[DOCTRINE RESUMED.]

[The text is] Matt. 25:1-12, at this time especially, v. 8.¹

After having observed from this parable wherein true Christians and false agree, I proceeded to consider wherein they differ. And we observed that those things wherein they differ, might be referred to three heads:

1. The great and most essential difference consisting in that, [that] the one {have} oil {in their vessels, and the other have none}.

2. In the consequences of this.

3. In that general character that is manifest from the consideration of both.

Having spoken to the first of these, viz., their most essential difference, consisting {in the one having oil, and the other not}; I now proceed to the second, viz., the difference consisting in the consequences of this. As the difference between true Christians and false consisting in the one having oil, {and the other not}, is very great, so the consequences are very great.

The consequences of this difference are twofold. They are either,

(1) Those things that are consequent upon it, with respect to their behavior; and,

(2) With respect to their state.

In the

(1) [First] place, I would take notice of the difference between true Christians {and false Christians}, appearing in the consequence of one’s having oil, {and the other not}, with respect to their behavior. And under this head, the parable that we are upon leads us to observe this difference, viz., that the external religion of false Christians [is] wont to fail in times of trial, but that is not so with respect to true Christians.
Under this head, three things are to be shown:

1. That false Christians' external religion is wont to fail in times of trial.

2. That it is not so with respect to true Christians.

3. That this difference is a consequence of the one having oil in their vessels, and the other none.

1. False Christians' external religion is wont to fail in times of trial. What is principally signified by the lamps of the virgins, is their external religion. The oil signifies the religion of the heart, that is hid within the vessel, and is out of sight; but the lamps are outward and visible. With respect to the lamps of the foolish virgins, we are informed that they went out; and when the midnight cry came, they were found with their lamps gone out.

   This external religion, signified by the lamps, includes all besides what is in the heart: all their religious practice—not only that which is open before the world, but their external behavior, though it may be secret and hid from the eye of the world—and also their profession of religion.

   It has been shown that false Christians may make the same profession with the godly, and that they may in many things agree with the godly in their external practice of religion.

   But their religious practice is wont to fail in times of trial, and in some sorts of trials their very profession of religion is wont to fail too.

   Neither their profession nor their practice is to be depended on, nor are they built so that they will stand all trials that may come.

   The religion of some false Christians fails under one trial, and others under another. But the religion of all such is liable to fail; it
is none of it of that nature as to be suited to bear trials.

Here, I would mention several sorts of trials, under which the religion of false Christians is wont to fail:

a. In what respects their religion is wont to fail under such trials. I shall mention, and I would mention, but three sorts of trials,

(a) Length of time is a trial that the religion of false Christians is commonly wont to fail under. Time is that which will try the stability and durableness of things. That which in its own nature, is not solid and substantial, will be devoured by time; they will by degrees decay and molder, and wear away and come to nothing.

So it is with the religion of false Christians. They often, for a while, at first seem very religious and very strict in many duties. It may be, a little while after they have met with these common affections, when they have entertained hopes of heaven, they for a while will [have] seemed to be zealous and engaged in religion, but this don't hold. They in a little time grow weary of it. They'll quickly be tired of this exactness and care and pains, and will alter their hand; by and by, religion will be very much let alone by ’em.

They never had a preparedness of heart to endure to the end, and very commonly their religion vanishes away in a little time. Hos. 6:4, “O Israel, what shall I do unto thee? for thy goodness is like the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.”

This was the case with the foolish virgins. While the bridegroom tarried, they slumbered and slept, and their lamps went out. The bridegroom tarried long, and the length of time tried their lamps; they by degrees burnt more and more dimly, till at length, before the bridegroom came, they totally went out.

(b) Another trial under which the religion of false {Christians} is wont to fail, is a time of general decay of religion. This again was the
case with the foolish virgins. The time when their lamps went out, was a time of general decay of religion in the society to which they belonged; they all slumbered and slept. And we are taught in the foregoing chapter that at such a time, the love of false Christians is wont to wax cold, v. 12.

False Christians, while it is a time of the flourishing of religion amongst the people where they dwell, many keep up a great deal of religion, and many appear well in their walk and conversation: for then there a great many things to move ‘em, that there are not at other times. There are many things then to work on natural principles, to induce ‘em to behave themselves well.

But when such a time is past away, and there comes a dull and dead time in religion, and a time of the prevalency of many ill and corrupt things, then they have their trial.

And commonly, at such times, the religion of false Christians is wont to fail. Then they [are] wont to return, and appear as they used to do: to be careless of the practice of religion, to neglect God and Christ and holy things, and to pursue mainly after other things; and their old corruptions, their pride and their worldliness and their malice and the like, are wont to revive, [like] the snakes in the spring.

And sometimes, when they get amongst those that have religion in contempt, they are wont to grow ashamed of religion, ashamed of religious talk and of religious practice too, and, it may [be], ashamed of the very profession of religion; and so are ashamed of Christ in an evil generation, and therefore are of that number of whom he will be ashamed when he comes.

© Another trial³ is when times and such changes come, wherein the practice of religion is attended with more than ordinary difficulty.

It may be, when the false Christian first set out in religion, it is
a smooth time, a time when the practice of religion was attended with no remarkable difficulty, and there was no occasion for any remarkable suffering or denying themselves.

But after a while, God in his providence brings a change of time and change of circumstances, so that now they can’t be strict in the practice of religion with that ease and convenience that they could before: now, if they would hold on as they have begun, they must very much deny themselves; they must exceedingly cross some of their natural inclinations, and, it may be, must suffer much in their temporal interests; they must suffer in their honor, or in their estates.

Such a kind of trial as this had the virgins in this parable: it grew late in the night, and it was very difficult for ‘em to keep awake.

When they first went out to meet the bridegroom, it was, we may suppose, early in the evening, when they could be concerned and engaged in such an affair with but little difficulty. But by and by the time altered; it grew very late, and they could not [but] attend it with much more difficulty and inconvenience. Midnight is a difficult time to be engaged in any earnest business: in this time, their lamps went out.

Such times of difficulty are in the parable of the sower and the seed, “And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away,” Matt. 13:6.

Such difficulties seem to be one thing meant by winds and storms arising, [and] rain descending. “And the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it,” Matt. 7, latter end. Such difficulties are what are called in Ezekiel “the stumbling block” that God lays before hypocrites. Ezek. 3:20, “Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling-block before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he
hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand."

God commonly is wont to try professions in this manner. Sometimes God brings the trial of persecution, in which case the religion of false Christians is wont to fail, and commonly their very profession of Christianity.

[b.] Having thus observed of what kind the trials are, under which the religion of hypocrites is wont to fail, I now proceed, in the second place, to show how it is wont to fail. I would here mention several ways:

a. When they under trials cast off the profession of the Christian; as it has now been observed that false Christians are wont to do in times of persecution. Or,

b. When they become openly vicious and profane in their lives. So sometimes those, that for a while have the guise of saints, do become. There is soon a great alteration in them; they seem in a great measure to cast off religion and get into wicked ways, which they live in, in an open manner, and sometimes prove some of the worst of men, the most intolerable in vice and wickedness.

So it was with many that the apostles speak of in their epistles. Particularly, the apostle Peter speaks much of them, in the second chapter of his second epistle; and the apostle Jude in his epistle.

c. When they by degrees grow into a distaste and dislike of religion. There are some that don’t come to that, to be openly profane, being restrained from it for their credit’s sake and from other selfish motives, that yet grow into a distaste of strict religion.

They get out with such a way of living: it seems to them a kind of bondage; one while, they seemed to comply with it, but they soon grow sick of it: since that, they have thought it was needless, and, it may be, [are] ready to call it by an evil name. It looks to them to be a needless,
uncomfortable, over-precise way of living.

And as they dislike it for their own practice, so they have a distaste of it in others. When they see others that seem to continue zealous in such a way of living, they have a disrelish of them upon that account; they ben’t suited in the company of such persons.

For a while, at first, they joined with them, and seemed to think it honorable and commendable; but now they have other notions. They are ready to despise such things, and it may be laugh at them, and speak contemptibly of them. They now like other sort of company a great deal better.

So Judas seemed to like the company of Christ and his disciples, and followed them a while; but at last he got out with them, he left ‘em in a disgust, and turned a traitor.

d. When they are come to that, as to leave off the laborious parts of religion. There are some false Christians that don’t turn openly vicious and profane, that will yet have done with the laborious parts of religion.

There are some parts of religion that are very laborious, and require a great deal of watchfulness and pains: those, they are wont to forsake.

They may continue to go to meeting, and attend other things wherein the form of religion consists, and may keep from gross sins. But as for constant and daily reading, and strict prayer and meditation, watching against their constitution-sins, and fighting with temptations and corruptions, and such like laborious duties: they do but little of them. Of those things, they in their practice say as those, Mal. 1:13, “What a weariness is it!”

e. When they come to that, as secretly to live in ways of known sin. Sometimes false Christians, while under some remarkable awakenings, or
just while they are under the first impressions of their first affections and hopes, may be very careful to keep from indulging their lusts.

While under awakenings, they dare not do these and those things; and while under the sensible impressions of their first affections and false joys, they may seem to be very exact a while. But after a little while, they grow more bold. They begin to venture to taste their old, sinful sweets; they have been tied up a while, but they break loose again; and so it is with [them] as the apostle Peter says, according to the true proverb, II Pet. 2:22, "The dog is returned to his own vomit again." For a while, it may be, they seemed to be universal in their respect to God’s commandments, but ‘tis not so long: after a little while, they begin to make very free with some of the commands; and if they were observed in their dealings with their neighbors and in their talk in their chimney corners, and were followed into their families and secret places, and observed in the dark as well as the light, it would plainly appear that they lived with little regard to some of the holy communion of God.

f. [Sixth,] and lastly, when they begin a course to make use of their hope, to engage themselves in negligence and laxness in religion. At first, while their affections and impressions were new, it may be they thought they should be willing to do anything for God. Gal. 4:15, “I bear you record, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.”

But after a while they learn another way; they begin secretly to think with themselves, Why, now, if they be converted, they are safe; what need they be concerned? They that are once converted shall certainly be saved, and if they don’t take so much pains and put themselves to such difficulty, and if they take their ease more, it will be well with them at last.

When persons are got into such a way as this, and this is usual with
them, then it may be said of 'em, that their lamps are gone out.

When it comes to that with them, that all their concern is to have just religion enough to carry 'em to heaven, and because they think they have so much set their hearts at rest about getting any more striving against sin, then they prove themselves to be some of that sort spoken of by the Prophet. Ezek. 33:13, “When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it.”

[2.] I come now to the second thing under this head we are upon, viz., that is not thus with true Christians; or thus, that the external religion of some Christians don’t thus fail in times of trial. True Christians may be guilty of many failings, and they may greatly decline in times of trial [in] the practice of religion; but yet it never fails in the manner as has been spoken of, wherein the religion of false Christians is wont to fail. The wise virgins slumbered and slept as well as the foolish, but here was the difference: that while the foolish virgins slumbered and slept, the lamps went out; but it was not so with the wise: their lamps burnt dim, so that they needed trimming when they awaked, but they were kept alive, so that it could not be said of them that they were gone out. Not only their oil lasted, but also the flame of their lamps continued burning, signifying that not only shall religion always remain in the hearts of the godly, but also in their walk and practice. Though a godly person may be guilty of great declensions, yet God will never suffer their lamps [to] go out; he will watch and keep them alive while they sleep, for he is the watchman of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps [Ps. 121]. They are those spoken of, Matt. 24:13, “who endure to the end, and shall be saved”; and therefore are said, Luke 8:15, “to bring forth fruit with patience”; and are those spoken of, Rom. 2:7, “who by patient
continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." It is said of the righteous, Job 17:9, that he "shall hold on his way." And we are told, John 15:16, that Christ has chosen 'em, that they should go and bring forth fruit, and that their fruit should remain: not only shall their seed remain, but their fruit shall remain.

Their seed's remaining is the reason why their fruit will remain; and therefore the apostle John says, I John 3:9, "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not," i.e., {continues to be fruitful}. They are those that so answer that precept of Christ in Rev. 2:10, in a measure of being fruitful unto death, and so at last receive "a crown of life."

Therefore, the Apostle speaks so positively of those that are indeed of the number of true Christians, that they will not continue with them, and not go out from them, I John 2:19.

And though the godly may be guilty of great declinings in religion in times of trial, yet their religion can't be said to fail as the religion of hypocrites is wont to do at such times; because their declinings ben't of that nature as to carry in them a practical casting off God and religion, as those backslidings of hypocrites that have been mentioned do. As when a man comes to leave strict religion out of a real dislike and distaste of it, and to quit the laborious parts of religion and those things in it that are contrary to his own interest, or stand in the way of his idols; this shows that the man regards religion not for its own sake but only as a thing by-the-bye, and just to serve a turn, and shows him to be indeed no real friend to the thing itself. And so when he will live in known sins, and seeks to be religious no further than just so as to get to heaven, this implies a real casting off God and religion. And therefore, how far soever a godly [man] may decline, his religion never comes to fail in such a manner as this.

3. This difference is the consequence of theforementioned
difference, of one’s having oil in their vessels, and the other not: and
that, partly from the nature of the thing, and partly from the nature of
God’s covenant.

a. ‘Tis partly from the nature of things. If there be no spiritual
principle in the heart, or change of nature in the soul, ‘tis the natural
consequence that such a man’s external religion should not be durable: as
natural as that a lamp should go out that has no oil to feed it; or that a
plant should die when the sun is risen upon it with a burning, but that
has no root in the ground to support its life against the heat of the sun;
and as natural as that a stream of water should fail that has no spring to
supply it. The religion of false Christians may be compared to those
puddles of snow water that run in our streets, in or near the spring. They
run plentifully for a while; there seems to be as much water in them as in
those streams that have a living spring at the head of ‘em. But by and by
they will dry up; drought and heat will consume those snow waters, because
they have no spring to supply ’em.

The trials that professors meet with are like wind and water, that
overthrows what is built on the sand, or like fire that burns up wood, hay
and stubble, and such things as won’t stand the fire.

b. [;Tis] partly from the nature of God’s covenant. [The] religion
of false Christians is not built on Christ, the mediator of the covenant,
as has been observed; and therefore has not the promises of that covenant
to secure it, as the religion of true Christians {does}.

[There is that] great promise of gospel covenant, Jer. 32:40. “And I
will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away
from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that
they shall not depart from me.”

APPLICATION.
Use I of Self-Examination. Many professors of religion [are] present. Many that set out in religion a little while ago, {they} seemed at first to be zealous {and} affectionate. {They seemed} strict to comply with [God’s commands], to approve of and esteem [them].

How has it been since {then}? There have been trials, [and] length of time. [There has been a] general declension.

Doubtless, [they have] met with change and been in circumstances, one and another, wherein religion has been attended with special difficulty.


Let it be your manner to make use of your hope.

Perseverance in the practice of religion, through trials, is what is greatly insisted on in Scripture, as that which professors should try themselves by. Rom. 11:22, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity.” John 8:31, “If ye continue in my ways then are you my disciples indeed.” Gal. 6:9, “Be not weary of well doing: [for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not].” Luke 14:29-30, “Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.” Jas. 1:25, “Whoso looketh into the law of liberty, [and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed].” Ezek. 18:24, “But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die”; and ch. 33:12, etc., “Therefore, thou son of man, say unto the
children of thy people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression: as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turneth from his wickedness; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth." “In those is continuance, and we shall be saved” [Is. 64:5].

[Perseverance is] so much insisted on probably for two reasons:

First. This is what is plain and visible, and can’t be denied as to things internal. [It leaves no] room for many cavils and disputes.

Herein it, above all things, appears whether religion is effectual, has its thorough effect.

Second. This tends to convince the conscience how justly they may be disowned and repented of God.

[Use] II [of] Exhortation. If it be thus, will you seek earnestly to get into a better state?

First Motive. Commonly, such professors are surprised by the midnight cry in such circumstances.

Second [Motive]. Consider how you would accept a friend that should treat you as you do God and Christ.
Notes

1. The tail end of the previous unit occupies both recto and verso of the first leaf and the first three lines of the second leaf of this booklet.
2. MS: "is."
3. MS: "under which"
4. MS: "requires."
5. JE deletes: "They do in a stated manner set their hearts more on worldly things, than things of religion."
6. MS: "III."
7. MS: "no."
8. MS: "IV."