal welfare both of reader, hearer, and writer.