be accomplished by the Spirit to the glory of the Spirit, that the whole Trinity conjunctly and each person singly might be exceedingly glorified. The work that was the appointed means of this was begun immediately after the fall and is carried on and finished at the end of the world when all this intended glory shall be fully accomplished in all things.

A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections (1746)

Author's Preface

There is no question whatsoever, that is of greater importance to mankind, and that it more concerns every individual person to be well resolved in, than this, what are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favor with God, and entitled to his eternal rewards? Or, which comes to the same thing, What is the nature of true religion? and wherein do lie the distinguishing notes of that virtue and holiness, that is acceptable in the sight of God. But though it be of such importance, and though we have clear and abundant light in the Word of God to direct us in this matter, yet there is no one point, wherein professing Christians do more differ one from another. It would be endless to reckon up the variety of opinions in this point, that divide the Christian world; making manifest the truth of that of our Savior, “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads to life, and few there be that find it.”

The consideration of these things has long engaged me to attend to this matter, with the utmost diligence and care, and exactness of search and inquiry, that I have been capable of; it is a subject on which my mind has been peculiarly intent, ever since I first entered on the study of divinity. But as to the success of my inquiries, it must be left to the judgment of the reader of the following treatise.

I am sensible it is much more difficult to judge impartially of that which is the subject of this discourse, in the midst of the dust and smoke of such a state of controversy, as this land is now in, about things of this nature: as it is more difficult to write impartially, so it is more difficult to read impartially. Many will probably be hurt in their spirits, to find so much that appertains to religious affection, here condemned: and perhaps indignation and contempt will be excited in others, by finding so much here justified and approved. And it may be, some will be ready to charge me
with inconsistency with myself, in so much approving some things, and so much condemning others; as I have found, this has always been objected to me by some, ever since the beginning of our late controversies about religion. 'Tis a hard thing to be a hearty zealous friend of what has been good and glorious, in the late extraordinary appearances, and to rejoice much in it; and at the same time, to see the evil and pernicious tendency of what has been bad, and earnestly to oppose that. But yet, I am humbly, but fully persuaded, we shall never be in the way of truth, nor go on in a way acceptable to God, and tending to the advancement of Christ's kingdom, till we do so. . . .

Part I. Concerning the Nature of the Affections, and Their Importance in Religion

1 Pet. 1:8. 

Whom having not seen, ye love: in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

In these words, the Apostle represents the state of the minds of the Christians he wrote to, under the persecutions they were then the subjects of. These persecutions are what he has respect to, in the two preceding verses, when he speaks of the trial of their faith, and of their being in heaviness through manifold temptations.

Such trials are of threefold benefit to true religion: hereby the truth of it is manifested, and it appears to be indeed true religion: they, above all other things, have a tendency to distinguish between true religion and false, and to cause the difference between them evidently to appear. Hence they are called by the name of trials, in the verse next preceding the text, and in innumerable other places: they try the faith and religion of professors of what sort it is, as apparent gold is tried in the fire, and manifested, whether it be true gold or no. And the faith of true Christians being thus tried and proved to be true, is found to praise, and honor, and glory; as in that preceding verse.

And then, these trials are of further benefit to true religion; they not only manifest the truth of it, but they make its genuine beauty and amiableness remarkably to appear. True virtue never appears so lovely, as when it is most oppressed: and the divine excellency of real Christianity, is never exhibited with such advantage, as when under the greatest trials: then it is that true faith appears much more precious than gold; and upon this account, is found to praise, and honor, and glory.

And again, another benefit that such trials are of to true religion, is, that they purify and increase it. They not only manifest it to be true, but also tend to refine it, and deliver it from those mixtures of that which is false, which encumber and impede it; that nothing may be left but that which is true. They tend to cause the amiableness of true religion to appear to the best advantage, as was before observed; and not only so, but they tend to increase its beauty, by establishing and confirming it, and making it more lively and vigorous, and purifying it from those things that obscured its luster and glory. As gold that is tried in the fire, is purged from its alloy and all remainders of dross, and comes forth more solid and beautiful; so true faith being tried as gold is tried in the fire, becomes more precious; and thus also is found unto praise, and honor, and glory. The Apostle seems to have respect to each of these benefits, that persecutions are of to true religion, in the verse preceding the text.

And in the text, the Apostle observes how true religion operated in the Christians he wrote to, under their persecutions, whereby these benefits of persecution appeared in them; or what manner of operation of true religion, in them, it was, whereby their religion, under persecution, was manifested to be true religion, and eminently appeared in the genuine beauty and amiableness of true religion, and also appeared to be increased and purified, and so was like to be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ. And there were two kinds of operation, or exercise of true religion, in them, under their sufferings, that the Apostle takes notice of in the text, wherein these benefits appeared.

1. Love to Christ; "Whom having not seen, ye love." The world was ready to wonder, what strange principle it was, that influenced them to expose themselves to so great sufferings, to forsake the things that were seen, and renounce all that was dear and pleasant, which was the object of sense: they seemed to the men of the world about them, as though they
were beside themselves, and to act as though they hated themselves; there
was nothing in their view, that could induce them thus to suffer, and
support them under, and carry them through such trials. But although
there was nothing that was seen, nothing that the world saw, or that the
Christians themselves ever saw with their bodily eyes, that thus influenced
and supported 'em; yet they had a supernatural principle of love to some­
ing unseen; they loved Jesus Christ, for they saw him spiritually, whom
the world saw not, and whom they themselves had never seen with bodily
eyes.

2. *Joy in Christ.* Though their outward sufferings were very grievous,
yet their inward spiritual joys were greater than their sufferings, and these
supported them, and enabled them to suffer with cheerfulness.

There are two things which the Apostle takes notice of in the text
concerning this joy. (1) The manner in which it rises, the way in which
Christ, though unseen, is the foundation of it, viz. by faith; which is the
evidence of things not seen; "In whom, though now ye see him not, yet
believing, ye rejoice." (2) The nature of this joy; "unspeakable and full of
glory." "Unspeakable" in the kind of it; very different from worldly joys,
and carnal delights; of a vastly more pure, sublime and heavenly nature,
being something supernatural, and truly divine, and so ineffably excellent;
the sublimity, and exquisite sweetness of which, there were no words to set
forth. Unspeakable also in degree; it pleasing God to give 'em this holy joy,
with a liberal hand, and in large measure, in their state of persecution.

Their joy was "full of glory": although the joy was unspeakable, and no
words were sufficient to describe it; yet something might be said of it, and
no words more fit to represent its excellency, than these, that it was "full of
glory"; or, as it is in the original, "glorified joy." In rejoicing with this joy,
their minds were filled, as it were, with a glorious brightness, and their
natures exalted and perfected: it was a most worthy, noble rejoicing, that
did not corrupt and debase the mind, as many carnal joys do; but did
greatly beautify and dignify it: it was a prelibation of the joy of heaven, that
raised their minds to a degree of heavenly blessedness: it filled their minds
with the light of God's glory, and made 'em themselves to shine with some
communication of that glory.

Hence the proposition or doctrine, that I would raise from these words
is this,

**doct.** True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.

We see that the Apostle, in observing and remarking the operations and
exercises of religion, in the Christians he wrote to, wherein their religion
appeared to be true and of the right kind, when it had its greatest trial of
what sort it was, being tried by persecution as gold is tried in the fire, and
when their religion not only proved true, but was most pure, and cleansed
from its dross and mixtures of that which was not true, and when religion
appeared in them most in its genuine excellency and native beauty, and
was found to praise, and honor, and glory; he singles out the religious
affections of love and joy, that were then in exercise in them: these are the
exercises of religion he takes notice of, wherein their religion did thus
appear true and pure, and in its proper glory.

Here I would, I. Show what is intended by the affections, II. Observe
some things which make it evident, that a great part of true religion lies in
the affections.

I. It may be inquired, what the affections of the mind are?

I answer, the affections are no other, than the more vigorous and
sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.

God has induced the soul with two faculties: one is that by which it is
capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns and views
and judges of things; which is called the understanding. The other faculty
is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is
some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is
inclined to 'em, or is disinclined, and averse from 'em; or is the faculty by
which the soul does not behold things, as an indifferent unaffected spec­
tator, but either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or
rejecting. This faculty is called by various names: it is sometimes called the
inclination: and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and
governed by it, is called the will; and the mind, with regard to the exercises
of this faculty, is often called the heart.

The exercises of this faculty are of two sorts; either those by which the
soul is carried out towards the things that are in view, in approving of them, being pleased with them, and inclined to them; or those in which the soul opposes the things that are in view, in disapproving them, and in being displeased with them, averse from them, and rejecting them.

And as the exercises of the inclination and will of the soul are various in their kinds, so they are much more various in their degrees. There are some exercises of pleasedness or displeasedness, inclination or disinclination, wherein the soul is carried but a little beyond a state of perfect indifference. And there are other degrees above this, wherein the approbation or dislike, pleasedness or aversion, are stronger; wherein we may rise higher and higher, till the soul comes to act vigorously and sensibly, and the actings of the soul are with that strength that (through the laws of the union which the Creator has fixed between soul and body) the motion of the blood and animal spirits begins to be sensibly altered; whence oftentimes arises some bodily sensation, especially about the heart and vitals, that are the fountain of the fluids of the body: from whence it comes to pass, that the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, perhaps in all nations and ages, is called the heart. And it is to be noted, that they are these more vigorous and sensible exercises of this faculty, that are called the affections.

The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will and inclination of the soul, but only in the liveliness and sensibleness of exercise....

II. [The] second thing proposed ... was to observe some things that render it evident, that true religion, in great part, consists in the affections.

1. What has been said of the nature of the affections, makes this evident, and may be sufficient, without adding anything further, to put this matter out of doubt: for who will deny that true religion consists, in a great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart.

That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wounings, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in his Word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion: "Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11). "Tis such a fervent, vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion, that is the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart, or true regeneration, and that has the promises of life; “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut. 30:6).

If we ben't in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing, is vigor in the actings of our inclinations so requisite, as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious. True religion is evermore a powerful
thing; and the power of it appears, in the first place, in the inward exercises of it in the heart, where is the principal and original seat of it. Hence true religion is called the power of godliness, in distinction from the external appearances of it, that are the form of it, “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it” (II Tim. 3:5). The Spirit of God in those that have sound and solid religion, is a spirit of powerful holy affection; and therefore, God is said to have given them the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7). And such, when they received the Spirit of God, in his sanctifying and saving influences, are said to be baptized with the Holy Ghost, and with fire; by reason of the power and fervor of those exercises the Spirit of God excites in their hearts, whereby their hearts, when grace is in exercise, may be said to burn within them; as is said of the disciples (Luke 24:32) ....

And though true grace has various degrees, and there are some that are but babes in Christ, in whom the exercise of the inclination and will towards divine and heavenly things, is comparatively weak; yet everyone that has the power of godliness in his heart, has his inclinations and heart exercised towards God and divine things, with such strength and vigor, that these holy exercises do prevail in him above all carnal or natural affections, and are effectual to overcome them: for every true disciple of Christ, loves him above father or mother, wife and children, brethren and sisters, houses and lands; yea, than his own life. From hence it follows, that wherever true religion is, there are vigorous exercises of the inclination and will, towards divine objects: but by what was said before, the vigorous, lively and sensible exercises of the will, are no other than the affections of the soul.

2. The Author of the human nature has not only given affections to men, but has made 'em very much the spring of men's actions. As the affections do not only necessarily belong to the human nature, but are a very great part of it; so (inasmuch as by regeneration, persons are renewed in the whole man, and sanctified throughout) holy affections do not only necessarily belong to true religion, but are a very great part of that. And as true religion is of a practical nature, and God has so constituted the human nature, that the affections are very much the spring of men's actions, this also shows, that true religion must consist very much in the affections.

Such is man's nature, that he is very inactive, any otherwise than he is influenced by some affection, either love or hatred, desire, hope, fear or some other. These affections we see to be the springs that set men agoing, in all the affairs of life, and engage them in all their pursuits: these are the things that put men forward, and carry 'em along, in all their worldly business; and especially are men excited and animated by these, in all affairs, wherein they are earnestly engaged, and which they pursue with vigor. We see the world of mankind to be exceedingly busy and active; and the affections of men are the springs of the motion: take away all love and hatred, all hope and fear, all anger, zeal and affectionate desire, and the world would be, in a great measure, motionless and dead; there would be no such thing as activity amongst mankind, or any earnest pursuit whatsoever. 'Tis affection that engages the covetous man, and him that is greedy of worldly profits, in his pursuits; and it is by the affections, that the ambitious man is put forward in his pursuit of worldly glory; and 'tis the affections also that actuate the voluptuous man, in his pursuit of pleasure and sensual delights: the world continues, from age to age, in a continual commotion and agitation, in a pursuit of these things; but take away all affection, and the spring of all this motion would be gone, and the motion itself would cease. And as in worldly things, worldly affections are very much the spring of men's motion and action; so in religious matters, the spring of their actions are very much religious affections: he that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.

3. Nothing is more manifest in fact, than that the things of religion take hold of men's souls, no further than they affect them. There are multitudes that often hear the Word of God, and therein hear of those things that are infinitely great and important, and that most nearly concern them, and all that is heard seems to be wholly ineffectual upon them, and to make no alteration in their disposition or behavior; and the reason is, they are not affected with what they hear .... I am bold to assert, that there never was any considerable change wrought in the mind or conversation of any one person, by anything of a religious nature, that ever he read, heard or saw,
that had not his affections moved. Never was a natural man engaged earnestly to seek his salvation: never were any such brought to cry after wisdom, and lift up their voice for understanding, and to wrestle with God in prayer for mercy; and never was one humbled, and brought to the foot of God, from anything that ever he heard or imagined of his own unworthiness and undeservings of God's displeasure; nor was ever one induced to fly for refuge unto Christ, while his heart remained unaffected. Nor was there ever a saint awakened out of a cold, lifeless frame, or recovered from a declining state in religion, and brought back from a lamentable departure from God, without having his heart affected. And in a word, there never was anything considerable brought to pass in the heart or life of any man living, by the things of religion, that had not his heart deeply affected by those things. . . .

Upon the whole, I think it clearly and abundantly evident, that true religion lies very much in the affections. Not that I think these arguments prove, that religion in the hearts of the truly godly, is ever in exact proportion to the degree of affection, and present emotion of the mind. For undoubtedly, there is much affection in the true saints which is not spiritual: their religious affections are often mixed; all is not from grace, but much from nature. And though the affections have not their seat in the body, yet the constitution of the body, may very much contribute to the present emotion of the mind. And the degree of religion is rather to be judged of by the fixedness and strength of the habit that is exercised in affection, whereby holy affection is habitual, than by the degree of the present exercise: and the strength of that habit is not always in proportion to outward effects and manifestations, or inward effects, in the hurry and vehemence, and sudden changes of the course of the thoughts of the mind. But yet it is evident, that religion consists so much in affection, as that without holy affection there is no true religion: and no light in the understanding is good, which don't produce holy affection in the heart; no habit or principle in the heart is good, which has no such exercise; and no external fruit is good, which don't proceed from such exercises. . . . We may hence learn how great their error is, who are for discarding all religious affections, as having nothing solid or substantial in them.

There seems to be too much of a disposition this way, prevailing in this land at this time. Because many who, in the late extraordinary season, appeared to have great religious affections, did not manifest a right temper of mind, and run into many errors, in the time of their affection, and the heat of their zeal; and because the high affections of many seem to be so soon come to nothing, and some who seemed to be mightily raised and swallowed with joy and zeal, for a while, seem to have returned like the dog to his vomit: hence religious affections in general are grown out of credit, with great numbers, as though true religion did not at all consist in them. Thus we easily, and naturally run from one extreme to another. A little while ago we were in the other extreme; there was a prevalent disposition to look upon all high religious affections, as eminent exercises of true grace, without much inquiring into the nature and source of those affections, and the manner in which they arose: if persons did but appear to be indeed very much moved and raised, so as to be full of religious talk, and express themselves with great warmth and earnestness, and to be filled, or to be very full, as the phrases were; it was too much the manner, without further examination, to conclude such persons were full of the Spirit of God, and had eminent experience of his gracious influences. This was the extreme which was prevailing three or four years ago. But of late, instead of esteeming and admiring all religious affections, without distinction, it is a thing much more prevalent, to reject and to discard all without distinction. Herein appears the subtlety of Satan. While he saw that affections were much in vogue, knowing the greater part of the land were not versed in such things, and had not had much experience of great religious affections, to enable them to judge well of 'em, and distinguish between true and false; then he knew he could best play his game, by sowing tares amongst the wheat, and mingling false affections with the works of God's Spirit, he knew this to be a likely way to delude and eternally ruin many souls, and greatly to wound religion in the saints, and entangle them in a dreadful wilderness, and by and by, to bring all religion into disrepute. But now, when the ill consequences of these false affections appear, and 'tis become very apparent, that some of those emotions which made a glaring show, and were by many greatly admired, were in reality nothing; the devil sees it to be for his interest to go another way to work, and to endeavor to his utmost to propagate and establish a persuasion, that
all affections and sensible emotions of the mind, in things of religion, are nothing at all to be regarded, but are rather to be avoided, and carefully guarded against, as things of a pernicious tendency. This he knows is the way to bring all religion to a mere lifeless formality, and effectually shut out the power of godliness, and every thing which is spiritual, and to have all true Christianity turned out of doors. For although to true religion, there must indeed be something else besides affection; yet true religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them. He who has no religious affection, is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart. As there is no true religion, where there is nothing else but affection; so there is no true religion where there is no religious affection. As on the one hand, there must be light in the understanding, as well as an affected fervent heart, where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heart; so on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light, that knowledge is no true spiritual knowledge of divine things. If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart. The reason why men are not affected by such infinitely great, important, glorious, and wonderful things, as they often hear and read of, in the Word of God, is undoubtedly because they are blind; if they were not so, it would be impossible, and utterly inconsistent with human nature, that their hearts should be otherwise, than strongly impressed, and greatly moved by such things.

This manner of slighting all religious affections, is the way exceedingly to harden the hearts of men, and to encourage 'em in their stupidity and senselessness, and to keep 'em in a state of spiritual death as long as they live, and bring 'em at last to death eternal. The prevailing prejudice against religious affections at this day, in the land, is apparently of awful effect, to harden the hearts of sinners, and damp the graces of many of the saints, and stunt the life and power of religion, and preclude the effect of ordinances, and hold us down in a state of dullness and apathy; and undoubtedly causes many persons greatly to offend God, in entertaining mean and low thoughts of the extraordinary work he has lately wrought in this land.

And for persons to despise and cry down all religious affections, is the way to shut all religion out of their own hearts, and to make thorough work in ruining their souls.

They who condemn high affections in others, are certainly not likely to have high affections themselves. And let it be considered, that they who have but little religious affection, have certainly but little religion. And they who condemn others for their religious affections, and have none themselves, have no religion.

There are false affections, and there are true. A man's having much affection, don't prove that he has no true religion: but if he has no affection, it proves that he has no true religion. The right way, is not to reject all affections, nor to approve all; but to distinguish between affections, approving some, and rejecting others; separating between the wheat and the chaff, the gold and the dross, the precious and the vile. . .

Part II. Showing What Are No Certain Signs That Religious Affections Are Truly Gracious or That They Are Not

If anyone, on the reading of what has been just now said, is ready to acquit himself, and say, "I am not one of those who have no religious affections; I am often greatly moved with the consideration of the great things of religion"; let him not content himself with this, that he has religious affections. For (as was observed before) as we ought not to reject and condemn all affections, as though true religion did not at all consist in affection; so on the other hand, we ought not to approve of all, as though everyone that was religiously affected, had true grace, and was therein the subject of the saving influences of the Spirit of God; and that therefore the right way is to distinguish among religious affections, between one sort and another. Therefore let us now endeavor to do this: and in order to it, I would do two things.

I. I would mention some things, which are no signs one way or the other, either that affections are such as true religion consists in, or that they are otherwise; that we may be guarded against judging of affections by false signs.

II. I would observe some things, wherein those affections which are
spiritual and gracious, differ from those which are not so, and may be distinguished and known.

First, I would take notice of some things, which are no signs that affections are gracious, or that they are not.

1. 'Tis no sign one way or the other, that religious affections are very great, or raised very high.

Some are ready to condemn all high affections: if persons appear to have their religious affections raised to an extraordinary pitch, they are prejudiced against them, and determine that they are delusions, without further inquiry. But if it be as has been proved, that true religion lies very much in religious affections, then it follows, that if there be a great deal of true religion, there will be great religious affections; if true religion in the hearts of men, be raised to a great height, divine and holy affections will be raised to a great height.

Love is an affection; but will any Christian say, men ought not to love God and Jesus Christ in a high degree? And will any say, we ought not to have a very great hatred of sin, and a very deep sorrow for it? Or that we ought not to exercise a high degree of gratitude to God, for the mercies we receive of him, and the great things he has done for the salvation of fallen men? Or that we should not have very great and strong desires after God and holiness? Is there any who will profess, that his affections in religion are great enough; and will say, “I have no cause to be humbled, that I am no more affected with the things of religion than I am, I have no reason to be ashamed, that I have no greater exercises of love to God, and sorrow for sin, and gratitude for the mercies which I have received”? Who is there that will go and bless God, that he is affected enough with what he has read and heard, of the wonderful love of God to worms and rebels, in giving his only begotten Son to die for them, and of the dying love of Christ; and will pray that he may not be affected with them in any higher degree, because high affections are improper, and very unlovely in Christians, being enthusiastic, and ruinous to true religion? . . .

From these things it certainly appears, that religious affections being in a very high degree, is no evidence that they are not such as have the nature of true religion. Therefore they do greatly err, who condemn persons as enthusiasts, merely because their affections are very high.

And on the other hand, 'tis no evidence that religious affections are of a spiritual and gracious nature, because they are great. 'Tis very manifest by the Holy Scripture, our sure and infallible rule to judge of things of this nature, that there are religious affections which are very high, that are not spiritual and saving. The apostle Paul speaks of affections in the Galatians, which had been exceedingly elevated, and which yet he manifestly speaks of, as fearing that they were vain, and had come to nothing, “Where is the blessedness you spake of? for I bear you record, that if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me” (Gal. 4:15). And in the 11th verse he tells them, he was afraid of ‘em, lest he had bestowed upon them labor in vain. So the children of Israel were greatly affected with God’s mercy to ‘em, when they had seen how wonderfully he wrought for them at the Red Sea, where they sang God’s praise; though they soon forgot his works. So they were greatly affected again, at Mount Sinai, when they saw the marvelous manifestations God made of himself there; and seemed mightily engaged in their minds, and with great forwardness made answer, when God proposed his holy Covenant to them, saying, “All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient.” But how soon was there an end to all this mighty forwardness and engagedness of affection? How quickly were they turned aside after other gods, rejoicing and shouting around their golden calf? . . .

2. 'Tis no sign that affections have the nature of true religion, or that they have not, that they have great effects on the body.

All affections whatsoever, have in some respect or degree, an effect on the body. As was observed before, such is our nature, and such are the laws of union of soul and body, that the mind can have no lively or vigorous exercise, without some effect upon the body. So subject is the body to the mind, and so much do its fluids, especially the animal spirits, attend the motions and exercises of the mind, that there can’t be so much as an intense thought, without an effect upon them. Yea, 'tis questionable,
whether an embodied soul ever so much as thinks one thought, or has any exercise at all, but that there is some corresponding motion or alteration of motion, in some degree, of the fluids, in some part of the body. But universal experience shows, that the exercise of the affections, have in a special manner a tendency, to some sensible effect upon the body. And if this be so, that all affections have some effect on the body, we may then well suppose, the greater those affections be, and the more vigorous their exercise (other circumstances being equal) the greater will be the effect on the body. Hence it is not to be wondered at, that very great and strong exercises of the affections, should have great effects on the body. And therefore, seeing there are very great affections, both common and spiritual; hence it is not to be wondered at, that great effects on the body, should arise from both these kinds of affections. And consequently these effects are not signs, that the affections they arise from, are of one kind or the other.

Great effects on the body certainly are no sure evidences that affections are spiritual; for we see that such effects oftentimes arise from great affections about temporal things, and when religion is no way concerned in them. And if great affections about secular things that are purely natural, may have these effects, I know not by what rule we should determine, that high affections about religious things, which arise in like manner from nature, can't have the like effect.

Nor on the other hand, do I know of any rule any have to determine, that gracious and holy affections, when raised as high as any natural affections, and have equally strong and vigorous exercises, can't have a great effect on the body. No such rule can be drawn from reason: I know of no reason, why a being affected with a view of God's glory should not cause the body to faint, as well as a being affected with a view of Solomon's glory. And no such rule has as yet been produced from the Scripture: none has ever been found in all the late controversies which have been about things of this nature.

3. 'Tis no sign that affections are truly gracious affections, or that they are not, that they cause those who have them, to be fluent, fervent and abundant, in talking of the things of religion.
state; yet, 'tis also evident, that it was never God's design to give us any rules, by which we may certainly know, who of our fellow professors are his, and to make a full and clear separation between sheep and goats: but that on the contrary, it was God's design to reserve this to himself, as his prerogative. And therefore no such distinguishing signs as shall enable Christians or ministers to do this, are ever to be expected to the world's end: for no more is ever to be expected from any signs, that are to be found in the Word of God, or gathered from it, than Christ designed them for.

2. No such signs are to be expected, that shall be sufficient to enable those saints certainly to discern their own good estate, who are very low in grace, or are such as have much departed from God, and are fallen into a dead, carnal and unchristian frame. It is not agreeable to God's design (as has been already observed) that such should know their good estate: nor is it desirable that they should; but on the contrary, every way best that they should not; and we have reason to bless God, that he has made no provision that such should certainly know the state that they are in, any other way, than by first coming out of the ill frame and way they are in.

Indeed it is not properly through the defect of the signs given in the Word of God, that every saint living, whether strong or weak, and those who are in a bad frame, as well as others, can't certainly know their good estate by them. For the rules in themselves are certain and infallible, and every saint has, or has had those things in himself, which are sure evidences of grace; for every, even the least act of grace is so. But it is through his defect to whom the signs are given. There is a twofold defect in that saint who is very low in grace, or in an ill frame, which makes it impossible for him to know certainly that he has true grace, by the best signs and rules which can be given him. First, a defect in the object, or the qualification to be viewed and examined. I don't mean an essential defect; because I suppose the person to be a real saint; but a defect in degree: grace being very small, cannot be clearly and certainly discerned and distinguished.

Secondly, there is in such a case a defect in the eye. As the feebleness of grace and prevalence of corruption, obscures the object; so it enfeebles the sight; it darkens the sight as to all spiritual objects, of which grace is one. Sin is like some distempers of the eyes, that make things to appear of different colors from those which properly belong to them, and like many other distempers, that put the mouth out of taste, so as to disenable from distinguishing good and wholesome food from bad, but everything tastes bitter. Men in a corrupt and carnal frame, have their spiritual senses in but poor plight for judging and distinguishing spiritual things.

For these reasons, no signs that can be given, will actually satisfy persons in such a case: let the signs that are given, be never so good and infallible, and clearly laid down, they will not serve them. It is like giving a man rules, how to distinguish visible objects in the dark: the things themselves may be very different, and their difference may be very well and distinctly described to him; yet all is insufficient to enable him to distinguish them, because he is in the dark. And therefore many persons in such a case spend time in a fruitless labor, in poring on past experiences, and examining themselves by signs they hear laid down from the pulpit, or that they read in books; when there is other work for them to do, that is much more expected of them; which, while they neglect, all their self-examinations are like to be in vain, if they should spend never so much time in them. The accursed thing is to be destroyed from their camp, and Achan to be slain; and till this be done they will be in trouble. 'Tis not God's design that men should obtain assurance in any other way, than by mortifying corruption, and increasing in grace, and obtaining the lively exercises of it. And although self-examination be a duty of great use and importance, and by no means to be neglected; yet it is not the principal means, by which the saints do get satisfaction of their good estate. Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination, as by action.

Therefore, though good rules to distinguish true grace from counterfeit ... may be very useful ...; yet I am far from pretending to lay down any such rules ... to enable all true saints to see their good estate. ...

Having premised these things, I now proceed directly to take notice of those things in which true religious affections are distinguished from false.

1. Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious, do arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are spiritual, supernatural and divine.

I will explain what I mean by these terms, whence will appear their use.
Religious Affections

Religious Affections

156

Religious Affections

to distinguish between those affections which are spiritual, and those which are not so.

We find that true saints, or those persons who are sanctified by the Spirit of God, are in the New Testament called spiritual persons. And their being spiritual is spoken of as their peculiar character, and that wherein they are distinguished from those who are not sanctified. This is evident because those who are spiritual are set in opposition to natural men, and carnal men.

And it must be here observed, that although it is with relation to the Spirit of God and his influences, that persons and things are called spiritual; yet not all those persons who are subject to any kind of influence of the Spirit of God, are ordinarily called spiritual in the New Testament. They who have only the common influences of God's Spirit, are not so called, in the places cited above, but only those, who have the special, gracious and saving influences of God's Spirit: as is evident, because it has been already proved, that by spiritual men is meant godly men, in opposition to natural, carnal and unsanctified men. And it is most plain, that the Apostle by spiritually minded, Rom. 8:6, means graciously minded. And though the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, which natural men might have, are sometimes called spiritual, because they are from the Spirit; yet natural men, whatever gifts of the Spirit they had, were not, in the usual language of the New Testament, called spiritual persons. For it was not by men's having the gifts of the Spirit, but by their having the virtues of the Spirit, that they were called spiritual; as is apparent, by Gal. 6:1: “Brethren, if any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.” Meekness is one of those virtues which the Apostle had just spoken of, in the verses next preceding, showing what are the fruits of the Spirit. Those qualifications are said to be spiritual in the language of the New Testament, which are truly gracious and holy, and peculiar to the saints.

So that although natural men may be the subjects of many influences of the Spirit of God, as is evident by many Scriptures, as Num. 24:2; I Sam. 10:10 and 11:6 and 16:14; I Cor. 13:1–3; Heb. 6:4–6 and many others; yet they are not in the sense of the Scripture, spiritual persons; either are any of those effects, common gifts, qualities or affections, that are from the influence of the Spirit of God upon them, called spiritual things. The great difference lies in these two things.

1. The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell in them, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action. The Scriptures represent the Holy Spirit, not only as moving, and occasionally influencing the saints, but as dwelling in them as his temple, his proper abode, and everlasting dwelling place (I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16, John 14:16–17). And he is represented as being there so united to the faculties of the soul, that he becomes there a principle or spring of new nature and life.

So the saints are said to live by Christ living in them (Gal. 2:20). Christ by his Spirit not only is in them, but lives in them; and so that they live by his life; so is his Spirit united to them, as a principle of life in them; they don't only drink living water, but this living water becomes a well or fountain of water, in the soul, springing up into spiritual and everlasting life (John 4:14), and thus becomes a principle of life in them; this living water, this Evangelist himself explains to intend the Spirit of God (ch. 7:38–39). The light of the Sun of Righteousness don't only shine upon them, but is so communicated to them that they shine also, and become little images of that Sun which shines upon them; the sap of the true vine is not only conveyed into them, as the sap of a tree may be conveyed into a vessel, but is conveyed as sap is from a tree into one of its living branches, where it becomes a principle of life. The Spirit of God being thus communicated and united to the saints, they are from thence properly denominated from it, and are called spiritual.

On the other hand, though the Spirit of God may many ways influence natural men; yet because it is not thus communicated to them, as an indwelling principle, they don't derive any denomination or character from it; for there being no union it is not their own. The light may shine upon a body that is very dark or black; and though that body be the subject of the light, yet, because the light becomes no principle of light in it, so as to cause the body to shine, hence that body don't properly receive its denomination from it, so as to be called a lightsome body. So the Spirit of God acting upon the soul only, without communicating itself to be an
active principle in it, can't denominate it spiritual. A body that continues
black, may be said not to have light, though the light shines upon it; so
natural men are said not to have the Spirit, Jude 19: "sensual," or natural
(as the word is elsewhere rendered) "having not the Spirit."

2. Another reason why the saints and their virtues are called spiritual
(which is the principal thing), is that the Spirit of God, dwelling as a vital
principle in their souls, there produces those effects wherein he exerts and
communicates himself in his own proper nature. Holiness is the nature of
the Spirit of God, therefore he is called in Scripture the Holy Ghost.
Holiness, which is as it were the beauty and sweetness of the divine nature,
is as much the proper nature of the Holy Spirit, as heat is the nature of fire,
or sweetness was the nature of that holy anointing oil, which was the
principal type of the Holy Ghost in the Mosaic dispensation; yea, I may
rather say that holiness is as much the proper nature of the Holy Ghost, as
sweetness was the nature of the sweet odor of that ointment. The Spirit of
God so dwells in the hearts of the saints, that he there, as a seed or spring
of life, exerts and communicates himself, in this his sweet and divine
nature, making the soul a partaker of God's beauty and Christ's joy, so that
the saint has truly fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus
Christ, in thus having the communion or participation of the Holy Ghost.
The grace which is in the hearts of the saints, is of the same nature with
the divine holiness, as much as 'tis possible for that holiness to be, which is
infinitely less in degree; as the brightness that is in a diamond which the
sun shines upon, is of the same nature with the brightness of the sun, but
only that it is as nothing to it in degree. . . .

Thus not only the manner of the relation of the Spirit, who is the
operator, to the subject of his operations, is different; as the Spirit operates
in the saints, as dwelling in them, as an abiding principle of action,
whereas he doth not so operate upon sinners; but the influence and
operation itself is different, and the effect wrought exceeding different. So
that not only the persons are called spiritual, as having the Spirit of God
dwelling in them; but those qualifications, affections and experiences that
are wrought in them by the Spirit, are also spiritual, and therein differ
vastly in their nature and kind from all that a natural man is or can be the
subject of, while he remains in a natural state; and also from all that men or
devils can be the authors of; 'tis a spiritual work in this high sense; and
therefore above all other works is peculiar to the Spirit of God. . . . And
the influences of the Spirit of God in this, being thus peculiar to God,
and being those wherein God does, in so high a manner, communicate
himself, and make the creature partaker of the divine nature (the Spirit of
God communicating itself in its own proper nature). This is what I mean
by those influences that are divine, when I say that truly gracious affec-
tions do arise from those influences that are spiritual and divine.

The true saints only have that which is spiritual; others have nothing
which is divine, in the sense that has been spoken of. They not only have
not these communications of the Spirit of God in so high a degree as the
saints, but have nothing of that nature or kind. For the apostle James tell
us, that natural men have not the Spirit; and Christ teaches the necessity
of a new birth, or a being born of the Spirit, from this, that he that is born
of the flesh, has only flesh, and no spirit (John 3:6). They have not the
Spirit of God dwelling in them in any degree; for the Apostle teaches, that
all who have the Spirit of God dwelling in them are some of his (Rom.
8:9–11). And an having the Spirit of God is spoken of as a certain sign that
persons shall have the eternal inheritance; for 'tis spoken of as the earnest
of it (II Cor. 1:22 and 5:5; Eph. 1:14), and having anything of the Spirit is
mentioned as a sure sign of being in Christ, "Hereby know we that we
dwell in him, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (I John 4:30).

Ungodly men, not only have not so much of the divine nature as the saints,
but they are not partakers of it; which implies that they have nothing of it;
for a being partaker of the divine nature is spoken of as the peculiar
privilege of the true saints (II Pet. 1:4). Ungodly men are not partakers of
God's holiness (Heb. 12:10). A natural man has no experience of any of
those things that are spiritual: the Apostle teaches us that he is so far from
it, that he knows nothing about them, he is a perfect stranger to them, the
talk about such things is all foolishness and nonsense to him, he knows not
what it means, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of
God; for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them; because
they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). . . .

From these things it is evident, that those gracious influences which the
saints are subjects of, and the effects of God's Spirit which they experience, are entirely above nature, altogether of a different kind from anything that men find within themselves by nature, or only in the exercise of natural principles; and are things which no improvement of those qualifications, or principles that are natural, no advancing or exalting them to higher degrees, and no kind of composition of them, will ever bring men to; because they not only differ from what is natural, and from everything that natural men experience, in degree and circumstances; but also in kind; and are of a nature vastly more excellent. And this is what I mean by supernatural, when I say, that gracious affections are from those influences that are supernatural.

From hence it follows, that in those gracious exercises and affections which are wrought in the minds of the saints, through the saving influences of the Spirit of God, there is a new inward perception or sensation of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified. For doubtless if God by his mighty power produces something that is new, not only in degree and circumstances, but in its whole nature, and that which could be produced by no exalting, varying or compounding of what was there before, or by adding anything of the like kind; I say, if God produces something thus new in a mind, that is a perceiving, thinking, conscious thing; then doubtless something entirely new is felt, or perceived, or thought; or, which is the same thing, there is some new sensation or perception of the mind, which is entirely of a new sort, and which could be produced by no exalting, varying or compounding of that kind of perceptions or sensations which the mind had before; or there is what some metaphysicians call a new simple idea. If grace be, in the sense above described, an entirely new kind of principle; then the exercises of it are also entirely a new kind of exercises. And if there be in the soul a new sort of exercises which it is conscious of, which the soul knew nothing of before, and which no improvement, composition or management of what it was before conscious or sensible of, could produce, or anything like it; then it follows that the mind has an entirely new kind of perception or sensation; and here is, as it were, a new spiritual sense that the mind has, or a principle of new kind of perception or spiritual sensation, which is in its whole nature different from any former kinds of sensation of the mind, as tasting is diverse from any of the other senses; and something is perceived by a true saint, in the exercise of this new sense of mind, in spiritual and divine things, as entirely diverse from anything that is perceived in them, by natural men, as the sweet taste of honey is diverse from the ideas men get of honey by only looking on it, and feeling of it. So that the spiritual perceptions which a sanctified and spiritual person has, are not only diverse from all that natural men have, after the manner that the ideas or perceptions of the same sense may differ one from another, but rather as the ideas and sensations of different senses do differ. Hence the work of the Spirit of God in regeneration is often in Scripture compared to the giving a new sense, giving eyes to see, and ears to hear, unstopping the ears of the deaf, and opening the eyes of them that were born blind, and turning from darkness unto light. And because this spiritual sense is immensely the most noble and excellent, and that without which all other principles of perception, and all our faculties are useless and vain; therefore the giving this new sense, with the blessed fruits and effects of it in the soul, is compared to a raising the dead, and to a new creation.

This new spiritual sense, and the new dispositions that attend it, are no new faculties, but are new principles of nature. I use the word "principles," for want of a word of a more determinate signification. By a principle of nature in this place, I mean that foundation which is laid in nature, either old or new, for any particular manner or kind of exercise of the faculties of the soul; or a natural habit or foundation for action, giving a person ability and disposition to exert the faculties in exercises of such a certain kind; so that to exert the faculties in that kind of exercises, may be said to be his nature. So this new spiritual sense is not a new faculty of understanding, but it is a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of understanding. So that new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense, is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will.

The Spirit of God, in all his operations upon the minds of natural men, only moves, impresses, assists, improves, or some way acts upon natural principles; but gives no new spiritual principle. Thus when the Spirit of
God gives a natural man visions, as he did Balaam, he only impresses a natural principle, viz. the sense of seeing, immediately exciting ideas of that sense; but he gives no new sense; neither is there anything supernatural, spiritual or divine in it. So if the Spirit of God impresses on a man’s imagination, either in a dream, or when he is awake, any outward ideas of any of the senses, either voices, or shapes and colors, ’tis only exciting ideas of the same kind that he has by natural principles and senses. So if God reveals to any natural man, any secret fact; as for instance, something that he shall hereafter see or hear; this is only exciting ideas of the same kind that he has by natural principles and senses. So if God reveals to any natural man, any secret fact; as for instance, something that he shall hereafter see or hear; this is only exciting ideas of the same kind that he has by natural principles and senses. So if God reveals to any natural man, any secret fact; as for instance, something that he shall hereafter see or hear; this is only exciting ideas of the same kind that he has by natural principles and senses. So if God reveals to any natural man, any secret fact; as for instance, something that he shall hereafter see or hear; this is only exciting ideas of the same kind that he has by natural principles and senses.

From hence it appears that impressions which some have made on their imagination, or the imaginary ideas which they have of God, or Christ, or heaven, or anything appertaining to religion, have nothing in them that is spiritual, or of the nature of true grace. Though such things may attend what is spiritual, and be mixed with it, yet in themselves they have nothing that is spiritual, nor are they any part of gracious experience. . . .

Many who have had such things have very ignorantly supposed them to be of the nature of spiritual discoveries. They have had lively ideas of some external shape, and beautiful form of countenance; and this they call spiritually seeing Christ. Some have had impressed upon them ideas of a great outward light; and this they call a spiritual discovery of God’s or Christ’s glory. Some have had ideas of Christ’s hanging on the cross, and his blood running from his wounds; and this they call a spiritual sight of Christ crucified, and the way of salvation by his blood. Some have seen him with his arms open ready to embrace them; and this they call a discovery of the sufficiency of Christ’s grace and love. Some have had lively ideas of heaven, and of Christ on his throne there, and shining ranks of saints and angels; and this they call seeing heaven opened to them. Some from time to time have had a lively idea of a person of a beautiful countenance smiling upon them; and this they call a spiritual discovery of the love of Christ to their souls, and tasting the love of Christ. . . .

But it is exceeding apparent that such ideas have nothing in them which is spiritual and divine, in the sense wherein it has been demonstrated that all gracious experiences are spiritual and divine. These external ideas are in no wise of such a sort, that they are entirely, and in their whole nature diverse from all that men have by nature, perfectly different from, and vastly above any sensation which ’tis possible a man should have by any natural sense or principle, so that in order to have them, a man must have a new spiritual and divine sense given him, in order to have any sensations of that sort; so far from this, that they are ideas of the same sort which we have by the external senses, that are some of the inferior powers of the humane nature; they are merely ideas of external objects, or ideas of that nature, of the same outward sensitive kind; the same sort of sensations of mind (differing not in degree, but only in circumstances) that we have by those natural principles which are common to us, with the beasts, viz. the five external senses. This is a low, miserable notion of spiritual sense, to suppose that ’tis only a conceiving or imagining that sort of ideas which we have by our animal senses, which senses the beasts have in as great perfection as we; it is, as it were, a turning Christ, or the divine nature in the soul, into a mere animal. . . .

From hence it again clearly appears, that no such things have anything in them that is spiritual, supernatural and divine, in the sense in which it has been proved that all truly gracious experiences have. And though external ideas, through man’s make and frame, do ordinarily in some
degree attend spiritual experiences, yet these ideas are no part of their spiritual experience, any more than the motion of the blood, and beating of the pulse, that attends experiences, are a part of spiritual experience. And though undoubtedly, through men's infirmity in the present state, and especially through the weak constitution of some persons, gracious affections which are very strong, do excite lively ideas in the imagination; yet 'tis also undoubted, that when persons' affections are founded on imaginations, which is often the case, those affections are merely natural and common, because they are built on a foundation that is not spiritual; and so are entirely different from gracious affections, which, as has been proved, do evermore arise from those operations that are spiritual and divine.

IV. Gracious affections do arise from the mind's being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.

Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, or some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge.

XII. Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice. I mean, they have that influence and power upon him who is the subject of 'em, that they cause that a practice, which is universally conformed to, and directed by Christian rules, should be the practice and business of his life.

This implies three things; (1) That his behavior or practice in the world, be universally conformed to, and directed by Christian rules. (2) That he makes a business of such a holy practice above all things; that it be a business which he is chiefly engaged in, and devoted to, and pursues with highest earnestness and diligence: so that he may be said to make this practice of religion eminently his work and business. And (3) That he persists in it to the end of life: so that is may be said, not only to be his business at certain seasons, the business of Sabbath days, or certain extraordinary times, or the business of a month, or a year, or of seven years, or his business under certain circumstances; but the business of his life; it being that business which he perseveres in through all changes, and under all trials, as long as he lives.

The tendency of grace in the heart to holy practice, is very direct, and the connection most natural close and necessary. True grace is not an unactive thing; there is nothing in heaven or earth of a more active nature; for 'tis life itself, and the most active kind of life, even spiritual and divine life. 'Tis no barren thing; there is nothing in the universe that in its nature has a greater tendency to fruit. Godliness in the heart has as direct a relation to practice, as a fountain has to a stream, or as the luminous nature of the sun has to beams sent forth, or as life has to breathing, or the beating of the pulse, or any other vital act; or as a habit or principle of action has to action: for 'tis the very nature and notion of grace, that 'tis a principle of holy action or practice. Regeneration, which is that work of God in which grace is infused, has a direct relation to practice; for 'tis the very end of it, with a view to which the whole work is wrought: all is calculated and framed, in this mighty and manifold change wrought in the soul, so as directly to tend to this end: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto good works" (Eph. 2:10). Yea 'tis the very end of the redemption of Christ; "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). "He died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died, and rose again" (II Cor. 5:15). "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered up himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works, to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:14).

From what has been said it is manifest, that Christian practice or a holy life is a great and distinguishing sign of true and saving grace. But I may go further, and assert, that it is the chief of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of professors unto others, and also to their own consciences.

But then it is necessary that this be rightly taken, and that it be well understood and observed, in what sense and manner Christian practice is the greatest sign of grace. Therefore, to set this matter in a clear light, I will endeavor particularly and distinctly to prove, that Christian practice is
the principal sign by which Christians are to judge, both of their own and others' sincerity of godliness; withal observing some things that are needful to be particularly noted, in order to a right understanding of this matter.

1. I shall consider Christian practice and an holy life, as a manifestation and sign of the sincerity of a professing Christian, to the eye of his neighbors and brethren.

And that this is the chief sign of grace in this respect, is very evident from the Word of God. Christ, who knew best how to give us rules to judge of others, has repeated it and inculcated it, that we should know them by their fruits; "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). . . . So Luke 6:44: "Every tree is known by his own fruit." Christ nowhere says, ye shall know the tree by its leaves or flowers, or ye shall know men by their talk, or ye shall know them by the good story they tell of their experiences, or ye shall know them by the manner and air of their speaking, and emphasis and pathos of expression, or by their speaking feelingly, or by making a very great show by abundance of talk, or by many tears and affectionate expressions, or by the affections ye feel in your hearts towards them: but by their fruits shall ye know them; the tree is known by its fruit; every tree is known by its own fruit. And as this is the evidence that Christ has directed us mainly to look at in others, in judging of them, so it is the evidence that Christ has mainly directed us to give to others, whereby they may judge of us; "Let your light so shine before men, that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

Here Christ directs us to manifest our godliness to others. Godliness is as it were a light that shines in the soul: Christ directs that this light should not only shine within, but that it should shine out before men, that they may see it. But which way shall this be? 'Tis by our good works. Christ don't say, that others hearing your good words, your good story, or your pathetical expressions; but that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven. Doubtless when Christ gives us a rule how to make our light shine, that others may have evidence of it, his rule is the best that is to be found. And the apostles do mention a Christian practice, as the principal ground of their esteem of persons as true Christians. . . .

Therefore here are two ways of manifesting to our neighbor what is in our hearts; one by what we say, and the other by what we do. But the Apostle abundantly prefers the latter as the best evidence. Now certainly all accounts we give of ourselves in words, our saying that we have faith, and that we are converted, and telling the manner how we came to have faith, and the steps by which it was wrought, and the discoveries and experiences that accompanied it, are still but manifesting our faith by what we say; 'tis but showing our faith by our words; which the Apostle speaks of as falling vastly short of manifesting of it by what we do, and showing our faith by our works.

And as the Scripture plainly teaches that practice is the best evidence of the sincerity of professing Christians; so reason teaches the same thing. Reason shows that men's deeds are better and more faithful interpreters of their minds, than their words. The common sense of all mankind, through all ages and nations, teaches 'em to judge of men's hearts chiefly by their practice, in other matters: as whether a man be a loyal subject, a true lover, a dutiful child, or a faithful servant. If a man professes a great deal of love and friendship to another, reason teaches all men, that such a profession is not so great an evidence of his being a real and hearty friend, as his appearing a friend in deeds; being faithful and constant to his friend, in prosperity and adversity, ready to lay out himself, and deny himself, and suffer in his personal interest, to do him a kindness. A wise man will trust to such evidences of the sincerity of friendship, further than a thousand earnest professions and solemn declarations, and most affectionate expressions of friendship in words. And there is equal reason why practice should also be looked upon as the best evidence of friendship towards Christ. Reason says the same that Christ said, in John 14:21: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." Thus if we see a man, who in the course of his life, seems to follow and imitate Christ, and greatly to exert and deny himself for the honor of Christ and to promote his kingdom and interest in the world; reason teaches that this is an evidence of love to Christ, more to be depended on, than if a man only says he has love to Christ, and tells of the inward experiences he has had of love to him, what strong love he felt, and how his heart was drawn out in love at such and such a time, when it may be there appears but little
imitation of Christ in his behavior, and he seems backward to do any great
matter for him, or to put himself out of his way for the promoting of his
kingdom, but seems to be apt to excuse himself, whenever he is called to
deny himself for Christ. So if a man in declaring his experiences, tells how
he found his heart weaned from the world, and saw the vanity of it, so that
all looked as nothing to him, at such and such times, and professes that he
gives up all to God, and calls heaven and earth to witness to it; but yet in
his practice is violent in pursuing the world, and what he gets he keeps
close, is exceeding loath to part with much of it to charitable and pious
uses, it comes from him almost like his heart's blood. But there is another
professing Christian, that says not a great deal, yet in his behavior appears
ready at all times to forsake the world, whenever it stands in the way of his
duty, and is free to part with it at any time, to promote religion and the
good of his fellow creatures; reason teaches that the latter gives far the
most credible manifestation of an heart weaned from the world. . . .

Persons in a pang of affection may think they have a willingness of heart
for great things, to do much and to suffer much, and so may profess it very
earnestly and confidently; when really their hearts are far from it. Thus
many in their affectionate pangs, have thought themselves willing to be
damned eternally for the glory of God. Passing affections easily produce
words; and words are cheap; and godliness is more easily feigned in words
than in actions. Christian practice is a costly laborious thing. The self­
denial that is required of Christians, and the narrowness of the way that
leads to life, don't consist in words, but in practice. Hypocrites may much
more easily be brought to talk like saints, than to act like saints.

Thus it is plain that Christian practice is the best sign or manifestation
of the true godliness of a professing Christian, to the eye of his neigh­
bors . . .

Secondly, I proceed to show that Christian practice, taken in the sense
that has been explained, is the chief of all the evidences of a saving
sincerity in religion, to the consciences of the professors of it; much to be
preferred to the method of the first convictions, enlightenings and com­
forts in conversion, or any immanent discoveries or exercises of grace
whatever, that begin and end in contemplation. The evidence of this
appears by the following arguments.

Argument 1. Reason plainly shows that those things which put it to the
proof what men will actually cleave to and prefer in their practice, when
left to follow their own choice and inclinations, are the proper trial what
they do really prefer in their hearts. Sincerity in religion, as has been
observed already, consists in setting God highest in the heart, in choosing
him before other things, in having a heart to sell all for Christ, etc. But a
man's actions are the proper trial what a man's heart prefers. As for
instance, when it is so that God and other things come to stand in
competition, God is as it were set before a man on one hand, and his
worldly interest or pleasure on the other (as it often is so in the course of a
man's life), his behavior in such case, in actually cleaving to the one
and forsaking the other, is the proper trial which he prefers. Sincerity consists
in forsaking all for Christ in heart; but to forsake all for Christ in heart, is
the very same thing as to have an heart to forsake all for Christ: but
certainly the proper trial whether a man has an heart to forsake all for
Christ, is his being actually put to it, the having Christ and other things
coming in competition, that he must actually or practically cleave to one
and forsake the other. To forsake all for Christ in heart, is the same thing
as to have an heart to forsake all for Christ when called to it: but the
highest proof to ourselves and others, that we have an heart to forsake all
for Christ when called to it, is actually doing it when called to it, or so far
as called to it. To follow Christ in heart, is to have an heart to follow him.
To deny ourselves in heart for Christ, is the same thing as to have an heart
to deny ourselves for him in fact. The main and most proper proof of a
man's having an heart to anything, concerning which he is at liberty to
follow his own inclinations, and either to do or not to do as he pleases, is
his doing of it. When a man is at liberty whether to speak or keep silence,
the most proper evidence of his having an heart to speak, is his speaking.
When a man is at liberty whether to walk or sit still, the proper proof of
his having an heart to walk, is his walking. Godliness consists not in an
heart to intend to do the will of God, but in an heart to do it. The children
of Israel in the wilderness had the former, of whom we read, "Go thou
near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us
all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it and do
it. And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me;
and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever” (Deut. 5:27–29). The people manifested that they had a heart to intend to keep God’s commandments, and to be very forward in those intentions; but God manifests that this was far from being the thing that he desired, wherein true godliness consists, even an heart actually to keep them.

Arg. 2. As reason shows that those things which occur in the course of life that put it to the proof whether men will prefer God to other things in practice, are the proper trial of the uprightness and sincerity of their hearts; so the same are represented as the proper trial of the sincerity of professors, in the Scripture. There we find that such things are called by that very name, trials or temptations (which I before observed are both words of the same signification). The things that put it to the proof whether men will prefer God to other things in practice, are the difficulties of religion, or those things which occur that make the practice of duty difficult and cross to other principles besides the love of God; because in them, God and other things are both set before men together, for their actual and practical choice; and it comes to this, that we can’t hold to both, but one or the other must be forsaken.

Now from all that has been said, I think it to be abundantly manifest, that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the gracious sincerity of professors, to themselves and others; and the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences, that which seals and crowns all other signs. I had rather have the testimony of my conscience, that I have such a saying of my supreme Judge on my side, as that, “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me” (John 14:21); than the judgment, and fullest approbation, of all the wise, sound and experienced divines, that have lived this thousand years, on the most exact and critical examination of my experiences, as to the manner of my conversion. Not that there are no other good evidences of a state of grace but this. There may be other exercises of grace, besides these efficient exercises, which the saints may have in contemplation, that may be very satisfying to them: but yet this is the chief and most proper evidence. There may be several good evidences that a tree is a fig tree; but the highest and most proper evidence of it, is that it actually bears figs. ’Tis possible that a man may have a good assurance of a state of grace, at his first conversion, before he has had opportunity to gain assurance, by this great evidence I am speaking of. If a man hears that a great treasure is offered him, in a distant place, on condition that he will prize it so much, as to be willing to leave what he possesses at home, and go a journey for it, over the rocks and mountains that are in the way, to the place where it is; ’tis possible the man may be well assured, that he values the treasure to the degree spoken of; as soon as the offer is made him; he may feel a willingness to go for the treasure, within him, beyond all doubt: but yet, this don’t hinder but that his actual going for it is the highest and most proper evidence of his being willing, not only to others, but to himself. But then as an evidence to himself, his outward actions, and the motions of his body in his journey, are not considered alone, exclusive of the actions of his mind, and a consciousness within himself, of the thing that moves him, and the end he goes for; otherwise, his bodily motion is no evidence to him, of his prizing the treasure. In such a manner is Christian practice the most proper evidence of a saving value of the pearl of great price, and treasure hid in the field.