



POSITIVELY PURITAN

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COURSE GOALS:

1. Introduce the Puritans
2. Whet Your Appetite to Read the Puritans

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Week One:

Introducing the Puritans

Week Two:

Finding Joy in Every Circumstance

in “All Things for Good” by Thomas Watson

Week Three:

Recognizing Satan’s Tactics and the Christian’s Defense

in “Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices” by Thomas Brooks

Week Four:

Receiving the Tenderness of Christ for Sinners

in “The Bruised Reed” by Richard Sibbes

Week Five:

Grieving Appropriately through Life’s Tragedies

in “A Token for Mourners” by John Flavel

Week Six:

Learning Contentment in Sad & Sinking Times

“The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment” by Jeremiah Burroughs

POSITIVELY PURITAN
Week One: Introducing the Puritans

“Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.”

– H.L. Mencken

POPULAR SENTIMENT ON THE PURITANS

“The Puritans never laughed and were opposed to fun.”

“The Puritans wore drab, unfashionable clothes.”

“The Puritans were opposed to sports and recreation.”

“The Puritans were money-grubbing workaholics who would do anything to get rich.”

“The Puritans were repelled by the human body and the physical world.”¹

WHO EXACTLY WERE THE PURITANS?

Puritanism was part of the Protestant Reformation in England from the middle of the 16th century and into the 17th century.

They were pastors and theologians who desired to see a “pure” Church of England and disliked Queen Elizabeth’s impeding of church reforms. In other words, they were a reform movement within the English Protestant Reformation.

English Puritans were a persecuted minority group in England. Puritans (separatists) who emigrated to the English Colonies exercised more broad influence over their towns and colonies.

¹ Much of these lecture notes come from Leland Ryken’s “Worldly Saints.”

For the Puritans, the Bible was central to everything. C. H. Spurgeon once remarked concerning Bunyan, “Prick him anywhere- his blood is bible.”

PURITAN THEOLOGY

Calvinistic – *High view of God’s sovereignty and man’s need of grace.*

Creation – Surprisingly, the Puritans loved the created world as the understood it to a good gift from the Creator.

“The world is God’s book,” said Richard Baxter, *“and every creature is a letter, or syllable, or word, or sentence... declaring the name and will of God.”* - Richard Baxter)

Providence – The Puritans saw God at work in all things. They expected to find God in, “the milkhouse, the stable, the barn, and the like where God visited the soul.” – John Bunyan

Vocation (or calling) – God has called us to be redeemed in Christ generally, and specifically, God calls us into families, churches, work, and public life.

CHURCH HISTORY SURVEY:

I. The Church in the Ancient World (c. 5 B.C. – 500 A.D.)

- a. Spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire
 - i. Persecution
 - ii. Defense (Early Church Fathers)
 - iii. Council of Nicaea (325 D)
 - iv. Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430)
 - v. Visigoths Sack Rome (A.D. 410)

II. The Church in the Middle Ages (c. A.D. 500 – 1500)

- a. Holy Roman Empire emerges (A.D. 800-1054)
- b. The Great Schism (A.D. 1054)

III. The Church in the Modern Era (1500 A.D. – Present)

- a. Protestant Reformation (A.D. 1517-1648)
 - i. Puritanism (1526-1700)
- b. First Great Awakening (A.D. 1730-1755)
- c. Second Great Awakening (A.D. 1790-1840)
- d. Modern Mission Movement
- e. Global Christianity

HISTORY OF THE PURITAN MOVEMENT

1526 William Tyndale's English New Testament reaches England.

1536 Henry VIII and the English Parliament separate the Church of England from Rome.

1553 Mary Tudor (Bloody Mary) becomes queen. As a Roman Catholic, she attempts the reversal of the English Reformation. Nearly 300 Protestants are martyred while many flee to Europe.

1603 King James I is crowned and in 1611 the Authorized Version is published.

1620 Puritan Separatists found the colony at Plymouth, Massachusetts.

1630 John Winthrop leads a large group of Puritans to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

1636 Harvard College is founded.

1643-1646 Westminster Assembly, a synod called by Parliament, creates the Westminster Confession, as well as a Larger and Shorter Catechism.

1642-1651 English Civil War. Ends as Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary Army defeats the king's army.

1688 William & Mary crowned in the Glorious Revolution, deposing the Catholic King James II.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE?

Banner of Truth Publishers

Reformation Heritage Books

Ligonier Ministries

RECOMMENDED READS

The Valley of Vision – Various

A Method for Prayer – Matthew Henry

The Heart of Christ – Thomas Goodwin

All Loves Excelling – John Bunyan

The Christian in Complete Armour – William Gurnall

The Loveliness of Christ – Samuel Rutherford

The Doctrine of Repentance – Thomas Watson

A Sure Guide to Heaven – Joseph Alleine

Pilgrim's Progress – John Bunyan

A Body of Divinity – Thomas Watson

The Character of an Old English Puritan, or Non-Conformist

Written by the Reverend John Gere
Originally published in 1646

The Old English Puritan was such an one, that honored God above all, and under God gave every one his due. His first care was to serve God, and therein he did not what was good in his own, but in God's sight, making the word of God the rule of his worship. He highly esteemed order in the House of God: but would not under color of that submit to superstitious rites, which are superfluous, and perish in their use. He revered Authority keeping within its sphere: but durst not under pretence of subjection to the higher powers, worship God after the traditions of men. He made conscience of all God's ordinances, though some he esteemed of more consequence. He was much in prayer; with it he began and closed the day. It is he was much exercised in his closet, family and public assembly. He esteemed that manner of prayer best, whereby the gift of God, expressions were varied according to present wants and occasions; yet did he not account set forms unlawful. Therefore in that circumstance of the church he did not wholly reject the liturgy, but the corruption of it. He esteemed reading of the word an ordinance of God both in private and public but did not account reading to be preaching. The word read he esteemed of more authority, but the word preached of more efficiency. He accounted preaching as necessary now as in the Primitive Church, God's pleasure being still by the foolishness of preaching to save those that believe. He esteemed the preaching best wherein was most of God, least of man, when vain flourishes of wit and words were declined, and the demonstration of God's Spirit and power studied: yet could he distinguish between studied plainness and negligent rudeness. He accounted perspicuity the best grace of a preacher: And that method best, which was most helpful to the understanding, affection, and memory. To which ordinarily he esteemed none so conducive as that by doctrine, reason and use. He esteemed those sermons best that came closest to the conscience: yet would he have men's consciences awakened, not their persons disgraced. He was a man of good spiritual appetite, and could not be contented with one meal a day. An afternoon sermon did relish as well to him as one in the morning. He was not satisfied with prayers without preaching: which if it were wanting at home, he would seek abroad: yet would

he not by absence discourage his minister, if faithful, though another might have quicker gifts. A lecture he esteemed, though not necessary, yet a blessing, and would read such an opportunity with some pains and loss. The Lord's Day he esteemed a divine ordinance, and rest on it necessary, so far as it conduced to holiness. He was very conscientious in observance of that day as the mart day of the soul. He was careful to remember it, to get house, and heart in order for it and when it came, he was studious to improve it. He redeems the morning from superfluous sleep, and watches the whole day over his thoughts and words, not only to restrain them from wickedness, but worldliness. All parts of the day were like holy to him, and his care was continued in it in variety of holy duties: what he heard in public, he repeated in private, to whet it upon himself and family. Lawful recreations he thought this day unseasonable, and unlawful ones much more abominable: yet he knew the liberty God gave him for needful refreshing, which he neither did refuse nor abuse. The sacrament of baptism he received in infancy, which he looked back to in age to answer his engagements, and claim his privileges. The Lord's Supper he accounted part of his soul's food: to which he labored to keep an appetite. He esteemed it an ordinance of nearest communion with Christ, and so requiring most exact preparation. His first care was in the examination of himself: yet as an act of office or charity, he had an eye on others.

He endeavored to have the scandalous cast out of communion: but he cast not out himself, because the scandalous were suffered by the negligence of others. He condemned that superstition and vanity of Popish mock-fasts; yet neglected not an occasion to humble his soul by right fasting: He abhorred the popish doctrine of opus operatum in the action. And in practice rested in no performance, but what was done in spirit and truth. He thought God had left a rule in his word for discipline, and that aristocratical by elders, not monarchical by bishops, nor democratical by the people. Right discipline he judged pertaining not to the being, but to the well-being of a church. Therefore he esteemed those churches most pure where government is by elders, yet unchurched not those where it was otherwise. Perfection in churches he thought a thing rather to be desired, than hoped for. And so he expected not a church state without all defects. The corruptions that were in churches he thought

his duty to bewail, with endeavors of amendment: yet he would not separate, where he might partake in the worship, and not in the corruption. He put not holiness in churches, as in the temple of the Jews; but counted them convenient like their synagogues. He would have them kept decent, not magnificent: knowing that the gospel requires not outward pomp. His chief music was singing of psalms wherein though he neglected not the melody of the voice, yet he chiefly looked after that of the heart. He disliked such church music as moved sensual delight, and was as hinderance to spiritual enlargements. He accounted subjection to the higher powers to be part of pure religion, as well as to visit the fatherless and widows: yet did he distinguish between authority and lusts of magistrates, to that he submitted, but in these he durst not be a servant of men, being bought with a price. Just laws and commands he willingly obeyed not only for fear but for conscience also; but such as were unjust he refused to observe, choosing rather to obey God than man; yet his refusal was modest and with submission to penalties, unless he could procure indulgence from authority. He was careful in all relations to know, and to duty, and that with singleness of heart as unto Christ. He accounted religion an engagement to duty, that the best Christians should be best husbands, best wives, best parents, best children, best masters, best servants, best magistrates, best subjects, that the doctrine of God might be adorned, not blasphemed. His family he endeavors to make a church, both in regard of persons and exercises, admitting none into it but such as feared God; and laboring that those that were borne in it, might be born again unto God. He blessed his family morning and evening by the word and prayer and took care to perform those ordinances in the best season. He brought up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and commanded his servants to keep the way of the Lord. He set up discipline in his family, as he desired it in the church, not only reproving but restraining vileness in his. He was conscientious of equity as well as piety knowing that unrighteousness is abomination as well as ungodliness. He was cautious in promising, but careful in performing, counting his word no less engagement than his bond. He was a man of tender heart, not only in regard of his own sin, but others misery, not counting mercy arbitrary, but a necessary duty wherein as he prayed for wisdom to direct him, so he studied for cheerfulness and bounty to act. He was sober in the use of things of

this life, rather beating down the body, than pampering it, yet he denied not himself the use of God's blessing, lest he should be unthankful, but avoid excess lest he should be forgetful of the Donor. In his habit he avoided costliness and vanity, neither exceeding his degree in civility, nor declining what suited with Christianity, desiring in all things to express gravity. His own life he accounted a warfare, wherein Christ was his captain, his arms, prayers, and tears. The Cross his banner, and his word, Vincit qui patitur. He was immovable in all times, so that they who in the midst of many opinions have lost the view of true religion, may return to him and find it.

Reader, seeing a passage in Mr. Tombes his book against paedobaptism*; wherein he compares the Nonconformists in England to the Anabaptists in Germany in regard of their miscarriages and ill success in their endeavors, till of late years; I was moved for the vindication of those faithful and reverend witnesses of Christ, to publish this Character; whereof if any shall desire proof in matter of fact, as in the matter of right, the Margin contains evidence, let him either consult their writings, or those who are fit witnesses by reason of age, fidelity and acquaintance, having fully known their doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, patience, persecution and affliction, etc. 2 Timothy 3:10, 11. And I doubt not but full testimony will be given that their aim and general course was according to rule: some extravagance there be in all professions, but we are to judge of a profession by the rule they hold forth, and that carriage of the professors which is general and ordinary.

POSITIVELY PURITAN

Week Two: Finding Joy in Every Circumstance

in “All Things for Good” by Thomas Watson (c. 1620-1686)

*And we know that all things work together for good to those
who love God, to those who are the called
according to His purpose.*

– Romans 8:28

There are two things, which I have always looked upon as difficult. The one is—to make the **wicked** sad; the other is—to make the **godly** joyful. Dejection in the godly arises from a double spring: either because their inward comforts are darkened, or their outward comforts are disturbed. To cure both these troubles, I have put forth this ensuing treatise,

hoping, by the blessing of God, that it will buoy up their desponding hearts, and make them look with a more pleasant aspect. I would prescribe them to take, now and then, a little of this Cordial: "all things work together for good to those who love God." To know that nothing hurts the godly, is a matter of comfort; but to be assured that all things which fall out shall cooperate for their good, that their *crosses* shall be turned into blessings, that *showers of affliction* water the withering root of their grace and make it flourish more—this may fill their hearts with joy until they run over!

I. A GLORIOUS PRIVILEGE – *All things work together for good.*

The Best Things Work for Our Good

God's Power Works for Our Good:

God's power works for good, in supporting us in TROUBLE. "Underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27). What upheld Daniel in the lion's den? What upheld Jonah in the whale's belly? What upheld the three Hebrews in the furnace? Only the power of God!

The power of God subdues our CORRUPTIONS. "He will subdue our iniquities" (Micah 7:19). Is your sin strong? God is powerful, He will break the head of this leviathan. Is your heart hard? God will dissolve that stone in Christ's blood.

God's Promises Work for Our Good

Are we under the guilt of sin? There is a promise, "The Lord is merciful and gracious" (Exod. 34:6), where God as it were puts on His glorious embroidery, and holds out the golden scepter, to encourage poor trembling sinners to come to Him. "The Lord is merciful and gracious." God is more willing to pardon—than to punish. Mercy does more multiply in Him, than sin in us.

The Communion of Saints Works for Our Good

"We are helpers of your joy" (2 Cor. 1:24). One Christian conversing with another is a means to confirm him. As the stones in an arch help to strengthen one another, one Christian by imparting his experience, heats and quickens another. "Let us provoke one another to love, and to good works" (Heb. 10:24). How does grace flourish by holy conference! A Christian by good discourse drops that oil upon another, which makes the lamp of his faith burn the brighter.

Christ's Intercession Works for Our Good

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me" (John 17:20). When a Christian is weak, and can hardly pray for himself, Jesus Christ is praying for him.

What a comfort is this— when Satan is tempting, Christ is praying! This works for good.

The Worst Things Work for Our Good

Do not mistake me, I do not say that of their own nature, the worst things are good, for they are a fruit of the curse. But though they are naturally evil—yet the wise overruling hand of God disposing and sanctifying them—they are morally good.

The Evil of Affliction Works for Our Good

Jacob wrestled with the angel, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was put out of joint. This was sad; but God turned it to good, for there he saw God's face, and there the Lord blessed him. "Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:30). Who would not be willing to have a bone out of joint, so that he might have a sight of God?

Affliction teaches what sin is. In the word preached, we hear what a dreadful thing sin is, that it is both defiling and damning—but we fear it no more than a painted lion; therefore God lets loose affliction—and then we feel sin bitter in the fruit of it. A sick bed often teaches more than a sermon. We can best see the ugly visage of sin in the looking-glass of affliction!

Afflictions work for good, as they conform us to Christ. God's rod is a pencil to draw Christ's image more lively upon us. It is good that there should be symmetry and proportion between the Head and the members. Would we be parts of Christ's mystical body, and not like Him? His life, as Calvin says, was a series of sufferings, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). He wept, and bled. Was His head crowned with thorns, and do we think to be crowned with roses? It is good to be like Christ, though it be by sufferings.

The Evil of Temptation is Overruled for Good to the Godly

A tree that is shaken by the wind is more settled and rooted. Just so, the blowing of a temptation does but settle a Christian the more in grace.

But sometimes Satan foils a child of God. How does this work for good? I grant that, through the suspension of divine grace, and the fury of a temptation, a saint may be overcome; yet this foiling by a temptation shall be overruled for good. By this foil God makes way for the augmentation of grace. Peter was tempted to self-confidence, he presumed upon his own strength; and Christ let him fall. But this wrought for his good, it cost him many a tear. "He went out, and wept bitterly" (Matt. 26:75). And now he grows less self-reliant. He dared not say he loved Christ more than the other apostles. "Do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15). He dared not say so—his fall into sin broke the neck of his pride!

We read of saints with harps in their hands (Rev. 14:2), an emblem of praise. We meet many Christians who have tears in their eyes, and complaints in their mouths. But there are few with their harps in their hands, who praise God in affliction.

Think—if the worst things work for good to a believer, what shall the best things—Christ, and heaven! How much more shall these work for good! If the cross has so much good in it—what has the crown! If such precious clusters grow in Golgotha—how delicious is that fruit which grows in Canaan! If there is any sweetness in the bitter waters of Marah— what is there in the sweet wine of Paradise! If God's rod has honey at the end of it—what has His golden scepter! If the bread of affliction tastes so savory—then how savory is His manna! What is the heavenly ambrosia? If God's blow and stroke work for good—what shall the smiles of His face do! If temptations and sufferings have matter of joy in them—what shall glory have! If there is so much good out of evil—how great is that good where there shall be no evil? If God's chastening mercies are so great—what will His crowning mercies be? "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

II. THE PERSONS INTERESTED IN THIS PRIVILEGE – *The Lovers of God, The Called*

Them that Love God

Love is an expansion of soul, or the inflaming of the affections, by which a Christian breathes after God as the supreme and sovereign good.

That our love may be drawn forth to God, we must know these three things in Him:

(1.) A fullness (Col. 1:19). He has a fullness of grace to cleanse us, and of a fullness glory to crown us; a fullness not only of sufficiency—but of redundancy. God is a sea of goodness without bottom and banks!

(2.) A freeness. God has an innate propensity to dispense mercy and grace; He drops as the honeycomb. "Whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). God does not require that we should bring money with us, only appetite.

(3.) A propriety, or property. We must know that this fullness in God is ours. "This God is our God" (Psalm 48:14). Here is the ground of love—His Deity, and the saving interest we have in Him.

A sharp reproof to those who do NOT love God. This may serve for a sharp reproof to such as have not a grain of love to God in their hearts—and are there such reprobates alive? He who does not love God—is a beast with a man's head! Oh wretch! Do you live upon God's bounty every day—yet not love Him? If one had a friend that supplied him continually with money, and gave him all his allowance, were not he worse than a barbarian, if he did not respect and honor that friend? Such a friend is God—He gives you your breath, He bestows a livelihood upon you—and will you not love Him?

The Called

The second qualification of the people to whom this privilege in the text belongs, is—they are the called by God. "All things work for good to those who are called." Though this word called is placed in order after loving of God—yet in reality, it goes before it. Love is first named—but not first wrought; we must be called of God, before we can love God.

There is a two-fold call.

(1.) There is an outward call, which is nothing else but God's blessed offer of grace in the gospel, His parleying with sinners, when He invites them to come in and accept of mercy. Of this our Savior speaks: "Many are called—but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). This external call is insufficient to salvation—yet sufficient to leave men without excuse.

(2.) There is an inward call, when God wonderfully overpowers the heart, and draws the will to embrace Christ. This is an effectual call. God, by the outward call, blows a trumpet in the ear; by the inward call, He opens the heart

The **MEANS** of our effectual call. The ordinary means which the Lord uses in calling us, is not by raptures and revelations—but is,

(1.) By His WORD... That is, in the ministry of the Word. When the Word calls from sin, it is as if we heard a voice from heaven.

(2.) By His SPIRIT. This is the loud call. The Word is the instrumental cause of our conversion, the Spirit is the efficient cause of our conversion. The ministers of God are only the pipes and organs; it is the Spirit blowing in them, which effectually changes the heart. "While Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the word" (Acts 10:44). It is not the farmer's industry in ploughing and sowing, which will make the ground fruitful, without the early and latter rain. Just so, it is not the seed of the Word that will effectually convert, unless the Spirit puts forth His sweet influence, and drops as rain upon the heart.

This call is a **SWEET** call. God so calls—as He allures. He does not force—but draw. The freedom of the will is not taken away—but the stubbornness of it is conquered.

This call is a **HOLY** call. "Who has called us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9). This call of God calls men out of their sins—by it they are consecrated, and set apart for God.

This call is an IRRESISTIBLE call. When God calls a man by His grace, he cannot but come. You may resist the minister's call—but you cannot the Spirit's call.

This call is an UNCHANGEABLE call. "God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). That is, as a learned writer says, those gifts which flow from election. When God calls a man, He does not repent of it.

This is the blessedness of a saint—his condition admits of no alteration. God's call is founded upon His decree—and His decree is immutable. Acts of grace cannot be reversed. God blots out His people's sins—but not their names. Let the world ring changes every hour, a believer's condition is unchangeable and unalterable.

III. THE ORIGIN OF THEIR EFFECTUAL CALLING – *The Purpose of God*

This purpose, or decree of God, is the fountainhead of our spiritual blessings. It is the moving cause of our effectual calling, justification, and glorification. It is the highest link in the golden chain of salvation. What is the reason that one man is effectually called, and not another? It is from the eternal purpose of God! God's decree gives the casting vote in man's salvation.

Let us then ascribe the whole work of grace to the pleasure of God's will. God did not choose us because we were worthy—but by choosing us He makes us worthy.

Here is a sovereign elixir of unspeakable comfort, to those who are the called of God. Their salvation rests upon God's purpose. "The foundation of God stands sure, having this seal. The Lord knows those who are his. Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19). Our graces are imperfect, our comforts ebb and flow—but God's foundation stands sure. They who are built

upon this rock of God's eternal purpose, need not fear falling away; neither the power of man, nor the violence of temptation, shall ever be able to overturn them!

POSITIVELY PURITAN

Week Three: Recognizing Satan's Tactics and the Christian's Defense

in "Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices" by Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

THE PROOF OF THE POINT

For the proof of the point, take these few Scriptures: (Eph. 6:11), "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Take one scripture more for the proof of the point, and that is in 2 Tim. 2:26, "And that they might recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

Satan has snares for the wise and snares for the simple; snares for hypocrites, and snares for the upright; snares for generous souls, and snares for timorous souls; snares for the rich, and snares for the poor; snares for the aged, and snares for youth. Happy are those souls that are not taken and held in the snares that he has laid!

SATAN'S DEVICES TO KEEP SOULS IN A SAD CONDITION

DEVICE 2: By working them to make false definitions of their graces.

Oh how does Satan labor with might and main to work men to make false definitions of FAITH! Some he works to define faith too high, as that it is a full assurance of the love of God to a man's soul in particular, or a full persuasion of the pardon and remission of a man's own sins in particular. Says Satan, What do you talk of faith? Faith is an assurance of the love of God, and of the pardon of sin; and this you have not; you know you are far off from this; therefore you have no faith.

Remedy (1). The first remedy against this device of Satan is, solemnly to consider, That there may be true faith, yes, great measures of faith, where there is no assurance.

It is one thing to have a right to heaven, and another thing to know it; it is one thing to be beloved, and another thing for a man to know that he is beloved.

Remedy (2). The second remedy against this device of Satan is, solemnly to consider, That God in the Scripture defines faith otherwise.

God defines faith to be a receiving of Christ—'As many as received him, to them he gave this privilege, to be the sons of God' (John 1:12).

Remedy (3). The third remedy against this device of Satan is, seriously to consider this, That there may be true faith where there is much doubtings.

Remedy (4). The fourth remedy against this device of Satan is, solemnly to consider, That assurance is an effect of faith; therefore it cannot be faith.

Again, faith cannot be lost—but assurance may; therefore assurance is not faith. Though assurance is a precious

flower in the garden of a saint, and is more infinitely sweet and delightful to the soul than all outward comforts and contentments; yet it is but a flower which is subject to fade, and to lose its freshness and beauty, as saints by sad experience find.

SATAN'S DEVICES TO DRAW THE SOUL TO SIN

DEVICE 1: To present the bait and hide the hook.

Satan's first device to draw the soul into sin is, to present the bait—and hide the hook; to present the golden cup—and hide the poison; to present the sweet, the pleasure, and the profit that may flow in upon the soul by yielding to sin—and to hide from the soul the wrath and misery that will certainly follow the committing of sin. By this device he deceived our first parents, "And the serpent said unto the woman, You shall not surely die—for God does know, that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5).

Remedy (1). First, Keep at the greatest distance from sin, and from playing with the golden bait which Satan holds forth to catch you; for this you have (Romans 12:9), "Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good."

The best course to prevent falling into the pit is to keep at the greatest distance from it; he who will be so bold as to attempt to dance upon the brink of the pit, may find by woeful experience that it is a righteous thing with God that he should fall into the pit.

Remedy (2). Consider that sin is but a bitter sweet.

Remedy (3). Solemnly to consider that sin will usher in the greatest and the saddest losses that can be upon our souls.

Remedy (4). Seriously to consider that sin is of a very deceitful and bewitching nature.

*"But exhort one another daily, while it is called 'today', lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."
Heb. 3:13.*

DEVICE 2: By painting sin with virtue's colors.

Remedy (4). Seriously to consider, That even those very sins that Satan paints, and puts new names and colors upon, cost the best blood, the noblest blood, the life-blood, the heart-blood of the Lord Jesus.

That Christ should come from the eternal bosom of his Father to a region of sorrow and death; that God should be manifested in the flesh, the Creator made a creature; that he who was clothed with glory should be wrapped with rags of flesh; he who filled heaven and earth with his glory should be cradled in a manger; that the almighty God should flee from weak man—the God of Israel into Egypt; that the God of the law should be subject to the law, the God of the circumcision circumcised, the God who made the heavens working at Joseph's homely trade; that he who binds the devils in chains should be tempted; that he, whose is the world, and the fullness thereof, should hunger and thirst; that the God of strength should be weary, the Judge of all flesh condemned, the God of life put to death; that he who is one with his Father should cry out of misery, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46); that he who had the keys of hell and death at his belt should lie imprisoned in the sepulcher of another, having in his lifetime nowhere to lay his head, nor after death to lay his body; that that HEAD, before which the angels do cast down their crowns, should be crowned with thorns, and those EYES, purer than the sun, put out by the darkness of death; those EARS, which hear nothing but hallelujahs of saints and angels, to hear the blasphemies of the multitude; that FACE, which was fairer than the sons of men, to be spit on by those beastly wretched Jews; that MOUTH and TONGUE, which spoke as never man spoke, accused for

blasphemy; those HANDS, which freely swayed the scepter of heaven, nailed to the cross; those FEET, "like unto fine brass," nailed to the cross for man's sins; each sense pained with a spear and nails; his SMELL, with stinking odor, being crucified on Golgotha, the place of skulls; his TASTE, with vinegar and gall; his HEARING, with reproaches, and SIGHT of his mother and disciples bemoaning him; his SOUL, comfortless and forsaken; and all this for those very sins that Satan paints and puts fine colors upon! Oh! how should the consideration of this stir up the soul against sin, and work the soul to fly from it, and to use all holy means whereby sin may be subdued and destroyed!

It was good counsel one gave, "Never let go out of your minds the thoughts of a crucified Christ." Let these be food and drink unto you; let them be your sweetness and consolation, your honey and your desire, your reading and your meditation, your life, death, and resurrection.

DEVICE 3: By extenuating and lessening of sin

Ah! says Satan, it is but a little pride, a little worldliness, a little uncleanness, a little drunkenness, etc. As Lot said of Zoar, "It is but a little one, and my soul shall live" (Gen. 19:20). Alas! says Satan, it is but a very little sin that you stick so at. You may commit it without any danger to your soul. It is but a little one; you may commit it, and yet your soul shall live.

Remedy (1). First, Solemnly consider, that those sins which we are apt to account small, have brought upon men the greatest wrath of God,

as the eating of an apple, gathering a few sticks on the Sabbath day, and touching of the ark. Oh! the dreadful wrath that these sins brought down upon the heads and hearts of men! The least sin is contrary to the law of God, the nature of God, the being of God, and the glory of God;

and therefore it is often punished severely by God; and do not we see daily the vengeance of the Almighty falling upon the bodies, names, states, families, and souls of men—for those sins that are but little ones in their eyes? Surely if we are not utterly forsaken by God, and blinded by Satan—we cannot but see it! Oh! therefore, when Satan says it is but a little one—you must say, Oh! but those sins which you call little, are such as will cause God to rain hell out of heaven upon sinners

DEVICE 6: By persuading the soul that the work of repentance is an easy work; and that therefore the soul need not make much matter of sin.

Remedy (1). The first remedy is, seriously to consider, That repentance is a mighty work, a difficult work, a work that is above our power.

Repentance is a flower wick does not grow in nature's garden!

Men are not born with repentance in their hearts, as they are born with tongues in their mouths: (Acts 5:31): 'Him has God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior—to give repentance.'

Remedy (5). The fifth remedy against this device of Satan is seriously to consider, That to repent of sin is as great a work of grace, as not to sin.

Remedy (6). The sixth remedy against this device of Satan is, seriously to consider, That he who now tempts you to sin upon this account, that repentance is easy, will, before long, to work you to despair, and forever to break the neck of your soul, present repentance as the most difficult and hardest work in the world;

SATAN'S DEVICES TO KEEP THE SOUL FROM HOLY DUTIES

DEVICE 1. By presenting the WORLD in such a dress, and in such a garb to the soul, as to ensnare the soul, and to win upon the affection of the soul.

Where one thousand are destroyed by the world's frowns-- ten thousand are destroyed by the world's smiles! The world, siren-like, sings to us, then sinks us! It kisses us, and betrays us, like Judas!

DEVICE 2. The second device that Satan has to draw the soul from holy duties, and to keep them off from religious services, is, By presenting to them the danger, the losses, and the sufferings which attend the performance of such and such religious services.

John 12:42, 'Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.'

Remedy (1). The first remedy against this device of Satan is to consider, That all the troubles and afflictions that you meet with in a way of righteousness shall never hurt you, they shall never harm you.

The treasures of a saint are the presence of God, the favor of God, union and communion with God, the pardon of sin, the joy of the Spirit, and the peace of conscience. These are jewels which none can give but Christ, nor none can take away but Christ.

Why, a believer's treasure is always safe in the hands of Christ; his life is safe, his soul is safe, his grace is safe, his comfort is safe, and his crown is safe in the hand of Christ. 'I know him in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until that day,' says the apostle (2 Tim. 1:12).

Remedy (5). The fifth remedy against this device of Satan is, solemnly to consider, That you shall gain more in the service of God, and by walking in righteous and holy ways, though troubles and afflictions should attend you—than you can possibly suffer, or lose, by your being found in the service of God.

Oh, the saints can say under all their troubles and afflictions, that they have food to eat, and drink to drink, that the world knows not of; that they have such incomes, such refreshments, such warmings, that they would not exchange for all the honors, riches, and dainties of this world. Ah, let but a Christian compare his external losses with his spiritual, internal, and eternal gain—and he shall find, that for every penny that he loses in the service of God, he gains a pound; and for every pound that he loses, he gains a hundred; for every hundred lost, he gains a thousand. We lose pins in his service, and find pearls! We lose the favor of the creature, and peace with the creature, and perhaps the comforts and contentments of the creature—and we gain the favor of God, peace of conscience, and the comforts and contentments of a better life.

For 'light afflictions,' they shall have 'a weight of glory!' For a few afflictions, they shall have these joys, pleasures, and contentments, that are as numerous as the stars of heaven, or as the sands of the sea! For momentary afflictions, they shall have an eternal crown of glory. 'It is but winking, and you shall be in heaven presently,' said the martyr.

POSITIVELY PURITAN

Week Four: Receiving the Tenderness of Christ for Sinners in “The Bruised Reed” by Richard Sibbes

The Reed & the Bruising

The prophet Isaiah, being lifted up and carried with the wing of a prophetic spirit, passes over all the time between him and the appearing of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Seeing with the eye of prophecy, and with the eye of faith, Christ as present, he presents him, in the name of God, to the spiritual eye of others, in these words: ‘Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth’ (Isa. 42:1-3). These words are alleged by Matthew as fulfilled now in Christ (Matt. 12:18-20). In them are propounded, first, the calling of Christ to his office; secondly, the manner in which he carries it out.

Christ’s Calling

God calls him here his servant. Christ was God's servant in the greatest piece of service that ever was, a chosen and a choice

servant who did and suffered all by commission from the Father. In this we may see the sweet love of God to us, in that he counts the work of our salvation by Christ his greatest service, and in that he will put his only beloved Son to that service.

How Christ Pursues His Calling

This is here said to be done modestly, without making a noise, or raising dust by any pompous coming, as princes are accustomed to do. 'His voice shall not be heard.' His voice indeed was heard, but what voice? 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden' (Matt. 11:28). He cried, but how? 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters' (Isa. 55:1). And as his coming was modest, so it was mild, which is set down in these words: 'A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.' We see, therefore, that the condition of those with whom he was to deal was that they were bruised reeds and smoking flax; not trees, but reeds; and not whole, but bruised reeds.

What it is to be Bruised

The bruised reed is a man that for the most part is in some misery, as those were that came to Christ for help, and by misery he is brought to see sin as the cause of it... This is such an one as our Saviour Christ terms 'poor in spirit' (Matt. 5:3), who sees his wants, and also sees himself indebted to divine justice.

Christ Will Not Break the Bruised Reed

In pursuing his calling, Christ will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, in which more is meant than spoken, for he will not only not break nor quench, but he will cherish those with whom he so deals.

But for further declaration of Christ's mercy to all bruised reeds, consider the comfortable relationships he has taken upon himself of husband, shepherd and brother, which he will discharge to the utmost. Consider the names he has borrowed from the mildest creatures, such as lamb and hen, to show his tender care. Consider

his very name Jesus, a Saviour, given him by God himself. Consider his office answerable to his name, which is that he should 'bind up the broken hearted' (Isa. 61:1). At his baptism the Holy Ghost rested on him in the shape of a dove, to show that he should be a dove like, gentle Mediator. See the gracious way he executes his offices. As a prophet, he came with blessing in his mouth, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (Matt. 5:3), and invited those to come to him whose hearts suggested most exceptions against themselves, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden' (Matt. 11:28). How did his heart yearn when he saw the people 'as sheep having no shepherd' (Matt. 9:36)! He never turned any back again that came to him, though some went away of themselves. He came to die as a priest for his enemies. In the days of his flesh he dictated a form of prayer unto his disciples, and put petitions unto God into their mouths, and his Spirit to intercede in their hearts. He shed tears for those that shed his blood, and now he makes intercession in heaven for weak Christians, standing between them and God's anger. He is a meek king; he will admit mourners into his presence, a king of poor and afflicted persons. As he has beams of majesty, so he has a heart of mercy and compassion. He is the prince of peace (Isa. 9:6). Why was he tempted, but that he might 'succor them that are tempted' (Heb. 2:18)?

What should we learn from this, but to 'come boldly to the throne of grace' (Heb. 4:16) in all our grievances? Shall our sins discourage us, when he appears there only for sinners? Are you bruised? Be of good comfort, he calls you. Conceal not your wounds, open all before him

We must conceive of bruising either as a state into which God brings us, or as a duty to be performed by us. Both are here meant. We must join with God in bruising ourselves. When he humbles us, let us humble ourselves, and not stand out against him, for then he will redouble his strokes.

We must lay siege to the hardness of our own hearts, and aggravate sin all we can. We must look on Christ, who was bruised for us, look on him whom we have pierced with our sins. But all directions will not prevail, unless God by his Spirit convinces us

deeply, setting our sins before us, and driving us to a standstill. Then we will cry out for mercy. Conviction will breed contrition, and this leads to humiliation. Therefore desire God that he would bring a clear and a strong light into all the corners of our souls, and accompany it with a spirit of power to lay our hearts low.

But if we have this for a foundation truth, that there is more mercy in Christ than sin in us, there can be no danger in thorough dealing. It is better to go bruised to heaven than sound to hell. Therefore let us not take off ourselves too soon, nor pull off the plaster before the cure be wrought, but keep ourselves under this work till sin be the sourest, and Christ the sweetest, of all things. And when God's hand is upon us in any way, it is good to divert our sorrow for other things to the root of all, which is sin. Let our grief run most in that channel, that as sin bred grief, so grief may consume sin.

The Smoking Flax

In pursuing his calling, Christ will not quench the smoking flax, or wick, but will blow it up till it flames. In smoking flax there is but a little light, and that weak, as being unable to flame, and that little mixed with smoke. The observations from this are that, in God's children, especially in their first conversion, there is but a little measure of grace, and that little mixed with much corruption, which, as smoke, is offensive; but that Christ will not quench this smoking flax.

There are several ages in Christians, some babes, some young men. Faith may be as 'a grain of mustard seed' (Matt. 17:20). Nothing so little as grace at first, and nothing more glorious afterward. Things of greatest perfection are longest in coming to their growth. Man, the most perfect creature, comes to perfection by little and little; worthless things, as mushrooms and the like, like Jonah's gourd, soon spring up, and soon vanish. A new creature is the most excellent creature in all the world, therefore it grows up by degrees.

Christ Will Not Quench the Smoking Flax

The second observation concerning the weak and small beginnings of grace is that Christ will not quench the smoking flax. This is so for two principal reasons. First, because this spark is from heaven: it is his own, it is kindled by his own Spirit. And secondly, it tends to the glory of his powerful grace in his children that he preserves light in the midst of darkness, a spark in the midst of the swelling waters of corruption.

It would be a good contest amongst Christians, one to labour to give no offence, and the other to labour to take none. The best men are severe to themselves, tender over others.

The church suffers much from weak ones, therefore we may assert our liberty to deal with them, though mildly, yet oftentimes directly... The church suffers much from weak ones, therefore we may assert our liberty to deal with them, though mildly, yet oftentimes directly. The scope of true love is to make the party better, which concealment oftentimes hinders. With some a spirit of meekness prevails most, but with some a rod. Some must be 'pulled out of the fire' (Jude 23) with violence, and they will bless God for us in the day of their visitation. We see that our Saviour multiplies woe upon woe when he has to deal with hard hearted hypocrites (Matt. 23:13), for hypocrites need stronger conviction than gross sinners, because their will is bad, and therefore usually their conversion is violent.

The Spirit of Mercy Should Move Us

Preachers need to take heed therefore how they deal with young believers. Let them be careful not to pitch matters too high, making things necessary evidences of grace which agree not to the experience of many a good Christian, and laying salvation and damnation upon things that are not fit to bear so great a weight.

If we look to the general temper of these times, rousing and waking Scriptures are fittest; yet there are many broken spirits who need soft and comforting words. Even in the worst time the prophets mingled sweet comfort for the hidden remnant of faithful people.

God has comfort. The prophet is told, 'Comfort ye my people' (Isa. 40:1), as well as, 'Lift up thy voice as a trumpet' (Isa. 58:1).

And here likewise there needs a caveat. Mercy does not rob us of our right judgment, so as to take stinking fire brands for smoking flax. None will claim mercy more of others than those who deserve due severity... Cold diseases must have hot remedies.

In the censures of the church, it is more suitable to the spirit of Christ to incline to the milder part, and not to kill a fly on the forehead with a mallet, nor shut men out of heaven for a trifle.

The power that is given to the church is given for edification, not destruction.

Some think it strength of grace to endure nothing in the weaker, whereas the strongest are readiest to bear with the infirmities of the weak.

We see in Christ a marvelous temper of absolute holiness, with great moderation. What would have become of our salvation, if he had stood upon terms, and not stooped thus low unto us? We need not affect to be more holy than Christ. It is no flattery to do as he does, so long as it is to edification. The Holy Ghost is content to dwell in smoky, offensive souls.

Assorted Quotes

Some are loath to do good because they feel their hearts rebelling, and duties turn out badly. We should not avoid good actions because of the infirmities attending them.

There is never a holy sigh, never a tear we shed, which is lost. And as every grace increases by exercise of itself, so does the grace of prayer. By prayer we learn to pray. So, likewise, we should take heed of a spirit of discouragement in all other holy duties, since we have so gracious a Saviour. Pray as we are able, hear as we are able, strive as we are able, do as we are able, according to the

measure of grace received. God in Christ will cast a gracious eye upon that which is his own.

In conclusion and as a general application to ourselves of all that has been said, we see the conflicting, but yet sure and hopeful, state of God's people. The victory lies not with us, but with Christ, who has taken on him both to conquer for us and to conquer in us. The victory lies neither in our own strength to get it, nor in our enemies' strength to defeat it. If it lay with us, we might justly fear. But Christ will maintain his own government in us and take our part against our corruptions. They are his enemies as well as ours. Let us therefore be `strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might' (Eph. 6:10). Let us not look so much at who our enemies are as at who our judge and captain is, nor at what they threaten, but at what he promises. We have more for us than against us. What coward would not fight when he is sure of victory? None is here overcome but he that will not fight.

Let us make use of this mercy and power of his every day in our daily combats: `Lord Jesus, thou hast promised not to quench the smoking flax, nor to break the bruised reed. Cherish thy grace in me; leave me not to myself; the glory shall be thine.'

POSITIVELY PURITAN

Week Five: Grieving Appropriately through Life's Tragedies
in "A Token for Mourners" by John Flavel (c. 1627-1691)

PREFATORY REMARKS

*O desire not to be delivered from your sorrows one moment before
God's time for your deliverance be fully come also.*

*Secondly, I desire, that though you and your afflictions had a sad
meeting, yet you and they may have a comfortable parting.*

Thirdly, I heartily wish that these searching afflictions may make the more satisfying discoveries; that you may now see more of the evil of sin, the vanity of the creature, and the fulness of Christ, than ever you yet saw.

Fourthly, I wish that all the love and delight you bestowed on your little one, may now be placed, to your greater advantage, upon Jesus Christ; and that the stream of your affection to him may be so much the stronger, as there are now fewer channels for it to be divided into.

Fifthly, That you may be strengthened with all might in the inner man to all patience, that the peace of God may keep your hearts and minds, labour to bring your hearts to a meek submission to the rod of your Father.

Lastly, My heart's desire and prayer to God for you, is, that you may die daily to all visible enjoyments, and by these frequent converses with death in your family, you may be prepared for your own change and dissolution, when it shall come.

MODERATE & IMMODERATE SORROW

It is as common with men, yea, with good men, to exceed in their sorrows for dead relations†, as it is to exceed in their love and delights to living relations; and both of the one, and the other, we may say, as they say of waters, It is hard to confine them within their bounds. It is therefore grave advice which the apostle delivers in this case, 1 Cor. 7:29, 30. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth that both they that have wives, be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not."

All these are time-eaten things, and before the expected fruit of these comforts be ripe, we ourselves may be rotten. It is therefore an high point of wisdom to look upon things which shortly will not be, as if already they were not, and to behave ourselves in the loss of these carnal enjoyments, as the natural man behaves himself in the use of spiritual ordinances; he hears as if he heard not, and we should weep as if we wept not; their affections are a little moved,

sometimes by spiritual things, but they never lay them so to heart, as to be broken-hearted for the sin they hear of, or deeply affected with the glory revealed.

SORROW ADMITTED TO CHRISTIAN MOURNERS

I will first allow what may be allowed to the Christian mourner, and then you will the better discern wherein the excess and sinfulness of your sorrow lies. And, First, How much soever we censure, and condemn immoderate sorrow; yet the afflicted must be allowed an awakened, and tender sense of the Lord's afflicting hand upon them. It is no virtue to bear what we do not feel; yea, it is a most unbecoming temper, not to tremble when God is smiting.

Secondly, We must allow the mourning, afflicted soul, a due and comely expression of his grief and sorrow in his complaints both to God and men. It is much more becoming a Christian, ingeniously to open his troubles, than suddenly to smother them. There is no sin in complaining to God, but much wickedness in complaining of him. Grievs are eased by groans and heart-pressures relieved by utterance. This was David's course and constant way, who was a man of afflictions, Psalm 142:2, 3. "I poured out my complaint before him, I shewed before him my trouble; when my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knowest my path."

We may also make our complaint to men. So did Job, chap. 19. ver. 21. "Have pity, have pity on me, O ye my friends, for the hand of God hath touched me."

Thirdly, The afflicted person may (ordinarily) accuse, judge, and condemn himself, for being the cause and procurer of his own troubles.

When God is smiting, we should be a searching

Lastly, The afflicted Christian may, in an humble, submissive manner, plead with God, and be earnest for the removal of the affliction.

WHEN SORROW BECOMES SINFUL

First, *It causeth us to slight and despise all our other mercies, and enjoyments as small things, in comparison of what we have lost.*

It often falls out, that the setting of one comfort, clouds and be-nights all the rest. Our tears for our lost enjoyments so blind our eyes, that we cannot see the many other mercies which yet remain: We take so much notice of what is gone, that we take little or no notice of what is left. But this is very sinful, for it involves in it both ignorance, ingratitude, and great provocation.

Secondly, *And no less sinful are our sorrows, When they so wholly ingulph our hearts, that we either mind not at all, or are little or nothing sensible of the public evils and calamities which lie upon the church and people of God.*

Thirdly, *Our sorrows then become sinful and exorbitant, When they divert us from, or distract us in our duties, so that our intercourse with heaven is stopt and interrupted by them.*

How long can we sit alone musing upon a dead creature? Here our thoughts easily flow; but how hard to fix them upon the living God! when our hearts should be in heaven, with our Christ, they are in the grave with our dead.

Poor creature, cease to weep any longer for thy dead relation, and weep rather for thy dead heart.

Fourthly, *Then you may also conclude your sorrows to be excessive and sinful, When they so overload and oppress your bodies, as to endanger your lives, or render them useless and unfit for service.*

Fifthly, *when affliction sours the spirit with discontent, and makes it inwardly grudge against the hand of God, then our trouble is full of sin, and we ought to be humbled for it before the Lord.*

to have lovely and well-pleased thoughts of God, even when he smites us in our nearest and dearest comforts, argues plainly that we love him for himself, and not for his gifts only.

Sixthly, *Our sorrows exceed due bounds when we continually excite and provoke them by willing irritations.*

Seventhly, *Lastly*, *Our sorrows may then be pronounced sinful, when they deafen our ears to all the wholesome, and seasonable words of counsel, and comfort, offered us for our relief, and support.*

GODLY MOURNERS COMFORTED

Consideration 1. *Consider, in this day of sorrow, who is the framer and author of this rod by which you now smart; is it not the Lord? And if the Lord hath done it, it becomes you meekly to submit. Psal. 46:10. "Be still, and know that I am God."*

Consideration 2. *Ponder well the quality of the comfort you are deprived of, and remember, that when you had it, it stood but in the rank and order of common and inferior comforts.*

It is not father, mother, wife, or child, in which our chief good and felicity lies; we have higher, better, and more enduring things than these; all these may perish, and yet our soul be secure and safe; yea, and our comfort in the way, as well as end, may be safe enough, though these are gone: God hath better things to comfort his people with than these, and worse rods to afflict you with than the removal of these.

Consideration 3. *Always remember, that how soon and unexpected soever your parting with your relations was, yet your lease was expired before you lost them, and you enjoyed them every moment of the time that God intended them for you.*

Consider. 4. *Hath God smitten your darling, and taken away the delight of your eyes with this stroke? Bear this stroke with patience and quiet submission: For how know you but your trouble might have been greater from the life, than it now is from the death of your children?*

Consider. 5. *How know you, but by this stroke which you so lament, God hath taken them away from the evil to come?*

Consider. 6. *A parting time must needs come, and why is not this as good as another?*

It is well for us and ours that our times are in God's hand, and not in our own. And how immature soever it seemed to be when it was cut down; yet it "came to the grave in a full age, as a shock of corn in its season," Job 5:26. They that are in Christ, and in the covenant, never die unseasonably, whensoever they die (saith one upon the text), 'They die in a good old age; yea, though they die in the spring and flower of youth; they die in a good old age; i.e. they are ripe for death whenever they die. Whenever the godly die, it is harvest time with him; though in a natural capacity he be cut down while he is green, and cropt in the bud or blossom; yet in his spiritual capacity he never dies before he is ripe; God can ripen him speedily, he can let out such warm rays and beams of his Holy Spirit upon them, as shall soon mature the seeds of grace into a preparedness for glory.'*

Consider. 7. *Call to mind in this day of trouble, the covenant you have with God, and what you solemnly promised him in the day you took him for your God.*

In those your spiritual distresses, when the burden of sin lay heavy, the curse of the law, the fear of hell, the dread of death and eternity beset thee on every side, and shut thee up to Christ, the only door of hope; ah! what good news wouldst thou then have accounted it, to escape that danger with the loss of all earthly comforts! Was not this thy cry in

those days? 'Lord, give me Christ, and deny me whatever else thou pleasest. Pardon my sin, save my soul, and, in order to both, unite me with Christ, and I will never repine or open my mouth. Do what thou wilt with me; let me be friendless, let me be childless, let me be poor, let me be any thing rather than a christless, graceless, hopeless soul.'

Consider. 8. *But if thy covenant with God will not quiet thee, yet methinks God's covenant with thee might be presumed to do it.*

You know what domestic troubles holy David met with in a sad succession, not only from the death of children, but, which was much worse, from the wicked lives of his children. There was incest, murder, and rebellion in his family; a far sorer trial than death in their infancy could have been; And yet see how sweetly he relieves himself from the covenant of grace, in 2 Sam. 23:5. "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure, for this is all my salvation and all my desire, although he make it not to grow."

First, If you are God's covenant people, though he may afflict, yet he will never forget you,

Secondly, As he will never forget you in your troubles, so he will order all your troubles for your good: It is a well-ordered covenant, or a covenant orderly disposed; so that every thing shall work together for your good.

Thirdly, This covenant is not only well ordered in all things, but sure: the mercies contained in it are called, "the sure mercies of David," Isa. 55:3.

The sweetest creature-enjoyments you ever had or have in this world, cannot say to you, as your God doth, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." You must part with your dear husbands, how well soever you love them; you

must bid adieu to the wife of your bosom, how nearly soever your affections be linked, and heart delighted in her. Your children and you must be separated, though they are to you as your own soul. But though these vanish away, blessed be God there is something that abides. 'Though all flesh be as grass, and the goodliness of it as the flower of the grass, though the grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it; yet the word of our God shall stand for ever,' Isa. 40:6, 7, 8.

Consideration 9. *The hope of the resurrection should powerfully restrain all excesses of sorrow in those that do profess it.*

Let them only mourn without measure, who mourn without hope.

First, That the same body which was so pleasant a spectacle to thee shall be restored again; yea, the same numerically, as well as the same specifically; so that it shall not only be what it was, but the who it was. "These eyes shall behold him, and not another," Job 19:27.

Secondly, And farther, this is supporting, that as you shall see the same person that was so dear to you; so you shall know them to be the same that were once endeared to you on earth in so near a tie of relation.

Thirdly, That at our next meeting, they shall be unspeakably more desirable, sweet, and excellent, than ever they were in this world. They had a desirableness in them here, but they were not altogether lovely, and, in every respect, desirable; they had their infirmities, both natural and moral; but all these are removed in heaven, and for ever done away: No natural infirmities hang about glorified bodies, or sinful ones upon perfected spirits of the just. O what lovely creatures will they appear to you then, when that which is now sown in dishonour, shall be raised in honour! 1 Cor. 15:43.

Fourthly, You shall have an everlasting enjoyment of them in heaven, never to part again. The children of the resurrection can die no more, Luke 20:36 you shall kiss their pale lips and cold cheeks no more; you shall never fear another parting pull, but be together with the Lord for ever, 1 Thes. 4:14.

Consideration 10: *The present felicity into which all that die in Christ are presently admitted, should abundantly comfort Christians over the death if such as either carried a lively hope out of the world with them, or have left good grounds of such an hope behind them.*

There is no Christian parent in the world, but would rejoice to see his child out-strip and get before him in grace, that he may be more eminent in parts and services than ever he was: And what reason can be given, why we should not as much rejoice to see our children get before us in glory, as in grace?

Alas! though you want your friends company, he wants not yours; your care was to provide for this child, but Jesus Christ hath provided infinitely better for it than you could; you intended an estate, but he a kingdom for it; you thought upon such or such a match, but Christ hath forbid all others, and married your child to himself. Would you imagine an higher preferment for the fruit of your bodies?

A King from heaven hath sent for your friend, and do you grudge at the journey? O think, and think again, what an honour it is to you, that Christ hath taken them out of your bosom, and laid them in his own; stript them out of those garments you provided, and cloathed them in white robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb. Let not your hearts be troubled, rather rejoice exceedingly, that God made you instruments to replenish heaven, and bring forth an heir for the kingdom of God.

Consideration 11. *Consider how vain a thing all your troubles and self-vexation is; it no way better's your case, nor eases your burden.*

Consideration 12. *The Lord is able to restore all your lost comforts in relations double to you, if you meekly submit to him, and patiently wait upon him under the rod.*

Consideration 13. *Consider, though he should deny you any more comforts of that kind, yet he hath far better to bestow upon you, such as these deserve not to be named with.*

Consideration 14. *Be careful you exceed not in your grief for the loss of earthly things, considering that Satan takes the advantage of all extremes.*

When it is dark night with men, it is noon-day with Satan; i.e. our suffering-time is his busiest working-time; many a dismal suggestion he then plants, and grafts upon your affliction, which are much more dangerous to us than the affliction itself.

Sometimes he injects desponding thoughts into the afflicted soul; "Then, said I, I am cut off from before thine eyes," Psal. 31:22 and Lam. 3:18, 19. "My hope is perished from the Lord, remembering my affliction, and my misery, the wormwood and the gall."

Sometimes he suggests hard thoughts of God, Ruth 1:20. "The Lord hath dealt very bitterly with me."

And sometimes murmuring and repining thoughts against the Lord; the soul is displeased at the hand of God upon it. Jonah was angry at the hand of God, and said, "I do well to be angry, even unto death," Jon. 4:9. What dismal thoughts are these? and how much more afflictive to a gracious soul, than the loss of any outward enjoyment in this world.

And sometimes very irreligious and atheistical thoughts, as if there were no privilege to be had by religion, and all our pains, zeal, and care about duty, were little better than lost labour, Psal. 73:13, 14. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning."

By these things Satan gets no small advantage upon the afflicted Christian; for albeit these thoughts are his burden, and God will not impute them to the condemnation of his people; yet they rob the soul of peace, and hinder it from duty, and make it act uncomely under affliction, to the stumbling and hardening of others in their sin: beware therefore, lest by our excess of sorrow ye give place to the devil; we are not ignorant of his devices.

Consider. 15. *Give no way to excessive sorrows upon the account of affliction, if ye have any regard to the honour of God and religion, which will hereby be exposed to reproach.*

O beware what you do before the world; they have eyes to see what you can do, as well as ears to hear what you can say: and as long as your carriage under trouble is so much like their own, they will never think your principles are better than theirs. Carnal worldlings will be drawn to think, that whatever fine talk you might have about God and heaven, your hearts were most upon the same things that theirs were, since your grief for their removal is as great as theirs.

Consider. 16. *Be quiet, and hold your peace, you little know how many mercies lie in the womb of this affliction.*

And what if by this stroke the Lord will awaken your drowsy soul, and recover you out of that pleasant, but dangerous spiritual slumber you were fallen into, whilst you had pillowed your head upon this; pleasant, sensible creature-enjoyment? Is not this really better for you than if he should say, Sleep on: he is joined to idols, let him alone;

*he is departing from me, the fountain, to a broken cistern;
let him go.*

Consider. 17. *Suffer not yourselves to be transported by impatience, and swallowed up of grief, because God hath exercised you under a smart rod; for, as smarting as it is, it is comparatively a gentle stroke to what others, as good as yourselves, have felt.*

Consideration 18. *If God be your God, you have really lost nothing by the removal of any creature-comfort.*

Consideration 19. *Though you may want a little comfort in your life, yet surely it may be recompensed to you by a more easy death.*

The removal of your friends before you may turn to your great advantage, when your hour is come that you must follow them. O how have many good souls been clogged and ensnared in their dying hour, by the loves, cares, and fears they have had about those they must leave behind them in a sinful, evil world!

Consideration 20. *But if nothing that hath been yet said will stick with you, then, lastly, remember that you are near that state, and place which admits no sorrows, nor sad rejections, upon any such accounts as these.*

We now live partly by faith, partly by sense, partly upon God, and partly upon the creature; our state is mixed, therefore our comforts are so too. But when God shall be all in all, and we shall be as the angels of God in the way and manner of our living; how much will the case be altered with us then, from what it is now?

When the days of our sinning are ended, the days of our mourning shall be so too. No graves were opened till sin entered, and no more shall be opened when sin is excluded.

POSITIVELY PURITAN
Week Six: Learning to Fear God, Not Man in
“Triumphing Over Sinful Fear” by John Flavel

INTRODUCTION

Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and

let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary. —Isaiah 8:12–14a

There is as much diversity in people's inward moods and dispositions as in their outward features. Some are as frightened as rabbits and jump at every sound—even a dog's bark. Some are as bold as lions and face danger without trembling. Some fear more than they ought, some before they ought, and others when they ought not at all. The carnal person fears man, not God. The strong Christian fears God, not man. The weak Christian fears man too much and God too little.

When the church is in the storms of persecution, and almost covered with the waves, her most courageous passengers may suffer as much from this boisterous passion within as from the storm without. This is the result of not thoroughly believing or seasonably remembering that the Lord—Admiral of all the oceans and Commander of all the winds—is on board the ship to steer and preserve it from the storm.

A Sin Condemned:

“Neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid” (Isa. 8:12b). This kind of fear is a sinful principle. It will incline them to do what their countrymen did, namely, to say “A confederacy.” Sinful fear will cause the best people to attempt to help themselves through sinful compromises... They must not forget God, magnify the creature, or prefer their own schemes and policies to God's almighty power and unchanging faithfulness.

A Remedy Prescribed:

“Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread” (Isa. 8:13). The fear of God will swallow up the fear of man. A reverential awe and dread of God will extinguish the creature's slavish fear, as the rain puts out the fire. To sanctify the Lord of hosts is to acknowledge the glory of His sovereign power, wisdom, and faithfulness. It includes not only a

verbal confession, but internal acts of trust, confidence, and entire dependence upon Him.

A Motive Encouraged:

“And he shall be for a sanctuary” (Isa. 8:14a). If we sanctify the Lord of hosts by acknowledging Him and depending upon Him in times of danger, then He will be our sanctuary. He will surely protect, defend, and provide for us in the worst times and cases.

“And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defense. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain” (Isa. 4:5–6). Let the wind roar, the rain beat, the lightning flash, we are in safety and have a good roof over our heads.

Conclusion:

Two points of doctrine emerge from the above explanation of the text. First, the best people are easily overcome with slavish fear in times of imminent distress and danger. Second, the fear of God is the most effectual means for extinguishing sinful fear and keeping us from danger.

TYPES OF FEAR

Natural Fear:

Everyone experiences natural fear. It is the trouble or agitation of mind that arises when we perceive approaching evil or impending danger. It is not always sinful, but it is always the fruit and consequence of sin.

Sinful Fear:

There is a fear that is formally and intrinsically sinful... Sinful fear arises from unbelief—an unworthy distrust of God. This occurs

when we fail to rely upon the security of God's promise; in other words, when we refuse to trust in God's protection.

The sinfulness of fear lies in its excess and immoderacy when we fear more than we ought.

The sinfulness of our fear lies in its excessiveness. To fear something more than we ought is bad enough, but to magnify its power above that of a creature is sinful. When we exalt a creature's power by fearing it, we give it ascendancy over us.

To trust in any creature as if it had God's power to help us, or to fear any creature as if it had God's power to hurt us, is exceedingly sinful.

The sinfulness of fear consists in its power to dispose and incline people to use sinful means to escape danger. This casts them into the hands of temptation. "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. 29:25a).

Religious Fear:

There is a holy and laudable fear, which is our treasure, not our torment. It is the chief ornament of the soul—its beauty and perfection, not its unhappiness or sin. Natural fear is a pure and simple passion of the soul. Sinful fear is the disordered and corrupt passion of the soul. But the awful, filial fear of God is the natural passion sanctified—changed and baptized into the name and nature of a spiritual grace.

God plants this fear in the soul as a fixed and permanent habit. It is not, therefore, a natural product of our heart, but a supernatural infusion and implantation. "I will put my fear in their hearts" (Jer. 32:40).

This fear puts the soul under the awe of God's eye. "My heart standeth in awe of thy word" (Ps. 119:161b).

This fear inclines us to do what pleases God.

This fear engages and, to some degree, enables the soul to shun and avoid whatever displeases God.

USES OF FEAR

The Use of Natural Fear

We begin with natural fear. It is absolutely necessary for our civil governance. By consequence, it is necessary for the world's peace, order, and comfort.

Whoever fears not the loss of his own life will master another person's life. It is the law and the accompanying fear of punishment that keeps the world in order. People are afraid to do evil because they are afraid to suffer for it.

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.... But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain” (Rom. 13:3–4a). By this means, fear restrains and prevents a world of evil.

The Uses of Religious Fear

First, God uses it to excite and confirm His people in the way of their duty. “Fear God, and keep his commandments” (Eccl. 12:13). Religious fear is the keeper of both tables of the law because it influences the duties of both tables.

Second, God uses this fear to preserve our conscience's peace and purity. It does so by preventing grief and guilt. “And by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil” (Prov. 16:6b). Our consciences' peace is directly proportionate to the degree to which the fear of God prevails in our hearts.

Third, God uses this fear to make us prepare for future distress. As a result, we are not surprised when it comes upon us. Thus, Noah “moved with fear, prepared an ark” (Heb. 11:7). His fear was the

instrument of his and his family's salvation. Some men owe their death to their fear, but good men (in a sense) owe their lives to their fear.

CAUSES OF SINFUL FEAR

Cause 1: Ignorance

First, we are ignorant of God. We do not know (or, at least, we do not fully consider) His almighty power, vigilant care, unspotted faithfulness, and how these are engaged by covenant for His people... If we thoroughly understand and believe what power is in God's hand to defend us, what tenderness is in His heart to help us, and what faithfulness is in His promises, our hearts will be calm—our courage will grow stronger and our fear will grow weaker.

Second, we are ignorant of others. We fear people because we do not know them... We fail to consider that people have no power over us except what God gives them from above.

Third, we are ignorant of ourselves. Our failure to appreciate our relation to God creates slavish fear in our hearts (Isa. 51:12). If we were to understand how dear we are to God, our relation to Him, our value in His eyes, and how He protects us by His faithful promises and gracious presence, we would not tremble at every appearance of danger.

Cause 2: Guilt

Another cause and fountain of sinful fear is a guilty conscience. A servant of sin is necessarily a slave of fear. Those who commit evil must expect evil.

Cause 3: Unbelief

A guilty conscience is a source of fears, but the sin of unbelief is the real and proper cause of most distracting and afflicting fears. To the extent that our souls are empty of faith, they are filled with fear. We read of people who have died by no other cause than their

fear. But we never read of anyone, once brought to life by faith, dying because of fear. If people were to dig to the root of their fears, they would find unbelief.

Cause 5: Immoderation

Our immoderate love of life and its comforts and conveniences is another cause of sinful fear in times of danger. If we loved our lives less, we would fear and tremble less.

But in comparison to Jesus Christ, life was a trifle to Paul. He tells us: “Neither count I my life dear unto myself” (Acts 20:24). In other words, “It is a commodity of little value in my eyes—not worth saving on such sinful terms.”

REMEDIES FOR SINFUL FEAR

Rule 1: Study the Covenant of Grace

The first rule for relieving slavish fear is to consider seriously and study thoroughly the covenant of grace in which all believers stand. A clear understanding of the covenant’s nature, extent, and stability, along with our interest in it, will go a long way to cure our sinful and slavish fear.

In the covenant, God gives Himself to His people—to be their God (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10). He bestows Himself upon us in all His glorious and essential properties so that we are assured that (in all fears and hardships) He will faithfully perform whatever His almighty power, infinite wisdom, and incomprehensible mercy can afford for our protection, support, deliverance, direction, pardon, or refreshment. God expects us to improve this by faith as the most sovereign antidote against all our fears in this world. “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee” (Isa. 43:1–2a). “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God” (Isa. 41:10a).

Rule 2: Consider the Misery of Sinful Fear

The miseries and calamities that sinful fear brings upon people in this world are unspeakable. It has plunged the consciences of so many poor wretches into deep distresses. It has put them upon the rack and made them roar like the damned in hell.

Reader, the time is coming when Christ will break forth from heaven with a shout, accompanied with His saints and angels. The heavens and earth will be in dreadful fire all around Him. The last trumpet will sound. The graves will open. The earth and sea will give up their dead. Your eyes will see Him ascend the awful throne of judgment. His faithful ones, who are not afraid to stand with Him in the face of dangers and enemies, will sit with Him as judges. What will it be like for Christ to disclaim and renounce you forever in the face of that great assembly? What will it be like for Him to proclaim you a delinquent, a traitor, because you denied His name and truth before those who have long since withered like the grass? Oh, how will you endure this? Now, put these two together; consider the terrors of conscience here and its desperate horror in hell. This is a smoldering; that is a roasting in the flames of God's insufferable wrath. This is a scalding drop sprinkled upon your conscience; that is the lake that burns forever with fire and brimstone. Oh, who would choose that suffering out of fear for present suffering which only touches the flesh and is but momentary? Think upon Christ's words: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it" (Mark 8:35a). Why, out of fear for a trifle, would you prolong a life that ends in the second death? It is nothing compared to what you will suffer from God forever.

Rule 4: Commit Yourself to God

In order to subdue slavish fear, we must commit ourselves and all that is ours into God's hands. This rule is confirmed in Scripture: "Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established" (Prov. 16:3). The greatest part of our trouble and burden in time of danger arises from the unsettledness and distraction of our own thoughts. The way to calm our thoughts is to commit everything to God. This rule must be applied when we face death in its terrible forms and frightful appearances. "Wherefore let

them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:9-19)

Rule 5: Mortify Your Affections to the World

If our hearts were crucified, they would soon be calmed. It is the strength of our affections that puts so much strength into our afflictions.

Paul and Silas lost their liberty, but not their comfort. They were never as free as when their feet were in the stocks.

Rule 9: Record Your Experiences of God’s Faithfulness

In order to subdue your slavish fear, you must carefully record your experiences of God’s care for you and His faithfulness to you in your past danger and distress. You must apply them to your present fears.

First, experience abates the terror of suffering and makes it less formidable. Fear says, “They are great waters and will drown us.” Experience says, “They are shallower than we think. We can safely cross; others have. We may pass through the Red Sea and not be overwhelmed.”

Rule 10: Consider Christ’s Providential Kingdom

In order to free yourself from sinful fear, you must consider Christ’s providential kingdom over all creatures and affairs in this world. Poor fearful souls! Is there not a King, a supreme Lord, who rules over all? Has not Christ the reins of government in His hands (Matt. 28:18; John 17:2; Phil. 2:9–12)? Enemies, like wild horses, may prance up and down as though they would trample everyone in their path; but the bridle of providence is in their mouths and upon their proud necks (2 Kings 19:28).

The care of the saints is in Christ’s hands. He is the Head of the body (Eph. 1:22–23). It is a reproach and dishonor to Christ to fill

our heads with distracting cares and fears when we have so wise a Head to consult and work for us.

You have lived to this day upon Christ's care. No truth is more evident than this: wisdom beyond your own has guided your ways (Jer. 10:23), power above your own has supported your burdens (Psalm 73:26), and a spring of relief beyond you has met your needs (Luke 22:35). He has performed everything for you.

Christ has promised to take care of His people—no matter the circumstances (Eccl. 8:12; Amos 9:8–9; Rom. 8:28). Oh, if we thoroughly believed these things, fear could no more afflict our hearts than clouds could trouble the heavens!