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And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes. Genesis 18:27

There is a wonderful display of the wisdom of God in this first book of the Holy Scriptures, in which the first principles of the religion of a sinner are laid down in the most simple manner. After a brief discovery of our original state and our dreadful fall from that state, the Spirit of God goes on in a historical way to describe the spiritual exercises of various individuals until we come to Abraham who was a leading example of faith and obedience.

These words, considered in their connection with the context, give ground for the following observation, that times of peculiar nearness to God will be times of special abasement and humiliation of soul before Him. Abraham was at this time admitted into great nearness to God and we see the effect which it had upon him. He has not much to say. God's people at these times have such views of their own vileness as it is beyond the power of language to describe. It is not a time to pay compliments to God in neatness or fluency of speech. This we may see exemplified in the case of the publican whose outward gestures are much more expressive of the posture of his soul than his words. All that he has to say is soon told in very few words, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Just so it is the case here with this eminent saint who is called the father of the faithful: "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes".

This observation will vindicate the propriety of appointing a day for fasting and humiliation preparatory to the dispensation of the Lord's Supper. It may be asked, "What is the reason for such appointments? Is it not a feast of gladness and of triumph?" It is true it is so, but who are they that are to be the partakers at this feast? Are they not sinners, who have many things about them to humble them? And it is most fit that their humility and lowliness of spirit should bear some proportion to the dignity and glory of this ordinance, and to their nearness of access to God in it. I am not at this time to speak merely or chiefly of the unregenerate, who have nothing to do with this ordinance. But I shall specially have in view those who are invited to this feast.

In handling this subject:

- I. I shall illustrate the view which is here given of the meanness and vileness of our nature, "who am but dust and ashes".
- II. I shall speak a little of that intercourse which God is pleased to grant unto His own people.
- III. I shall show how it is so wonderful that God should admit His people into such familiarity with Himself as was the case at this time with the patriarch Abraham: "Behold," says he, as if he had said, "How wonderful and admirable it is that the great Jehovah, the Lord of glory, should admit one so vile and loathsome as I am to speak unto Him!"
- IV. I shall apply the subject.

I The meanness and vileness of our nature

We are to consider the view which is here given of our natural meanness and vileness when it is said we are "but dust and ashes". These words, however, are both metaphorical and literal. In the former sense it is as if the patriarch had seen himself to be more vile than the dust of

the earth and more defiled and defiling than ashes. They are likewise literal and strictly true. Our bodies, which are a part of our constitution, were made of the dust and will soon be mingled with it again. But it is chiefly our moral deformity which makes us so unworthy in the sight of the eyes of God's glory.

In speaking more particularly here I shall begin with that which is most simple, namely the body, by which we may rise to a more distinct apprehension of our spiritual deformity.

1. The meanness of our nature appears in this, that we are clothed with a body. Setting the consideration of sin aside, it is cause of humiliation to think that, although we are allied to the angels, yet we are also allied to the beasts of the earth. In this we are made a little lower than the angels who, being wholly spiritual in their nature, have a nearer resemblance to God than man has. But our spirits are lodged in tabernacles of flesh, which are not so free, and have many wants and encumbrances. In this view, Adam and Eve were called to be humble even in paradise where they had no mixture of pain, for it is sin which has mingled sorrow with our humiliation. Adam in a state of innocence had a humble and thankful enjoyment in the possession of his body. And this enjoyment shall again be perfected in the heavenly world. There the spirits of just men made perfect shall continue to exercise this humble joy without the least measure of pain or sorrow throughout eternity, for they shall be free from that sin which in this world makes us truly mean and vile.

2. This meanness appears in our souls being wholly taken up with the body and with the things of sense, so that we are (as it were) out of the spiritual world and wholly sunk in an abyss of matter. Ever since man forsook God as the chief centre of his desires he has been plunged and immersed in the concerns of the flesh. If our minds were spiritually illuminated we would see that man in his natural state is a monster, putting that uppermost which should be lowermost, and that the noble soul of man, which was a spark from above, is trampled upon and drudged by the baser part which is only dust.

3. This view will be still further confirmed when we consider that we are naturally averse and backward to any spiritual views of God or of spiritual things. We cannot attain to any becoming spiritual apprehensions of the invisible God; we would still be for fancying to ourselves a visible Deity. And hence it is that there is found in man's heart such a propensity and bent for those idolatrous representations of God which have been the sin and folly of men in all ages. Hence also arise those unworthy and low thoughts of God which fill the minds of men in a state of nature and which are just ground of humiliation to us. From this, likewise, proceeds that inclination and bias to external pomp and show in the worship of God which has been so prevalent in the world, the children of men not considering that God is infinitely pure and spiritual and stands at the utmost distance from everything material.

4. This view will still further appear when we consider that we are not only averse to the contemplation of the spiritual world but are likewise backward to considering the things of this world in a spiritual manner. There is a great ocean of the glory of God in the visible world and this is seen by all the holy creatures of God. We are told that when the foundations of the world were laid "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). There is not a blade of grass but it has much of the glory of God veiled under it. We, in our fallen state, are so blinded that although He works on our right hand and on our left, we see Him not because we have become wholly carnal. And however lightly this may be thought of now, still it shall be brought in as a fundamental article of guilt against millions of men at the day of judgement, as set forth in Romans 1:18-21. It ought to be matter of deep humiliation to us that, while there is such glory everywhere shining around us and seen by a world of holy creatures, still that glory is unknown to us through the darkness which has blinded our eyes.

5. This meanness to which our nature is sunk appears further in that we are not only carnal in our apprehensions of earthly things, but we are also debased so low as even to prefer the interests of the flesh to God Himself and to all spiritual good in Him. So that a very mean and

vile gratification of the body is put by the soul in the room of God, an illustration of which is given by the Spirit of God in these words, "whose god is their belly" (Philippians 3:19). How humbling is the consideration that we by nature willingly suffer every low and transient lust to lord it over us! The throne of the heart is open to the gratification of every vile appetite, while the ever-blessed God, who alone can be the all-sufficient and eternal portion of the never-dying soul, is not at all desired.

6. This lowness into which our nature is fallen appears in that we are very averse to the suffering of the least bodily pain. So far are we alienated from God and so closely are we allied to the interests of the flesh that we cannot think of suffering any bodily pain for the glory of God. Man in his original rectitude would have willingly gone through much bodily suffering while the love and desire of the glory of God reigned in him supremely, and while the faculties of his soul and body were in the right place. But the case is now woefully changed. Those high and noble faculties of the soul are now subordinated to the low and base desires of the flesh, so that the gratification of its base appetites is desired rather than the glory of that God of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things (1 Corinthians 8:6). So completely is man sunk into the narrow circle of his mean self!

7. Another humbling view of the meanness of our bodies is that they are unable to bear the near approaches of God, either in a way of love or of terror. Whatever some philosophers may ignorantly say of spirits having no influence upon matter, the period approaches when they shall be convinced of the vanity of their atheistical conceits and when they shall see that *that* God who formed the body can, when He pleases, melt it at His presence. It is certain that the near approaches of God in a way of love have sometimes overwhelmed His own people to the exhausting of their natural strength, so that they required to be supernaturally strengthened before they could bear those manifestations with which they were favoured – as you may see in the examples of Daniel under the Old and of the beloved disciple [John] under the New Testament dispensations.

We may here see and admire the infinity of glory which was in the human nature of Jesus Christ and which was in such near and inconceivable union with the Godhead. You will perhaps say, "The human nature of Christ is but a created (and therefore a limited) thing – how then can there be an infinity of glory in it?" It is true that the human nature of Jesus Christ is limited, but being as it were enclosed in the Godhead and being anointed of the Spirit without measure, it may be said that an unsearchable glory resides in it, and the Person of Immanuel will be the wonder and delight of the heavenly world, and the great channel of the emanations and communications of God to the blessed inhabitants of that world throughout all eternity.

8. Lastly, the meanness of the body appears in that it is appointed to return unto the dust of death. This is humbling, whether we consider it as an effect of the curse or as an obstacle in the way of the person entering into the full blessedness of the heavenly world. Such is the mean and vile condition of the body that it is utterly unfit for perfect communion with God in its present state; nor can the soul enjoy this whilst it tabernacles in it. It must therefore be brought to the dust of death and become a spectacle of loathsomeness so that the soul may be freed from an ensnaring clog when engaging in the service of God.

II Ways in which God communes with His people

We shall now proceed to the second general head, which is to speak a little of the ways in which God is pleased to hold intercourse with His people while here. And on this (and the remaining part of the subject) I mean to be very brief. As the ways of this wonderful correspondence (betwixt the high and holy Jehovah and His low and sinful creatures) are many, I intend just to glance at some of the most obvious of them.

1. God holds this intercourse with His people in the way of permitting them to enquire of Him that which they desire to know. This is an exercise in which the people of God in all ages have

had sweet fellowship with Him, as you may see in the example of Abraham here, and also in the example of Jacob who, in the night of wrestling referred to in Genesis chapter 32, made this enquiry, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name" (Genesis 32:29). Likewise Moses, another son of Abraham, when he was brought into great nearness to God, breaks out in this manner, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory" (Exodus 33:18). God at such times brings His people to a state of intimacy with Himself like unto that which was enjoyed by the beloved disciple at the feasts of the passover when he made that enquiry concerning the discovery of the traitor, recorded in John 13:25, "Lord, who is it?"

2. Another way in which the people of God hold this intercourse is by expressing unto God their knowledge of Him. That knowledge which the people of God receive from Him they (as it were) pour back into His own bosom, as we may see in the exercise of David, who expresses himself in this manner (Psalm 89:8), "O Lord God of hosts, who is a strong Lord like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?" This knowledge of the excellency of God and of His faithfulness he had learned from God Himself, in the experience which he had had of his faithfulness. And here he sweetly pours it back into that ocean from which it came. Again he says, "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God!" (Psalm 36:7) This he had learned also from God Himself. Take another example from the spouse who, in her intercourse with her beloved, thus exclaims, "He is altogether lovely" (Song 5:16). It was only by his own light and teaching that she had come to this view, and here with delight she speaks of it. And this is an exercise which has a sweet promise made unto it (Hosea 6:3), "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord".

3. Another of the ways by which this intercourse is kept up is supplication. God takes it kindly from His children that they pour out their wants unto Him. And accordingly we find David often engaged in this way of communion with his heavenly Father, as you may see in Psalm 143:1, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, give ear to my supplications" (verse 1); "Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me" (verses 8 and 9). Thus you see the familiarity to which David was admitted when brought near to God in prayer, and this is an exercise wherein the people of God are often much refreshed and relieved.

4. Another way by which this fellowship is promoted is by the people of God laying themselves low before Him in the confession of their guilt and loathsomeness. This is the consequence of the clear manifestation of the love of God: in the dazzling light of His gracious presence they are made to see more clearly their own vileness. This was the case with the patriarch Abraham at the time referred to in the text. So also with Job and with Isaiah who, in those near interviews with God to which they were admitted, were overcome with the sense of their own defilement. And this is the way which God takes, both for exalting His people and also for granting them their requests. We may see this also in the case of Daniel, "a man greatly beloved" (Daniel 10:11) who, when he drew near in prayer to his God or a mercy upon which his heart was much set, humbled himself and made confession, as is recorded (Daniel chapter 9). And you will see towards the end of this prayer how Jehovah regards the humble and contrite spirit here manifested, agreeably to the words of Jesus Christ, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14).

5. Another way by which this heavenly correspondence is kept up is the exercise of thanksgiving. This has much resemblance to the fellowship of the heavenly world. We have some specimens of it in Revelation chapter 5, "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts and the elders ... saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (verses 11 & 12). And many of the saints have enjoyed much sweetness in this exercise whilst upon earth. How sweetly does Paul sing, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15). And again, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). We see David frequently holding fellowship with God in this way, and inviting others to join with him in the delightful

employment. And we also see in what lofty strains Moses and the believing Israelites engaged in this exercise of thanksgiving for that signal deliverance which was wrought in their behalf at the Red Sea.

In fine [Latin: finally; to sum up], the people of God in all ages have, in this way, had their darkest hours enlightened and their most bitter cups sweetened, as we may see in the case of Paul and Silas who, when in prison under the severity of man, had their mouths filled with praise and thanksgiving to God. Many others since their day can bear witness and set their seal to the truth of this, although the degrees of it may be many and various; for those exercises will be in proportion to their deliverances both internal and external, and according to the evidences of the love of God manifested in them. And this will be the case so long as they walk by faith. But in the heavenly world, when the duties of the mortification of sin and wrestling will cease, this exercise of thanksgiving shall endure and shall be performed in a joyful and formerly unknown manner, in company with the holy angels, to all eternity. This shall be done in the view of hell itself and will exceedingly aggravate the misery and torment of the inhabitants of that place. And this will tend also to make the praise and joy of the blessed all the more intense. The elect angels will have eternal matter of praise for their having been predestinated unto and confirmed in their first estate, from which many of their fellow-angels fell by apostasy. But the redeemed from among mankind shall have much higher ground of praise for their wonderful deliverance as brands plucked out of the burning, after having been so far advanced on their way to the place of endless misery and having been already, as it were, surrounded with the sorrows of hell in the foretastes thereof. Surely, therefore, the notes of their praise shall be high, unto Him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood (Revelation 1:5). While, throughout eternity, the smoke of the tormented shall arise to the glory of Divine justice, the praise of the redeemed shall arise for ever to the Lamb that was slain.

6. The last way I shall mention in which the people of God maintain intercourse with Him here is by their prayers for others. And in this duty likewise they enjoy sweet fellowship with God, as is here exemplified in the case of faithful Abraham, who was at this time engaged in this exercise. The children of light are frequently engaged in this duty, not only in behalf of unbelievers but also for such as are distempered saints, who are out of frame to pray for themselves. This may be learned from the example of Moses, who often stood in the breach in behalf of those who were true believers, although for the time they were under the influence of unbelief, so that while they were murmuring against God, he was crying to God for them. The people of God are also often at a throne of grace for poor sinners who cannot pray for themselves. "O" says the patriarch, "that Ishmael might live before thee" (Genesis 17:18).

It is the earnest wish of all saints (when they act as such) that the kingdom of Jesus Christ may be enlarged and built upon the ruins of the kingdom of darkness. David is often very earnest in this prayer, that God would have mercy upon the dark places of the earth and that He would teach transgressors His ways. And it is matter of wonder to the people of God that He is pleased to honour them in making them in some degree instrumental in promoting the welfare both of saints and of sinners in the signal answers which He gives to their petitions in behalf of such. We have an illustration of this in the case of Peter at the time when he was apprehended by Herod and secured in prison. We see what was then the conduct of the church – they betook themselves to the exercise of prayer (Acts 12:12), and the event in behalf of Peter was matter of wonder both to him and to them. Take as another example the case of the woman of Canaan who, when she applied to the Saviour in behalf of her daughter, was more successful in her errand than she could have expected (Matthew 15:28), "Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt".

These, and many similar testimonies which might be adduced, give evidence how well pleased God is with such exercises. This may be ground of encouragement to the people of God, to bring the cases of their friends and acquaintances unto Him from whom every good and perfect gift comes. And they know not what cause of joy they will have when they meet with those in the heavenly world for whom they wrestled whilst upon earth in these sweet

exercises. These are some of the ways in which God is pleased to allow His people come near and to hold intercourse with Himself in their pilgrimage journey through this world. And this is to them an occasion both of comfort and of wonder

This brings me to the last general head, namely:

III The wonder that God should admit His people to such familiarity with Himself

I shall show how it appears so wonderful to the people of God that He should thus admit them into such familiarity with Himself. This is intimated in the text in the word "Behold". And indeed it is matter of wonder to all who have been savingly illuminated to form just views both of God and of themselves that they, who are "but dust and ashes" should be admitted to hold intercourse with Him who is the God of glory. In illustration of this I shall take notice of a few of those views whereby the people of God are led to admire this infinite condescension of the ever-blessed Jehovah to His own poor, sinful creatures.

1. The view of the infinite glory and dignity of the nature and perfections of God fills His people with wonder at His condescension to them, when they consider the boundless distance which there is betwixt Him and the highest creatures, who are in His sight less than nothing and vanity. This we may see exemplified in the exercise of David (Psalm 113:5,6), "Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high? who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!" Yet this great Lord "raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people" (Psalm 113:7,8). How amazing is it to the redeemed in the heavenly world, that they are now so exalted and set on high with the principalities of light? But it is still more wonderful that the great God should admit such low creatures as sinful men upon earth into such nearness with Himself. And in the view of this we see Solomon, the wisest of mere men, as it were wrapped up in wonder, exclaiming (as in 2 Chronicles 6:18), "But will God in very deed dwell with men upon the earth?"

2. The view of that pollution and filthiness which the people of God are enabled to see in themselves raises their wonder that He who is so glorious in holiness should be so familiar with them. And at such times it is that their vileness is most distinctly felt, as was the case at this time in the experience of the patriarch Abraham. Jacob also on a similar occasion cries out in great amazement, "I am less than the least of all thy mercies!" We hear another eminent saint under the impression of this wonder pouring out his heart in these words (2 Samuel 7:18-20), "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? ... And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant?" He was so full of wonder that he was at a loss for words to express it. And at another time he cries in the language of great admiration (Psalm 40:5), "Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." And under the exercise of like admiration, Paul uttered these words, "I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy" (1 Timothy 1:13). And again, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given" (Ephesians 3:8).

In this manner the people of God are enabled to glorify Him, in admiration and wonder at His love and condescension. And this is only a prelude to that astonishing wonder, in which they shall be eternally swallowed up when they enter into the regions of light. For here they are often in the dark as to God's love and tender mercy towards them. But when the whole plan of their salvation and of God's gracious dealings with them in their way through this wilderness shall be opened up unto them, then their ecstasies will rise to such a height as that the courts above shall be made to ring with eternal hallelujahs of praise and wonder "unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Revelation 5:13) that was slain.

In the meantime, it is matter of humiliation to consider how very rare this exercise is among the people of God at this day. And this is one of the sad tokens of His wrath, and an effect of the withdrawing of His Spirit. It is this darkness and deadness which has come upon the present generation that makes it the season of winter to the church. This state of things is a loud call to deep humiliation of soul and also to earnest wrestling with God, if so be that He may be entreated to turn from His just anger and cause that the sun of righteousness shall break forth upon us. For it is He alone who can make it spring-time and dispel that hardness of heart – that great unfruitfulness and formality – which have provoked Him to depart from us. It is only the pouring out of the gracious influences of His Spirit which can turn the wilderness into a fruitful field. But when the Spirit shall be poured out from on high, then the weak hands shall be strengthened and the feeble knees confirmed (Isaiah 35:3). "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water" (Isaiah 35:5-7). And many shall behold "the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God" (Isaiah 35:2).

Now as the approaching solemnity [the Lord's Supper] is a season wherein God has often been entreated of His people and has bountifully granted their petitions, there is therefore matter of encouragement unto every upright one to cry earnestly unto Him, that He would prepare and purify a people for His table and meet with them at it. This is an ordinance which is peculiarly adapted for that near intercourse with Himself, to which God in Christ is pleased, at times, to admit His own people.

IV Application

1. The wrath of God against lusts and idols

I have now to proclaim the wrath of the living God against all the lusts of the flesh and against all the idols of the children of men. For, however lightly secure sinners may think of these things, yet the great God has proclaimed eternal war against them. Sinners may now suppose that this is a trivial matter, and may imagine that their life consists in the indulgence of their vile lusts. And so they may brave it out against all the warnings and threatenings which God in His Word declares against them. But the awful period is fast approaching when these imaginations shall become bitter to the finally impenitent. Then God will abundantly recover His glory, which now seems to be so much trampled upon, for He is fully able to deal with the greatest sinners, and the greatest multitude of them, in the way of punishment. That mirth and jollity of heart which they now have shall then be turned into the most bitter anguish. And the most resolute and stout-hearted among them shall then be overwhelmed with such amazement of spirit as they shall never be able to shake off. Those truths which are by them now made the subject of sport and ridicule shall then be pondered upon with the deepest seriousness, for there is no place for the indulgence of carnal security in the eternal world. It is matter for humiliation to think of that deep forgetfulness with regard to spiritual things, which has taken hold of the professors [those making profession of Christianity] of this age. And it may be necessary to inquire into the causes of that strong security by which sinners are so fast bound - here let us consider the causes:

(i) This may proceed from ignorance of the supreme majesty of the government of God. Sinners have such high views of their own importance as to imagine that God will not inflict the punishment which He has threatened in His holy Word, but that they shall meet with indulgence and that He will show some respect unto *them*. In this way they think that God is altogether such an one as themselves, not considering that He is a great King and that the greatest of creatures are as nothing before Him; for He made them all for His own glory, and this glory He will not lose.

(ii) Sinners are much strengthened in their security by the mysterious nature of sin. There is a

deep mystery in sin which shall never be known to those who shall perish, except by its effects; for although they make an hourly trade of it, yet the nature of it is hid from them because it is blinding in its nature. And so sinners are kept in the dark by it and go on without either caring for (or fearing) a hereafter. Hence it is also, that sinners are so much taken up with present things and that even the vilest things are preferred by them to the enjoyment of God.

(iii) They are fortified in this security by the example of the world around them. They strengthen one another in sin, for sinners are very infectious creatures. And hence we find custom and fashion so powerful that, although a sinner may at times be a little startled, he just looks around him like one half-awake and concluded that if it should go ill with him, it will be much worse with his neighbours. And so he lays himself down again to sleep, and thus chooses to go with the multitude, although it should be to perdition.

This is the dreadful nature of security and these are some of the ways by which it is promoted. And I call upon and solemnly warn all now present to beware of it. And I the rather do this because it seems to be a special judgement sent on this generation, from which very few are delivered. Therefore there is the more need for diligent and earnest striving after the special illumination of the Spirit of God who alone can awaken out of this fatal lethargy in which so many are ripening for unknown misery. Consider the absolute need of this – without this you are undone. This fatal disease can be removed in no other way, but if it be not removed it will still gather more strength. There is also the more need for this earnestness when we consider that there are few that be saved. Although the redeemed, when all gathered into one, will be a great multitude which no man can number (Revelation 7:9), yet the numbers of them in their several generations are very small, so that they are but as one here and one there. This ought to stir up all, for the redemption of the soul is not only precious, but it is also very singular and rare. Therefore, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephesians 5:14).

2. Mercy and peace to all returning sinners

I proclaim mercy and peace in the name of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to all returning sinners. This is the voice of God to such, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" (Jeremiah 3:22). And again, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isaiah 43:25). Behold, the Redeemer stands at the door and brings His own righteousness near in the offers of His grace. Therefore "now is the accepted time ... now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). That is, the time when the heart must be broken and humbled, when a deep sense of Divine wrath, impressed by the Spirit of God upon the conscience, must be experienced in order to the awakening and quickening of the elect sinner. Let none think it too harsh or severe to go through such a course of humiliation and soul exercise. Let it be considered that this is needful in order to obtain deliverance from the wrath of Jehovah.

It is needful that your eyes should be opened to see this wrath abiding upon you and to make you thirst after Jesus Christ and His righteousness. But to sweeten such an exercise to those who are under it, let it be remembered that God has the ordering of it, and that He can removed it and visit the soul with peace sooner than you think. Or, if He should see meet to continue it long, He is able to support and bear you up under it and to make it issue in great and never-ending joy. There is no comparison betwixt the experience in this world of all these terrors put together and being brought under the sword of Divine justice in hell for ever. One stroke of that sword in the almighty hand of the living God will be infinitely more dreadful and will sink deeper than all the terrors felt by the people of God here. But if there be any present who despise these truths, let them know that God shall laugh at them and hold them in derision if they continue in this way of thinking. When they are sinking under an experience of the reality of these things, where then will be that confidence and stoutness of heart which they at present manifest? Where is now the hero who in such or such an assembly on earth despised the Word of the living God? He is now weeping like a child before his Judge, and this

in the sight of the spirits of darkness and in the presence of all the holy creatures of God, who shall triumph over him in everlasting hallelujahs.

Therefore let all take warning and beware how they think of the work of the Holy Spirit in humbling His own people. And let them cry unto God who alone can give deliverance from their false confidences and break that pride and stoutness of heart by which so many are inevitably undone. For the same almighty power and wrath which operate in the punishment of the damned continually haunts and hovers over every one who is not truly united to Jesus Christ. Therefore, in His name I invite and welcome you to come unto Him in the way of earnest prayer; that He may take away the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, and that He may make His power glorious in triumphing over your natural obstinacy and in making all things new in your souls. This, however much above the power of creatures, is an easy work to Him who is "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). He only can make dead souls to live.

But there is need of great reverence and humility of spirit in this exercise, because He is infinitely high and is not to be moved by our prayers, for "he is in one mind, and who can turn him?" (Job 23:13). Yet there is the greatest encouragement to be in the use of the means of grace, because He has appointed them for this end and He will have respect to His own appointment. Yea, these means have been blessed unto thousands already, who have found that He is a prayer-answering God and that His "hand is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Isaiah 59:1). Therefore it is your immediate duty and interest to make earnest application unto Him and to plead for the Spirit of grace and of supplications (Zechariah 12:10) who alone can teach you what to pray for and how to pray as you ought (Romans 8:26). And while you do so, who can tell what great things God may do for your souls?

As to those of you who have already experienced the renewing and quickening influences of the Spirit of God in your hearts, you have the greatest call to be engaged in humble thankfulness – to be often looking to the hole of the pit whence you were dug (Isaiah 51:1) – and to be saying with an eminent brother in the family of grace, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" (Psalm 103:12). Improve your new privileges into a more holy and humble walking with Jesus Christ. And improve also the access which you have by Him to a throne of grace, particularly on occasion of the ensuing solemnity. This is one of those seasons when the Beloved of renewed souls is pleased to show Himself through the lattices (Song 2:9) and to admit His people into near intercourse and fellowship with Himself. Be earnest with Him, that He may manifest His glory – in preparing the hearts of His own people, in dispelling and scattering the darkness of their minds, in loosing their bands (Psalm 107:14) – and that it may also be a time of bringing near those who are yet afar off, a time of raising the dead and causing the dry bones to live. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7,8).