

Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners

Written by John Bunyan

Modern English Paraphrase by Andrew Sumner

Table of Contents

ABOUT THIS PARAPHRASE.....	1
PREFACE.....	2
GRACE ABOUNDING.....	4
An Object of Wrath.....	4
Conviction and Reformation.....	5
Hope and Fear.....	7
The Storm of Doubt.....	13
Established in the Truth.....	15
My Fall from Grace.....	18
The Path to Deliverance.....	25
Honey from the Lion.....	30
Trials through Illness.....	32
My Call to Ministry.....	33
Pride and Spiritual Gifts.....	36
Lies and Slanders.....	37
MY ARREST IN THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 1660.....	38
TRIAL AND PUNISHMENT.....	43
THE CLERK OF THE PEACE.....	46
THE MIDSUMMER ASSIZES.....	49
THE ASSIZES, JANUARY 1662.....	52
A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF MY IMPRISONMENT.....	52
IN CONCLUSION.....	55
LIFE AFTER PRISON.....	56
LICENSE.....	60

ABOUT THIS PARAPHRASE

This book is an inspiring account of John Bunyan's journey from a life steeped in sin and ignorant of God through to his ultimate conversion. His was not a simple, clean-cut transformation; rather he went through a long period of struggle, hope and despair in seeking God and then in serving Him. His story shows that if God can save and so powerfully work through such a man as he, the same can be true for any one of us.

The English language of today is significantly different from that of the 1600s, and while the original text can still be understood many people would find it hard to read. The purpose of this paraphrase is to try and express, as best I can, John Bunyan's words in today's language. To that end I've re-arranged the various sections of the book into chronological order, broken it where appropriate into chapters, and removed paragraph numbers. I hope the end result will make Bunyan's message of hope and the wonders of God's grace accessible to people who would never have otherwise read his book.

For those who haven't read this book before, it is actually a compilation of several letters to the church written while John Bunyan was in prison. The first, *Grace Abounding*, is a recount of John's spiritual journey and conversion, while the other letters deal with specific events - his arrest, his various trials and appeals etc. At the end is an account of the his life following his release, written by an unknown friend of Mr Bunyan.

Bunyan, of course, quoted from the King James Version of the Bible. In the spirit of making this book accessible to today's readers I have used either the Revised Standard Version or the New Living Translation, depending on which I felt best expressed the scripture being quoted and conveyed the meaning John was trying to express.

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Andrew Sumner, August 26 2009

GRACE ABOUNDING TO THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

A faithful account of the life and death of John Bunyan

Or

A brief account of the incredible mercy of God in Christ to him

Describing how He rescued him from the garbage heap and converting him to the faith of His blessed son Jesus Christ. This book describes his many struggles with sin, the temptations he met with, and how God carried him through them all.

PREFACE

OR, A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE PUBLISHING THIS WORK. WRITTEN BY THE AUTHOR AND DEDICATED TO THOSE WHOM GOD HAS COUNTED WORTHY TO RECEIVE FAITH, BY HIS MINISTRY IN THE WORD

My children, grace be with you. I regret that I can't be with you myself, and that my confinement stops me performing the duty God has laid on my heart - that of helping to teach you and building you up in faith and holiness. I want you to know that I care for you as your father, and I desire your spiritual and everlasting wellbeing. As I once did in a time of spiritual blessing and now from a place of trial and torment (Song of Solomon 4:8), I hold you foremost in my thoughts and prayers, greatly longing to see you arrive safely in Heaven.

I thank God every time I think of you. Even caught as I am in the teeth of the lion in the desert, I rejoice in considering the grace, mercy and knowledge of Christ our Saviour that God has given you. Your abundance of faith and love, your hunger and thirst for knowing God more, your tenderness of heart, your trembling at sin, and your sober and holy character before both God and men - these things are a great refreshment to me. "You are our pride and joy" 1 Thess 2:20.

This book is like a drop of honey that I have taken from the carcass of a lion - read Judges 14:5-8 to understand what I mean. Temptations, when we first encounter them, are like the lion that roared at Samson. If we overcome them, the next time we see them we'll find a nest of honey within, a source of strength and sweetness. I myself have been refreshed and encouraged in writing this book, for it reveals the work of God upon my soul, from the very first through to the present. It shows the times I was cast down and then how God raised me up, "for He wounds yet His hands make whole".

Isaiah 38:19 says "Each generation tells of your faithfulness to the next". It was for this reason that I waited so long at Sinai (Lev 6:10-11) to see the fire, the cloud and the darkness, that I might fear the Lord all the days of my life upon the earth and tell of His wonderful works to you my children (Psalm 78:3-5).

Moses recorded the journeys of Israel from Egypt to the land of Canaan, and commanded that the people remember their forty years of wandering in the desert. "Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands" (Deut 8:2). I have tried to do the same in relation to God's work in my life, and I have published it so that, if God will, other people may remember what He has done for their souls by reading of His work in me.

It is good for Christians to frequently think on the very beginnings of God's grace in their life. Exodus 12:42 says "On this night the Lord kept his promise to bring his people out of the land of Egypt. So this night belongs to him, and it must be commemorated every year by all the Israelites, from generation to generations". David said in the Psalms, "my soul is downcast within me, therefore I'll remember You from the land of Jordan, from Mount Hermon and the hill of Mizar". When he went out to fight Goliath he recalled how God had helped him defeat the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 27:36-37).

Paul, when brought to trial, told his judges about his conversion. He would think of the day and hour when he first met with God's grace, for he found it helpful (Acts 22 and 24). The people of Israel were encouraged to remember how God brought them out of the Red Sea (Numbers 14:25) for though they sang His praises they soon forgot His works (Psams 106:11,12).

In this book you may see much of God's abundant grace towards me. I thank God, I can say his grace was abundant, for it was greater than my both sins and Satan's temptations combined. I can remember my fears and doubts and my months of sadness with comfort now; they are like the head of Goliath in my hand. To David, no sword was like Goliath's - the sword that should have killed him. The very thought and sight of it was a witness of how God had delivered him. Oh, the remembrance of my great sins, my great temptations, and of my great fear of perishing forever! They bring afresh to my mind the great help and encouragement from Heaven, the great grace that God gave to such a wretch as I.

My dear children, recall your past to mind, remember your prayers and God's answers and consider them in your hearts (Psalms 73:5-12). Look carefully for evidence of the treasures of God's grace towards you, including your very first experiences. Remember the words that first laid hold on your heart, remember your troubled conscience, your fear of death and hell; remember your tears and prayers to God and how often you cried out to Him for mercy. Remember when God spoke to you from his Word and gave you hope, and take courage from those words again. If you have sinned against Him, if you are tempted to blaspheme, if you are drowned in despair, if you think God is against you or that heaven is hidden from you, remember it was like that with me, your father, and out of them all the Lord delivered me.

There's much more I could have included in this book, both in regards to my temptations and sins and to God's merciful kindness and his work in my soul. I could have tried to write with more eloquence and poetry, but I dared not. God did not observe trivial niceties and meaningless adornments when he saved me, and neither did I when I was sunken into the bottomless pit of despair in fear of hell itself. No, I have laid things down plain and simple, telling it like it was. Let whoever likes this receive the message to his heart, and whoever doesn't is welcome to produce something better. Farewell.

My dear Children,

The milk and honey are beyond this wilderness. God be merciful to you, and grant that you are not lazy, but go in to possess the land.

JOHN BUNYAN.

GRACE ABOUNDING

An Object of Wrath

Before I begin telling you about God's merciful work in my life, it makes sense to first give you an idea of my background. Perhaps in knowing how I began; my social status and how I was brought up, you'll have a better understanding of God's abundant grace and goodness towards me.

As many of you know, I was born into a poor and insignificant family. My father's rank and position were very low, despised by everyone. I can't boast of any noble blood in my ancestry or of any earthly riches. Regardless, I still praise God for He brought me into the world this way, and then blessed me with the grace and life that is in Christ by the gospel.

Even though my parents were so poor, God put it into their hearts to put me in school. I learned to read and write, even as well as other poor folk's children, but to my shame I had lost most, if not all of what I'd learned, long before the Lord began his work in my soul.

I grew up without God and followed the way of the world and the spirit at work in those who are disobedient (Eph 2:2-3). It was my delight to be "taken captive by the devil at his will" (2 Tim 2:26), being filled with such a strong wickedness in both my heart and my life that, even as a child I had few equals in cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming God's holy name.

This became second nature to me, and so offended the Lord that even in my childhood He frightened me with terrible dreams and visions. Often after a day or two spent in sin I was greatly troubled in my sleep with visions of devils and evil spirits, who, as I thought then, were trying to drag me away, and try as I might I couldn't escape them.

At this time I was also tormented by fears of being cast into the fires of hell and ending up in the company of demons, bound there with chains of darkness until the great day of judgement.

All this happened when I was just nine or ten years old. Often I would be playing worthless, foolish games with my companions when I'd be struck by these sudden fears, leaving me severely downcast and anxious. I was so overcome with despair of ever reaching heaven that I often wished either that there was no hell, or that I had been born a devil, thinking that it would have been better to be a tormentor than one of the tormented. Even so I didn't let go of my sins.

The terrible dreams began to leave me as I grew older. I soon forgot them, as my pleasure in sin quickly cut off even the memory of my fears, as if they had never existed. Therefore I let myself go, indulging my greed and lusts all the more and I gladly broke all of God's laws. By the time I was old enough to marry I had become the ringleader of a gang of hoodlums practicing all kinds of vice and sin.

I was so far gone in chasing the lusts and desires of my flesh, that without God's grace I would not only be heading for eternal judgement - I would also have broken the laws of men and brought shame and disgrace upon myself in the eyes of the world.

In those days I couldn't even bear the thought of religion. I couldn't endure anything religious myself, nor could I tolerate it in anyone else around me. Christianity felt like a prison to me, and just reading a few sentences about it was more than I could stand. I said to God, "Go away. I want no part of you and your ways" (Job 21: 14,15). I had banished both heaven and hell from my mind and no longer gave any thought to being saved or damned. Oh Lord, you know my life, and my ways are not hidden from You!

I do remember this though. Even though I could sin with the greatest delight and ease, and also enjoy the wickedness of my friends, if I happened to see someone sinning who professed to be good it really made my spirit tremble. Once, when I was most steeped in sin, I heard a religious man swear - and it struck me so severely that my heart ached.

Even now God did not totally leave me, but followed me still - not with fears and dreams as before, but with judgement mixed with mercy. For instance, once I fell into a creek and barely escaped drowning. Another time I fell out of a boat into Bedford river, yet was mercifully saved. Then there was the time I was out in the fields with a friend when a snake crossed the path - I struck it with a stick and having stunned it, pulled her fangs out with my fingers. If God had not been merciful to me I might have easily killed myself that day.

I am also thankful for this - when I was a soldier I was ordered, with many others, to go and lay siege to a town. I was just about to leave on the march when one of my companions offered to go in my place. I agreed, and standing sentinel at the siege he was shot in the head by a musket-ball and died there.

As I said, God was warning me with judgement and showing me mercy, but neither awakened me to repentance. I kept sinning and grew more and more rebellious against God, and more careless of my own salvation.

Soon after this I married, and mercifully found a wife whose father was considered godly. My wife and I were as poor as poor could be (we had neither a dish nor spoon between us), yet she did have two books - "The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven" and "The Practice of Piety", both of which her father had left her when he died. Sometimes I'd read the books with her, and even found some things there that I liked (though nothing convicted me of sin). She would often tell me what a godly man her father was, how he would rebuke and correct sin both in his house and among neighbours, and what a strict and holy life he lived both in his words and actions.

Even though I was still unaware of my sad and sinful state, these books did awaken in me a desire for religion. Knowing no better, I eagerly adopted the religion of the times, which consisted of going to church twice a day and I devoutly joined the others in their songs and prayers. My wicked life hadn't changed at all, as this was little more than superstition for me. I began to adore things of the church - the robes, the altar, the priest, the liturgy, thinking that these things were all "holy". I considered the priest and clerk to be especially happy and blessed, because they were God's special servants doing His work in the holy temple.

This illusion quickly gained strength in me, such that whenever I saw a priest (no matter how sordid and debauched his life was) I would find myself bowing down in my heart and clinging to him. I had such love for them, supposing them to be God's ministers, that I could have laid at their feet and let myself be trampled. Their name, their robes, their work did so intoxicate and bewitch me.

I had been like this for quite a while when another thought came into my mind - are we Israelites or not? Having read in the scriptures that they were the chosen people of God, I thought that I'd be really blessed if I were of this race. I yearned to know the answer to this question and at last asked my father, who told me No, we were not. I became downcast and again lost hope.

All this time I had no idea of the dangers and evil of sin. I didn't realise that sin would condemn me, religion or not, unless I belonged to Christ. I never thought of Him or even if He existed or not. Thus does a blind man wear himself out with foolish wandering, for he doesn't know the way to God's city (Eccles 10:15).

Conviction and Reformation

One day though, among all our parson's sermons, he spoke about the Sabbath day, and how evil it was to break it with work, sports or other activities. Up till then, notwithstanding all my religion, I had taken great delight in all manner of vice, especially on Sabbath days when I did not need to work. This sermon struck home, and I fell in my heart with a heavy conscience - I even believed that he had made that sermon on purpose to show me my sin. At that time I first felt what guilt was, and when I went home I was loaded down with a great burden on my spirit.

I now felt numb to the vain pleasures I enjoyed the most, which were now a source of bitterness to me. Unfortunately it did not last long - even before I'd finished dinner the burden began to fade, and my heart returned to its old course. Oh how glad I was that this guilt, this fiery conscience was gone from me, that I might again sin without control! Once I'd finished my food, I shook the sermon out of my mind and returned

to my sports and gambling with great delight.

However, that same day I was playing a game of Cat, and having struck it one blow from the hole and about to strike it a second time, a voice suddenly darted from heaven into my soul. "Will you leave your sins and go to heaven, or keep sinning and go to hell?" Disconcerted, I left the cat on the ground and looked up to heaven, and felt as if the Lord Jesus was angrily looking down on me, as if He was threatening a terrible punishment for this and my other ungodly habits.

I was suddenly convicted that I was a great and grievous sinner, and that it was now too late for me to look for heaven. Christ would not now forgive me, nor pardon my wrong-doing. In thinking this, my heart sunk in black despair, concluding that yes, it was indeed too late. So, I made up my mind to go on in sin. I'm lost either way, I thought, miserable if I leave my sins and miserable if I follow them. I'm damned anyway, so I may as well be damned for many sins as for a few.

There I was, standing in the middle of the game with all my companions around, yet I told them nothing. Having reached my desperate conclusion, I returned to my sport again. I well remember that I was in such despair that I thought sin would now be my only comfort. Heaven was lost, so I mustn't even think about it. Instead I formed a hunger to take my fill of sin, thinking about sins I hadn't committed yet and planning to taste their sweetness. I began to rush to fill my belly with sin as quickly as I could - I didn't want to die before I'd committed every kind of sin. Before God I'm not lying or exaggerating; this was what I desired with all my heart. The good Lord, Whose mercy is unsearchable, forgive me my transgressions!

I believe this temptation of the devil is more common among poor people than many realise. It sears their spirits and hearts with a sickness like scurvy. Their consciences are numbed and Satan fills them with such despair that, even though they feel little guilt, they secretly conclude there is no hope for them because they have loved sin, and therefore sin is all they have left. (Jeremiah 2:25, 18:12).

So on I went, greedily chasing after sin, but annoyed that it could no longer really satisfy me. It was like this for about a month, until one day when I was standing at a neighbour's shop window cursing, swearing and playing the madman as I usually did. The woman of the house heard me, and though she was also a very loose and ungodly wretch, she told that my swearing and cursing was so bad it made her tremble inside. She said that I had the most wicked ungodly tongue she had ever heard, and that any youth who heard me would surely be corrupted.

At this rebuke I was silenced, and in my heart I was put to shame, not only before the woman but also before God in heaven. While I stood there, hanging my head, I wished with all my heart that I could be a little child again, and that my father might teach me to speak without cursing. I thought I was so accustomed to it from such an early age that I could never think of reforming my speech; it would be a waste of effort to even try.

I don't know how it happened though, but from this time forward my swearing stopped. It was a great wonder to me when I realised it. Whereas before I couldn't speak without putting an oath before, and another behind, to make my words have authority - now I could, without cursing, speak better and more pleasantly than I ever had before. All this happened even though I didn't know Jesus Christ and while I continued chasing my sports and games.

Soon after this, I fell into company with a poor man who professed to being religious. I thought he spoke well about scriptures and on matters of religion, and liking what he said I started reading my Bible. I began to enjoy reading, especially the historical parts, but I didn't like Paul's letters or similar scriptures as I was still ignorant of the corruptions of my nature and of Jesus Christ's power to save me.

At this time my outward life began to change, both in words and actions. I put the Commandments before me as my way to heaven, and I tried hard to keep them. Sometimes I thought I did pretty well and I'd have some comfort in my heart, but now and then I'd break one and my conscience would accuse me. I'd repent, say I was sorry for it and promise God to do better next time, and once again I'd find comfort. I began to think that I was pleasing God as well as any man in England.

For about a year I was like this. All our neighbours took me now for a godly man, newly changed and

religious, and they marvelled at such a huge change in my life and manners. Indeed, so it was, though I didn't know Christ, nor His grace, faith or hope. As I since realised, had I then died my state would have been most fearful.

But as I say, my neighbours were amazed at this great conversion, from vile profanity into something like a moral life, and so they might be! They began to praise, commend, speak well of me both to my face and behind my back. Now I was godly, they said, now I was a right honest man! But oh, how pleased I was when I realised what they were thinking! Though I was still nothing more than a poor painted hypocrite, I loved to be talked about as if I were truly godly. I was proud of my godliness, and everything I did was done for people to notice and talk about. A whole year I went on this way.

I should mention here that, before this change, I had really enjoyed ringing church bells. In my heart though I thought this was a vain practice and that I really should stop. I kept hankering after it in my mind, so I'd go to the steeple house and though I didn't ring, I'd watch. My conscience still troubled me, and I began to wonder, "what if a bell should fall on me?". I chose to stand under a main beam, thinking that would protect me. Then I thought, what if it falls in mid-swing? It would miss the beam, bounce off the wall and still strike me! Therefore I took to standing in the doorway, thinking that I could slip out behind the thick walls and be safe.

For a while I still went to see the ringing, standing in the doorway. Then the thought came, what if the steeple itself falls? This thought (and yes the steeple could fall for all I know) shook my mind so much that I ran outside for fear the steeple would fall on my head.

My dancing was another thing. It was a year or more before I could totally give it up. All this time, whenever I thought I'd kept this or that commandment, or did or said anything I considered good, I had great peace in my conscience. I'd think to myself, surely God can't help but be pleased with me. Yes, I thought that no-one in England was pleasing God more than I.

What a poor wretch I was, still totally ignorant of Jesus Christ. I was trying to establish my own righteousness. I would have died like this, had God in mercy not showed me the truth of my state.

Hope and Fear

One day, God's providence called me to Bedford, to work on my trade. In a street in Bedford I came across three or four poor women, sitting at a door in the sun, talking about the things of God. I walked over, wanting to hear their words and perhaps join the conversation, being a brisk talker myself. I heard them, but I did not understand them at all. They were far above me, way beyond my reach. They spoke of a new birth, the work of God in their hearts, how they were convinced of their miserable sinful nature. They talked of how God had filled their souls with His love in the Lord Jesus, and how God's promises had both refreshed them and supported them against the devil's temptations. They discussed Satan's suggestions and temptings and how they were borne up under his attacks. They spoke of their own wretchedness of heart, and of their unbelief. They condemned and despised their own righteousness as filthily, and insufficient to do them any good.

As I listened I thought they spoke as if moved to do so by joy in their hearts. They spoke so pleasantly of scripture, with such grace in all they said, that I felt they'd discovered a whole new world, as if they were people that lived apart from everyone else, not the same as their neighbours at all. (Numbers 23:9)

My heart was shaken, and I suddenly thought all my efforts were for nothing. I saw that in all my thoughts about religion and salvation, the new birth had never entered into my mind. I knew nothing of the comfort of words and promises, nor of my wicked heart's deceit. I'd taken no notice of secret thoughts, nor did I understand what Satan's temptations were or how to fight them.

I considered what I'd heard, and as I left them and went about my employment their talk went with me, and my heart stayed with them. Their words really affected me. I was now convinced that I lacked any true evidence of godliness. Their example showed me that a truly godly person must be happy and blessed indeed.

I then made it my business to visit the company of these poor folk again and again. I couldn't stay away, and the more I went amongst them the more I questioned my own condition. I was amazed to notice two things happening in me, especially considering what a blind, ignorant, sordid and ungodly wretch I had been. My heart had become very soft and tender - as they discussed scriptures I was convicted by what I heard, and my mind was now continually meditating on these matters and on other good things I'd read or heard of previously.

My mind was now so turned towards God that it was like a leech at a vein, crying out Give, Give, Give (Prov 30:15). Yes, I was so fixed on eternity and the kingdom of heaven (though as God knows, I understood so little of it), that neither pleasures, profits, persuasions or threats could shake me loose or distract me. It was difficult for me to think of earthly things, but I'm ashamed to say that since then I've often found it just as hard to turn my mind towards heaven.

There's one thing I should mention here. I had forsaken the company of another young man who had been my closest friend, as I could no longer tolerate his wicked cursing, swearing and whoring. One day I bumped into him in a laneway and asked how he was. With his usual oaths and curses he answered that he was well. "Harry", I said, "why do you keep cursing and swearing like this? What will become of you if you're like this when you die?". He answered me angrily, "What would the devil do for company if it weren't for people like me?"

About this time I read some of Ranter's books which were being advertised at the time and highly endorsed by several older believers. I didn't feel comfortable about the books, but wasn't able to judge whether they were of God or not. I prayed earnestly, "O Lord, I am a fool, not able to know truth from error. Lord, don't leave me to my own blindness to either approve or condemn this teaching. If its of You, don't let me reject it, but if its of the devil don't let me embrace it. Lord, I lay my soul only at Your feet, please don't let me be deceived." I had just one religious friend all this time, the poor man I'd spoken of before. He too had read Ranter's books, and embraced them wholeheartedly, giving himself up to all manner of filthy and unclean behaviour. He now denied there was a God, or angels or spirits. He'd laugh at me when I told him to stop drinking, and laughed even more when I tried to correct the wicked things he was doing. He made out that he'd looked at all religions, and that he'd only now found the truth, also saying that I'd soon see all believers convert to Rantism. I couldn't stomach his new beliefs and resolved to have nothing more to do with him - he was as great a stranger to me now as he'd been a close confidant before.

This man wasn't my only temptation. I happened to meet several people in the countryside who were once strictly religious but were now swept away by these Ranters. They'd debate their new beliefs with me, and condemn me as legalistic and dark. They believed they had attained perfection and could do whatever they liked and not sin. Oh these ideas attracted my flesh as I was a young man in my prime. God had designed me, I hoped, for better things, and kept me fearing His name and from accepting such cursed beliefs. And blessed be God, who put it in my heart to distrust my own wisdom and instead cry out to Him to be protected and directed. I have since seen the effects of that prayer in His preserving me, not only from Ranting errors, but from others that have sprung up since. The Bible was precious to me in those days.

Now I began to look at the Bible with new eyes, to read as I never had before. The letters of the apostle Paul were specially sweet and pleasant to me. Indeed I was never out of the Bible, reading or meditating and crying out to God to show me the truth and the way to heaven and glory.

As I read, I came across the passage - "to one is given, by the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another the word of Knowledge by the same Spirit, to another faith, etc" (1 Cor 12). I understood this scripture to explain the special gifts the Holy Spirit gives to perform extraordinary deeds. I realised though that all I wanted was the ordinary wisdom and understanding other Christians had. As I thought on this passage I was convicted over the word "faith", and wondered whether I had faith or not. This perplexed and dismayed me, for if I proved not to have any faith then I'd be totally lost and cast away.

No, I told myself, I know I'm ignorant and I lack the gifts of knowledge and understanding that others have, and its true I don't really know what faith is - but still I believe I must have some. Satan was showing me that those who have no faith end up in despair, with no peace or rest for their souls, and that's a place I didn't want to go.

In this way I closed my eyes to the question of whether I had faith or not, being afraid of what the answer might be. God, however, would not let me rest content - I had no peace and felt I must resolve the issue somehow. But how could I tell if I had faith? And what if I proved not to have it? If I didn't I was sure to perish forever.

So at last I could no longer ignore this matter, and finally decided to put myself on trial and see for certain whether I had faith or not. Alas, poor wretch! I was so ignorant and brutish that I had simply no idea how to do it.

So having made my decision but not knowing what to do (and I had no-one to confide in either), the tempter put a lie in my mind - that the only way to find out if I had faith was to attempt a miracle. He brought scriptures to my mind that seemed to support his suggestion too. I was walking one day between Elstow and Bedford, and this temptation was very strong. The thought was in me to command puddles in the road to be dry, and the dry areas to be puddles. I was almost about to utter the words, when the thought came: "first go under that hedge and pray that God would make you able to do it". I then thought, but what if, after praying, I try the miracle and still nothing happens? I'd surely be proven faithless, lost and without hope. Afraid of this, I decided to try it another day instead.

I continued in this sad condition, thinking that if faith is evidenced by performing wonderful miracles then I surely didn't have it now, nor was I ever likely to get faith. Thus I was tossed between the devil and my own ignorance, so perplexed and torn that I didn't know what to do.

Around this time a vision began to form in my mind concerning the happiness of the poor people at Bedford. I pictured them sitting on the sunny side of a high mountain, warming themselves in the sun's pleasant beams, while I was in the cold and dark, shivering and frost-bitten. Between me and them I felt there was a wall circling the sunny mountain. My one desire was to find a way through the wall and join the happy group in the warmth of the sun.

I imagined myself going around the wall again and again, poking and probing to try and find a way through. For a long time I could find none, but at last I saw an extremely tight & narrow gap in the wall. I tried to go through, but it was so tight I just couldn't fit. I made many attempts, all in vain, until I was exhausted by my efforts. Finally with much straining and squeezing I managed to get my head through the gap, then my shoulders, and finally with one last great effort my whole body was through. Glad and relieved, I went and sat in the middle of the group and was comforted by the light and heat of the sun.

This mountain I understood to be the church of the living God. The sun was the shining of His merciful face on those in the church. The wall was the Word, that separated Christians and the world, and the gap was Jesus Christ, the only way to God the Father (John 14:6). The tightness of this narrow gap showed me that no-one could enter into life unless they were downright earnest, and unless they left the wicked world behind them. The passage only allowed body and soul to pass through, not body, soul and sin.

This vision stayed with my spirit many days, during which time I felt sad and forlorn, yet filled with a vehement hunger to be among the group sitting in the sunshine. I'd pray now wherever I was, whether at home or out, inside or in the fields, and often lifted my heart to God singing the 51st Psalm. "O Lord, consider my distress", for I didn't know where I was.

I still had no assurance that I had faith in Christ. Instead I was assailed by fresh doubts about whether I'd ever find salvation. 'What if I am not one of the elect?', I thought. Also, what if the day of grace is now past and gone?

I was greatly torn by these two thoughts of the devil. Sometimes one and then the other would afflict and distress me. Although I was on fire to find the way to heaven and glory, and nothing could deter me from this, what if God hasn't elected, or chosen me? This question so hurt and discouraged me that it made me physically weak. In addition, I felt that this scripture trampled on all my desires: "So it is God who decides to show mercy. We can neither choose it nor work for it" (Romans 9:16)

I was at a loss, not knowing what to do. I saw that unless God in his infinite grace and love had chosen me

to receive His mercy, I could yearn for and work towards heaven until my heart broke, but nothing good would come of it. So I was stuck with the question, How can you tell if you're chosen by God to receive mercy? What if you aren't? What then?

O Lord, I thought, what if you haven't chosen me? The tempter whispered, Maybe you're not chosen. Indeed, perhaps not, I thought. Well, said Satan, you may as well give up. If God hasn't elected and chosen you, you can forget about being saved, for "God showing mercy is what counts, not man's will or effort".

These doubts drove me to my wits end. I didn't know what to say, how to answer these temptations. I thought I'd come up with this question myself, not realising Satan was tormenting me with it. If only the elect receive salvation, I thought, how can I tell if I am one of them?

For several weeks I was greatly assaulted and perplexed with this. Often while out walking I felt ready to sink to the ground in despair. I became oppressed and downcast, almost ready to give up even the ghost of all my hopes of ever attaining life. Then one day, a word fell with great weight on my soul: "Look at past generations and see, did God ever reject or confound anyone who trusted Him?"

This took a huge weight off my mind, and encouraged me to believe that there may be hope after all. At that very instant I felt compelled to start at Genesis and read through to the end of Revelations, looking to see if anyone who trusted in God was confounded. Coming home I went straight to my Bible to see if I could find the verse, thinking I'd find it quickly for it was so fresh and had such strength on my spirit that I felt as if it talked with me.

Well, I looked and I didn't find it, but still it stayed with me. I asked various religious men if they knew where it was, but none did. I began to wonder how such a sentence could so suddenly and with such comfort and strength seize hold of my heart, and yet it couldn't be found (though I was sure it was in the Bible somewhere).

Eventually, much later, I found it in in the Apocrypha - Ecclesiasticus 2:10. At first this was a disappointment, seeing the text was not actually in the Bible. By this time though I had more experience of God's love and kindness and I blessed God for this word - even though it wasn't scripture it still summarized many of God's promises and it was God's own word to me. That verse still shines in my heart at times today.

Still the other doubt haunted me - what if the day of grace has been and gone? What if I've waited too long to receive mercy? I remember one day I was walking in the country, tormented by thoughts of it being too late. To aggravate my thoughts, the tempter reminded me of the good people of Bedford, suggesting to me that as they were already converted, God wasn't planning to save anyone else in this district. I had come too late, for they had received the blessing before me.

Now I was in great distress, thinking that this indeed might be so. I went up and down bemoaning my sad condition, counting myself far worse than a thousand fools for rejecting salvation so long and spending so many years in sin. Oh that I had turned to God sooner! Oh that I had repented seven years ago! It made me angry with myself, to think that I was so stupid to waste my years until my soul's hopes of heaven were lost.

This fear overwhelmed me as I walked, to the point where I could barely take another step. I happened to be almost in the same place as I was when I received the first encouragement, and suddenly these words broke in on my mind: "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled, and yet there is still more room" (Luke 14:22,23). These words, especially "and yet there is still more room" were such sweet words to me. Truly I believed by them that there was room in heaven for me. Not only that, but I felt that the Lord Jesus was thinking of me when He spoke them, knowing that the time would come when I'd be afflicted with fear that there was no place left for me. He spoke those words, ensuring they were recorded, to help me against this vile temptation. I truly believed this.

In the light and encouragement of this word I continued quite some time, comforted too by the thought that the Lord Jesus would think of me so long ago and speak these words on purpose for my sake (yes, I truly believed he did).

Temptations to lose hope and give up continued, both from Satan, my own heart and worldly friends. I

thank God that they were outweighed by a strong vision in my mind of death and the day of judgement. I'd often think of Nebuchadnezzar, who had captured all the kingdoms of the world (Daniel 5:18,19). Even though this great man had all this, I thought, just one hour in hell fire would make him forget it all. This helped me a great deal.

I also came to understand something about the beasts Moses declared clean and unclean. I saw they represented types of men - clean ones who were the people of God and unclean, the children of the wicked one. Now I read that the clean beasts chewed the cud, showing us (I thought) that we must feed (meditate and ruminate) on the word of God. They also had cleft hooves, which I thought signified that to be saved we must part with ungodly ways. Animals that chewed the cud but walked with claws (like the hare), or that didn't ruminate but had cleft hooves (like the pig) were still unclean. In the same way there were men who studied and talked about God's word but did not change their lives, and others who tried to reform their actions but didn't know God's word or have faith. Neither were saved, no matter how learned or devout (Deut 14). After this, I realised that to share Christ's glory you must first be called by Him here, to share in His word, His righteousness, the comforts and fruits of His Spirit and an interest in heavenly things. These are needed to prepare a soul for entry into the glory of heaven.

Once again I was at a standstill, afraid that I wasn't "called". If I'm not called, I thought, there's no hope for me. Only those who are called can inherit the kingdom of heaven. How I now loved words that spoke of a Christian's calling, such as when the Lord said to someone "Follow Me", and to another "Come after Me". If only He'd say that to me too, I thought, how gladly I'd run after Him!

Again and again I cried with great intensity to Christ to call me. I was on fire to be converted, for I saw such glory in being a Christian that I couldn't be content without becoming one. I would have spent everything I had to purchase it, could it have been bought with gold. Had I the whole world to give, I'd have done so ten thousand times over to convert my soul.

Converted men and women were lovely in my eyes now. They shone, they walked like a people that carried heaven's seal on them. Surely their lot was a pleasant one, with a wonderful heritage to come! However, Christ's words in Mark 3:13 made me feel sick: "He went up onto a mountain and called those He wanted, and they came to Him".

Even though it lit a fire in my soul, this scripture made me faint with fear. Christ "called those He wanted", and I was afraid that He wouldn't want me. Oh the glory of being called! Every time I read of someone Christ called, I couldn't help wishing I'd been born in their clothes. If only I'd been born Peter or John, or even been nearby when He called them - I would have cried out "O Lord, call me too!". How I feared He wouldn't call me.

I was like this for many months, and the Lord showed me nothing - not that I was already called or were likely to be in the future. I kept praying though, with groans to God that I would receive His calling, and finally a word came to me. "Those who are guilty I will hold innocent, for the Lord lives in Zion" (Joel 3:21). I was encouraged to wait still upon God, and I felt that if I weren't called yet, in time the call might come and I'd be truly converted to Christ.

It was around this time that I began to confide in those poor people in Bedford, to tell them of my condition. After listening, they introduced me to a Mr Gifford who made time to talk with me. He was willing to think well of me, though he had little grounds to do so, and invited me to his house to join a group of others who met to talk about God's work in their souls. As a result I became even more convicted and began to see a glimpse of how vain, selfish and wicked my heart is. Previously I'd had little insight into my own character, but now that I began to see what I was really like, the evil in me became active as it never had before. Lusts, corrupt thoughts and wicked desires, which I hadn't noticed before, now flared to life. On the other hand, my desire for heaven and life began to fade. Whereas before my soul was full of longing for God, now I was hankering after vain, foolish things. I couldn't bring myself to concentrate on good things - instead I was becoming careless and neglectful of God.

No, I thought, I'm growing worse and worse! I'm further from conversion than ever before! I began to sink into such discouragement that I felt I'd fallen into hell. I couldn't believe now that Christ loved me. Alas, I could neither hear Him, see Him or feel Him, nor enjoy anything to do with Him. I was driven as before a

storm, my heart unclean, as if full of Canaanites living in the land.

Sometimes I'd relate all of this to the people of God, and they'd pity me and tell me to believe God's promises. They may as well have told me to touch the sun with my finger, it would have been easier for me to do! All my senses and feelings were against me, I had a heart that would sin and was under a law that would condemn me.

I often thought of the demon-possessed child brought by his father to Christ. While being brought to Christ by his father, the child had been thrown down by the demon, hurting it and making it foam at the mouth (Luke 9:42, Mark 9:20).

I found my heart would now shut itself up against God and against His holy word. My unbelief was setting its shoulder against the door to keep Him out, even though I prayed with bitter sighs, "Lord, break down these gates of brass, cut through these bars of iron" (Psalms 56:16). Sometimes though I was given temporary peace by this verse: "I have equipped you for battle, though you don't even know Me" (Isaiah 45:5)

I was now so sensitive to the act of sinning, my conscience sore and aching at the smallest transgression. I didn't know how to speak, for fear I'd misplace my words and say something wrong. How careful I was now in all I said and did! It was as if I walked on quicksand, ready to pull me under as soon as I put a foot wrong, and felt bereft of God, Christ, the Spirit, and all good things.

One thing I noticed - although I committed so many sins before turning to God, He never excused them because I was ignorant of Him. He simply showed me that, as a sinner, I was lost unless I had Christ. I knew I needed a perfect righteousness to be acceptable to God, and the only place I'd find it was in Jesus Christ, nowhere else.

The evil within me became like a sickness with me, always active and putting itself forth. I was more disgusting in my eyes than a toad, and I thought so in God's eyes too. Sin and corruption bubble from my heart like water from a fountain. Everyone else, I thought, has a better heart than I do. I would have swapped hearts with anyone! Only the devil, I thought, could equal me for inner wickedness and filth. Seeing my own vileness made me fall deeply into despair, for I believed myself excluded from any hope of God's grace. Surely, I thought, God has forsaken me and I'm given up to the devil, to a reprobate mind. I was in this state for a long time - several years.

Afflicted as I was with fears of damnation, I noticed two things that really struck me as odd. I saw old people chasing after the things of this world, as if they were planning on living here always. I also saw believers becoming downcast and distressed when they suffered the loss of a loved one - a husband, wife or child. Lord, I thought, why all this concern over things that are so unimportant? Why do some seek after worldly things, and others grieve over the loss of them? They're working so hard for the things of this life, and shedding tears over them, but compare that to my situation - my soul is dying! My soul is damned! If my soul were saved then I'd consider myself rich, even if I only had bread and water! Worldly poverty would be trivial to me, a light burden to carry, for who can bear a wounded spirit?

Though I was in such torment over the state of my wicked heart, I didn't want to close my eyes or become numb to it. The only right way to deal with my guilty conscience was by the blood of Christ! If I got rid of it any other way I wouldn't be better off - on the contrary my state would be worse. So when troubled by my guilt, I'd cry only for the blood of Christ to take it off. Sometimes the sense of my sin would fade away, and I'd strive to fetch it back again, thinking of the punishment of hell that was waiting for me. Lord, I'd cry, I only want my sin dealt with the right way, by the blood of Christ and through receiving Your mercy to my soul, for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). I had seen some people who when troubled by their conscience had earnestly prayed, yet not seeking true forgiveness but rather just that their guilt would be eased. Having succeeded in clearing their mind of guilt the wrong way they grew harder and blinder and more wicked. This really scared me, so I cried out to God all the more, that it wouldn't happen that way with me.

I was now sorry that God had made me a man, for I considered myself a reprobate. Surely unconverted man is the saddest of all the creatures, I thought. I felt alone, and of all men I thought myself the least

blessed.

I thought I'd never be able to thank God that He'd made me a man. Man is indeed the most noble of God's creations, but by sin he has made himself the most ignoble. Birds, beasts, fish - I blessed their state, for they aren't sinful, they're not under God's anger, they aren't going to hell after they die. I could have rejoiced if my state was equal to theirs.

The Storm of Doubt

Such a long time passed like this (as I mentioned earlier, several years), yet one day I heard a sermon from Song of Solomon 4:1 - "You are beautiful, my love, you are beautiful to me". The preacher concentrated only on these two words, "my love". His conclusions were that: 1. The church, including every saved soul, is the object of Christ's love, even when it feels loveless. 2. Christ's love is without cause or reason. 3. Christ's love is constant even when the world hates his beloved. 4. Christ loves his church when its under temptation and being destroyed. 5. Christ loves from first to last, he doesn't stop loving.

I got nothing out of what he said at first. Only when he came to his fourth conclusion, when he said "When a saved soul is afflicted with temptations, deserted by all, assaulted with trials and God's face seems hidden, Christ says 'you are my love'. Think on these words 'my love'."

As I was going home these words came into my thoughts again. I remember saying to myself, "what use is it to me, to think on these two words?" Just as I thought this, these words began to burn in my heart: "You are My love, you are My love", again and again, twenty times over. As they ran in my mind they grew stronger and stronger. I looked up, but still caught between hope and fear I replied "but is it true? Is it true?". Then this word fell on me: "He didn't realise an angel was really helping him, but thought it was only a dream" (Acts 12:9).

At this I embraced the word, at which it powerfully and joyfully resounded in my soul "You are My love, You are My Love, and nothing shall separate you from My Love". With that, I was filled full of comfort and hope. I could now believe that my sins were forgiven, and I was so caught up in the love and mercy of God that I didn't know how to hold it in. I would have told the crows in the field about His love and mercy to me if they'd have been capable of understanding. I wished I had a pen and ink with me, I'd have written my experience down then and there. Surely, I thought, I'll remember this forty years from now! Alas, within less than forty days I'd begun to question everything again.

Still at times I could believe that God, in His grace, had truly spoken to me, even though the flavour and life of it faded as time passed. A week or two later this scripture came to mind: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat" (Luke 22:31), and began to echo so strongly in my head that several times I turned around thinking someone behind me had called it out. I was stirred up to watch and pray, anticipating that a storm was coming down on me and not understanding it at all.

Sometimes the words "Simon, Simon" sounded so strongly in my ears that I was sure someone was calling to me from a distance. Even though it wasn't my name I couldn't help turning to see who had yelled out.

I was so foolish and ignorant that I still didn't understand that this was a voice from heaven, a warning for me to beware what was coming. It wasn't long before I came to understand.

About a month later, a very great storm did fall on me, and it was twenty times worse than anything I'd experienced before. It crept up, piece by piece. First, I lost my peace of mind and could no longer find any comfort in my past experiences or the scriptures. Then darkness seized me, after which a tidal wave of blasphemous thoughts against God, Christ and the scriptures smashed into my spirit, to my great confusion and astonishment. I found myself questioning whether God or his beloved Son even existed, and whether the Bible wasn't just a fable, a lie, not God's holy and pure word.

The tempter also hit me with this question: Don't you realise that the Turks have scriptures just as good as yours, proving instead that Mohammed is the saviour? Who was I to think that so many millions of people in other countries around the world could be ignorant of the way to heaven (if heaven existed that is)? Did I

really believe that only we in our little corner of the earth knew the truth? Everyone thinks their own religion is the true one, whether Jews, Moslems or pagans. What if all our faith in Christ and the scriptures is just a "we think so" as well?

Sometimes I tried to argue against these thoughts, using the words of Paul to refute them. Alas, no sooner did I try this than I thought Paul may have been nothing but a lying deceiver, or perhaps a poor deluded fool. How did I know that his words were worth anything?

These suggestions (with many others I dare not think of even now) overwhelmed me with their number, constant repetition and fiery force. I felt as if I was attacked by doubt from morning to night, as if there was room for nothing else. I concluded that God had, in anger, given me up to be carried away on a whirlwind of doubt.

Only by the distaste I had for these dark thoughts did I feel hope that I could resist embracing them. I only felt this though occasionally, when God allowed me a brief respite to catch my breath. At other times the noise, strength and force of these attacks would drown any other thoughts in my head. While under this temptation I was often suddenly urged to curse and swear, or to speak some horrible thing against God, Christ or the scriptures.

Surely, I thought, I'm possessed by the devil. At times I thought I was truly going mad. Instead of praising God the Lord with others, if I even heard Him spoken of horrible blasphemous thoughts would bolt out of my heart against Him. Whether I could believe God existed or not, no love or peace or kindness could I find within me.

These things sunk me into a very deep despair. I believed that this was proof that I wasn't among God's people. How could anyone who loved God think thoughts like these? Often I thought of myself like a child kidnapped by a gypsy and carried away by force from family and country. I sometimes kicked out, shrieking and crying against my captor, but I was in the grip of the temptation and it carried me away like the wind. I'd think of King Saul and the evil spirit that possessed him, greatly fearing that I was sharing his fate (1 Samuel 10).

In those days, if I heard others talk about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, the tempter would provoke me to want to sin that sin. It was as if I had to do it, that I'd have no peace and quiet until I'd done it. Sometimes I felt ready to speak out in blasphemy against His Spirit, and I'd be ready to clap my hand over my mouth to stop myself. I even felt ready to leap head-first into a swamp or hole in the ground to stop myself speaking.

Again I considered animals like the dog, the toad or the horse. How gladly I'd have shared their state, as they had no souls to perish under the everlasting weight of sin and hell, as mine was likely to do. Furthermore, and this really broke my heart, I couldn't even find it in me now to truly desire God's deliverance. I was torn by this scripture: "But those who still reject me are like the restless sea, which is never still but continually churns up mud and dirt. There is no peace for the wicked, says my God" (Isaiah 57:20,21).

I now found my heart becoming terribly hard. I'd have given a thousand pounds to shed a tear, but my eyes were dry. I was very dejected at what was happening to me. I saw that some people could mourn and lament their sin. Others could rejoice and bless God for Christ. Still others could quietly and gladly remember God's word to them. I, however, was still in the storm of doubt and turmoil. I thought I was alone in my struggles, and though I'd groan at my hard circumstance I couldn't get out of it or get rid of it.

Over the year that this temptation lasted, I couldn't worship God without being greatly troubled in my soul. If I'd been hearing the word, uncleanness, blasphemies and despair would hold me captive from receiving it. While reading I'd have sudden thoughts to question everything I'd read. Sometimes my mind would be strangely snatched away and possess with other things, so that I couldn't remember even the sentence I'd only just read or heard.

Satan troubled me when I tried to pray too. It would be like he was behind me tugging at my clothes, saying "its time to stop, break off now, hurry up, you've prayed enough", and still distracting my mind. Sometimes

he'd cast in wicked thoughts such as I should pray to him, or fall down and worship him (Matthew 3:9).

The harder I tried to compose my mind against these distractions and fix it on God, the more the tempter worked to distract me, to confound me and turn my mind away. He'd put images of things like a bush, a bull, a broom or the like in my mind and suggest I pray to them. These things would stick in my thoughts, and it was as if I could think of nothing else whenever I tried to pray.

At times though the reality of God and the truth of His gospel would be revealed to my heart, which would yearn with inexpressible groanings to receive it. My whole soul strained after every word as I'd cry after God that He'd be merciful to me. Then the tempter would make me feel that God was mocking my prayers, pointing me out to his holy angels and saying 'this stupid wretch hankers after Me, as if I had nothing better to do with My mercy than give it to the likes of him. Poor soul, he is fooling himself to think he'll ever receive favour from the Highest'.

The tempter would also discourage me with the fear that, though I wanted God's mercy so much now, it wouldn't last - he'd cool me down and I'd turn away. I thought of many who'd sought after God for a while and then fallen away, and I'd fear it'd happen to me too. Ok, I thought, I'd better look out and take care that it doesn't happen! You can try, said Satan, but I'll cool you down so slowly you won't even notice. What do I care if it takes seven years to chill your heart? Continual rocking will put a crying child to sleep, yes, I'll have you cold before long.

Now I was really in a fix. I knew I'd be lost if I died now, but if I lived longer I'd only get colder towards God and be in an even worse state! I'd surely forget everything, even the memory of sin's evil, the worth of heaven and the need I had of Christ's blood to wash and cleanse my mind and spirit. I thank Christ Jesus that this didn't make me give up, but made me cry out to God all the more. I also received this wonderful word: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, etc, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38,39). Now I could hope that long life wouldn't destroy me or make me miss heaven.

Though I was still questioning everything, I received other supports from God's word as well, such as Jeremiah 3:5, that though we've spoken and done evil things, we could still cry to God 'My Father, you are the guide of my youth, and I'll return to You'.

I also had a sweet glimpse from 2 Corinthians 5:21 - "For God has made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". I remember one day sitting in a neighbour's house, sadly reflecting on my many blasphemies, and saying in my mind 'what grounds do I, who have been so vile and filthy, have to think that I'd ever inherit eternal life?', when this word suddenly came on me: "What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Also this word helped me: "Since I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). These words though were only hints, touches, short visits. They were very sweet while they lasted, but like Peter's sheet they'd suddenly be taken away from me to heaven again (Acts 10:16).

Established in the Truth

Eventually the Lord more fully and graciously reveal Himself to me, and not only saved me from the burden of guilt I carried, but also from the filth in my mind. The temptation was removed, and I was put into my right mind again like other Christians. This is how it happened...

One day I was travelling in the country, thinking about the wickedness and blasphemy of my heart, and how inside me I only had enmity and rebellion against God. This scripture crossed my mind: "He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross" (Colossians 1:20). This struck me over and over again, realising that God and my soul *were* friends by His blood. Yes, I saw that God's justice and my sinful soul could embrace and kiss each other through His blood. This was a good day for me, I hope I never forget it.

At another time, sitting by the fire in my house and again absorbed by my wretchedness, the Lord gave another precious word to me - "Because God's children are human beings — made of flesh and blood — the

Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of death" (Hebrews 2:14,15). I was almost ready to faint at the glory of these words, not from grief and trouble, but from solid joy and peace.

At this time I was still being helped by Mr Gifford, whose teaching, by God's grace, gave me much stability. Mr Gifford made it his business to save God's people from all the delusions and lies that we're naturally prone to believing. He'd tell us to take special care not to believe any doctrine on trust, but to cry out to God that He'd lead us into truth and establish us by His Spirit in the holy word. "If you're not grounded in the truth through God's word", said Mr Gifford, "when temptations come you won't have the help and strength to resist them that you might think you have".

I had previously experienced for myself that no man, especially when attacked by the devil, can say that Jesus Christ is Lord unless the Holy Spirit helps him, so I found Mr Gifford's words especially timely and relevant to me. By God's grace I willingly drank in this teaching, and prayed that He wouldn't let me believe any false doctrine but instead would confirm His truths to me. I saw there was a huge difference between the thoughts and ideas of men and God's revelations. In the same way, there's a great difference between faith that is feigned, the result of a man's efforts and will, and the faith that comes by a man being born of God. (Matthew 16:15, 1 John 5:1)

Oh how my soul was now led from truth to truth by God! Even from the birth of the Son of God, to his ascension into heaven, and his second coming from heaven to judge the world!

God was truly good to me. Everything I wanted to understand and cried out to Him about, He revealed to me. Not just in bits and pieces of the gospel, no, I was led into it in an orderly way. From the four gospels God revealed the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to me as clearly as if I'd been there witnessing it happen. I saw Him grow up, walk through this world, and then gently give Himself up to be hanged and nailed on the cross for my sins and wicked doings. As I was thinking on this, the word "He was ordained for the slaughter" (1 Peter 1:20) dropped onto my spirit.

When I considered also the truth of His resurrection, remembered Him saying "Don't hold onto me" to Mary, etc, it was as if I saw him leap from the grave's mouth for joy that He was risen again victorious over our dreadful enemy (John 20:17). I have also (in the spirit) seen Him as a man, on the right hand of God the Father pleading for me. I've seen him coming from heaven to judge the world with glory, and have been confirmed in these things by the scriptures: Acts 1:9-10, Acts 7:56, Acts 10:42, Hebrews 7:24, Hebrews 9:28, Revelations 1:18 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18.

At another time I was troubled, not knowing how or whether the Lord Jesus was a man as well as God, and God as well as a man. Truly in those days, men could say what they liked but unless I had evidence from heaven their words were nothing to me, I didn't believe anything I heard. Well, I was much troubled on this point and couldn't tell how to resolve it, until at last Revelations 5:6 came into my mind: "And I saw in the midst of the throne, in the midst of the four beasts and elders, stood a Lamb looking as if it had been slain". In the midst of the throne, I thought, that is God. In the midst of the elders, there He is as a man. This thought glowed within me and sweetly satisfied my worried confusion. Another scripture also helped in this: "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6).

Besides these teachings of God in His word, the Lord used two other things to confirm me in this truth. One was the errors of the Quakers, and the other was the guilt of sin. The more the Quakers opposed this truth the more God confirmed me in it, leading me to scriptures that wonderfully supported it.

The Quaker's errors included:-

1. That the holy scriptures were not the word of God.
2. That every man in the world had the spirit of Christ, grace, faith, etc.
3. That Christ Jesus, crucified and dying sixteen hundred years ago, did not satisfy divine justice for the sins

of the people.

4. That Christ's flesh and blood were within the saints.
5. That the bodies of the good and bad that are buried in the church-yard, shall not arise again.
6. That the resurrection has already happened for good men.
7. That the man Jesus, crucified between two thieves on mount Calvary in the land of Canaan near Jerusalem, was not now ascended above the starry heavens.
8. That Jesus, who died at the hands of the Jews, will not return at the last day; and as man, judge all nations.

They also had many other vile and disgusting teachings, which drove me to search the scriptures even more carefully. Through the light and testimony of the word I was not only enlightened but greatly established and comforted in the truth. Also as I said, the guilt of sin helped me too, for as soon as I'd sinned and felt the guilt of it, Christ's blood would take it away again, and again, and again, according to his sweet promises in scripture. Oh friends! Cry to God to reveal Jesus Christ to you, for no-one teaches like Him.

It'd take too long here to give you all the details of how God established me in the things of Christ - the words he showed and explained to me, made shine before me, live within me, talk with me and comfort me over and over, about Himself, His Son, His Spirit, His promises and the gospel.

Let me emphasize this though because its important: I'd be afflicted with temptation and then God would plainly reveal my sin to me. Sometimes I'd be oppressed by a great sense of guilt over it so strongly that it crushed me to the ground. Then the Lord would show me the death of Christ and sprinkle my conscience with His blood, after which all the condemnation left me and I'd rest in the peace and love of God through Christ.

At last I could see evidence, stamped and sealed in gold from heaven, that I was saved! I'd take much comfort from this and other revelations of God's grace to me. I often wished the last day were already here, that I could be forever on fire with the joy of being with Him who wore the crown of thorns, whose face was spat upon, body broken and soul made an offering for my sins. Previously I was in constant fear of hell, but now hell was so far removed from me I could scarce think of it! Oh how I wished that I was already eighty years old, that I might die quickly and go to my rest.

However, before I'd reached this point I'd had a strong desire to read the words of godly men in generations before I was born. I hope they'll forgive me, but my opinion of today's authors was that they only wrote about what other people felt or experienced without going through it themselves. Eventually God, who knows us completely, provided me with a book of Martin Luther's - it was his Commentary on Galatians. It was so old that it was ready to fall apart at the least touch. I was so glad that such an old book had fallen into my hands! When I started to read it I found that his experiences had been so similar to mine that it was as if the book had been written out of my own heart. I marvelled at this - this man couldn't have known what things would be like today, living as he had so long ago!

He also talked seriously about the temptations to blasphemy and despair, showing that the law of Moses as well as the devil, death and hell had a great hand in it. At first this was very strange to me, but thinking about it I came to realise it was true. I value this book of Martin Luther's over all others, except of course the Holy Bible, as its a great help to a wounded conscience.

I now found that I loved Christ dearly, or so I thought. Oh how my soul and emotions clung to Him, my love for Him as hot as fire. I quickly found though that this great love of mine wasn't worth much, for despite it I could still forget Him and go chasing after worthless trifles. God knows how to humble us, He knows how to take the pride from a man. Soon my love for him was really put to the test.

My Fall from Grace

After the Lord had so graciously delivered me from my great temptations and trials, and set me down so sweetly in the faith of his Holy gospel, after he'd given me such strong consolation and blessed evidence from heaven and set my mind on His love through Christ; the enemy came on me again with a new and terrible temptation.

The thought he put in my mind was this - that I should give Christ away in exchange for all the good things of this life that I was missing out on. This temptation was on me for a year or more. It followed me constantly, I was never free from it unless I was asleep.

In my mind I believed that those who belonged to Christ (as I hoped, through His grace, I did), could never lose Him. "The land must never be sold on a permanent basis, for the land belongs to Me" (Leviticus 25:23). Despite this I was continually disturbed that I'd have thoughts in me that were against Jesus Christ after He'd done so much for me - yet here I was again filled with blasphemous and rebellious thoughts.

Neither my dislike of the temptation or my efforts to resist it did any good - it stuck with me. In every little thing I did, eating my food, stooping to pick up a pin, chopping wood or looking at this or that, the temptation would come "Sell Christ for this, or sell Christ for that ... think of all you're missing out on! Sell Him, Sell Him, Sell Him".

Sometimes it'd run through my mind a hundred times over "Sell Him, Sell Him, Sell Him". Sometimes I'd stand as if I was physically and spiritually leaning against the force of the thought, lest some wicked thought would rise in my heart and I'd give in. Sometimes the tempter would make me believe that I had given in, that I'd sold out on Christ, and then I'd be tortured on a rack for several days.

I was so scared by this temptation, afraid that I'd weaken and give into it. As the destroyer said "Sell Him", I'd reply as fast as I could "I will not, I will not, I will not" and sometimes make pushing gestures with my elbows or hands, I was fighting so hard in my mind to resist. "I won't sell Him, not for thousands upon thousands of worlds" I'd say, trying to avoid setting too low a value on Him in my mind. I was so disconcerted by these attacks that I felt I was losing my sanity.

Sometimes I couldn't even eat my food in peace. As soon as I sat to eat the tempter would make me think I needed to leave my food and go pray instead. I'd say to myself "No, I'm here at the dinner table, I'll finish my food first". No, the tempter would say, you must pray now or you'll anger God and despise Christ. These things tore at me, and because of the sinfulness of my nature (I thought these were impulses from God) I thought that if I refused to go pray I'd be denying God. Refusing a temptation of the devil would make me feel as guilty as breaking one God's laws.

One morning, lying in my bed, I was again fiercely assaulted with the temptation to sell and part with Christ. "Sell Him, Sell Him, Sell Him" running through my mind as fast as a man could speak. Against which I answered in my mind, as I'd done before, "No, not for thousands, thousands and thousands of worlds, twenty times over!". At last, after much striving and mentally exhausted, this thought passed through my heart, "*Would you let Him go if He didn't want to stay with you?*", to which I thought I felt my heart give in and say yes. Oh the diligence of Satan, and the desperation of man's heart!

Now the battle was lost. I fell like a bird shot from a treetop, down into great guilt and fearful despair. Getting out of bed I went miserably out to the field, with a heart as heavy as any man could bear. For two hours I was like a man bereft of life, past hope of being saved, bound for eternal punishment.

Then this scripture seized me: "Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears." (Hebrews 12:16,17)

Now my doom was sealed, I was imprisoned until the coming judgement. For the next two years I was under damnation, both now and in the future. Occasionally, however, I'd have a few moments of relief.

Those words were like brass chains binding my soul, and for several months I heard their constant clanking. One day at around 10 or 11am I was walking near a hedge, full of sorrow and guilt that this evil thought had arisen within me, and this word rushed upon me, "the blood of Christ remits all guilt". At this I made a stand in my spirit and then another word took hold of me, "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Peace was born in my soul, and I imagined seeing the tempter slink away from me in shame. I realised that my sin, compared to the blood of Christ, was like a small stone compared to a vast field. I was really encouraged by this for the space of two hours, during which time I also saw by faith the Son of God suffering for my sins. Unfortunately it all faded, and I again sunk in my spirit under the weight of guilt.

It was mainly the scripture about Esau selling his birthright that accused me. All day, all week, all year it oppressed me. I couldn't escape it - try as I might to find other scriptures to give me relief and hope, that verse would still be there pointing its finger: "You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears."

Sometimes Luke 22:31 would touch me - "I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail", but it wouldn't stay with me. Considering my sin, I couldn't begin to think there'd be any hope of truly finding grace. So many days I was torn like this.

With a sad but careful heart I began to search God's word to see if there was any promise or encouraging word from which I could take hope, given what I'd done against Him. I began to think on Mark 3:28, "I tell you the truth, all sin and blasphemy can be forgiven". At first I thought that was a glorious promise for forgiveness of the worst offences, but then I reconsidered, thinking instead that it was a promise for people who'd never known Jesus, not someone who'd received light and mercy, and then afterwards dismissed Christ as I'd done.

I therefore feared that my wicked sin might be the unforgivable one of which He speaks in Mark 3:29, "but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. This is a sin with eternal consequences". Combined with the verse in Hebrews about Esau, I concluded that this was true of me.

Now I was both a burden and a terror to myself. I was weary of living and afraid to die. How gladly I would have been anyone other than myself! Anything but a man, in any condition other than my own! Over and over through my mind passed the thought that I couldn't ever be forgiven, that there was no escape from the wrath to come.

I wished I could go back in time, that I could find myself in the period before I'd given into the tempter. How I'd rather be torn to pieces now than give in a second time! Alas, these thoughts, wishes and resolutions were too late to help me. I thought God had let me go and now I'm fallen. "I long for the years gone by, when God took care of me" (Job 29:2).

I didn't want to perish, so I began to compare my sin with others, to see if anyone had sinned as I had and been saved. I looked at David's adultery and murder and found them to be terrible crimes committed after he'd received light and grace. His crimes, though, were only against the law of Moses, from which the Lord Christ could deliver him. Mine was against the gospel - I had sold my Saviour.

I felt as if I was being tortured. Not only was I full of guilt, but must I really also be guilty of the great transgression of Psalm 19:13? "We know that God's children do not make a practice of sinning, for God's Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them" (1 John 5:18). Oh how those words stung me!

Is there only one unforgivable sin, I thought. Only one sin that puts a soul beyond the reach of God's mercy? And I'm guilty of it? Must it needs be that? Is there only one sin among so many millions of sins for which there is no forgiveness, and I've truly gone and committed it? Oh unhappy sin! Unhappy man! These things broke my spirit. I didn't know where to turn, what to do, and I felt I was losing my mind. And again, aggravating my misery, came the words "afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected". No-one but me knows the terror of those days.

Then I began to consider Peter's sin, in which he denied knowing Jesus. This came closest to my sin of any I could find, for he had denied his Saviour. Like me, it was after he'd received grace and mercy, and even after he'd been warned. I also realised he'd done it three times, with time in between to consider. Even though I tried hard to see if this could help me, I realised that my sin was worse. He had denied knowing Jesus, but I had sold my Saviour. Therefore I thought myself closer to Judas than to David or Peter.

My torment became even greater now. I had sinned and fallen into the trap, but others had been preserved by God despite their wickedness - He hadn't let them become a "son of perdition" as He had with me.

How I cherished the way God preserved His people, how I envied them! How safe they were, hedged in safely by God's care, protection and special providence. They were just as bad as I by nature, yet He loved them and wouldn't allow them to fall beyond the reach of His mercy. As for me though, I was gone. I had done it, and He would not preserve or keep me. Rather he put up with me, because I was a reprobate to have fallen as I'd done. Those blessed scriptures that speak of God preserving His people shone like the sun before me, not to provide comfort but to show me the inheritance, the birthright, that I'd missed out on.

I began to see that, just as God provided the needs of his elect, so also He had His hand in all the temptations that afflicted them. This wasn't God tempting them to wickedness, no, it was choosing to allow only temptations that would humble his people, not destroy them, and after a time restore them to His mercy. Oh what love, what care, what kindness and mercy I saw now, mixed in with all the severe and hard ways of God toward His people! He let David, Hezekiah, Solomon, Peter and others fall, but would not let them commit the unforgivable sin that would cast them into hell. These are men that God has truly loved, I thought. Though He chastises them, He keeps them in safety under the shadow of the Almighty. All these thoughts added sorrow, grief and horror to me. Whatever I thought on was deadly to me now. If I thought on how God looked after His own, that destroyed me. If I thought how fallen I was, it destroyed me. As all things work together for the best for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, so I thought all things were working to hurt me, leading to my eternal destruction.

So I then began to compare my sin with that of Judas, thinking that if I could only find a point of difference, no matter how small, then I'd be happy as perhaps my sin could be forgiven. I did indeed find differences - Judas betrayed the Lord intentionally, but I'd fought against my temptation with much effort and prayer. He considered and planned his acts deliberately, but my sin was committed in a hurry, all at once. Even while I was thinking this I was still being tossed to and fro, driven from trouble to sorrow and hearing always the sound of Esau's fall in my ears.

For a while I got some relief from this comparison with Judas's sin, for I saw that I hadn't transgressed as fully as he had. This was quickly gone again though, for I realised that there could be more than one way to commit the unpardonable sin, and also that regardless of whether I'd planned it out deliberately like Judas had or not, I'd still done it and was therefore still under judgement.

How ashamed I was that I'd ended up like Judas. I thought of how disgusted all the saints would be when they saw me at judgement day, and this began to make me fearful in the presence of godly men. What a glory I perceived in walking with God, what a mercy it was to have a good conscience before Him.

Around this time I began to experience a new temptation - to abandon the truth and comfort myself with a lie. For instance, if I chose to believe that the day of judgement wasn't real, that there was no life after death or that sin really wasn't as serious as I was making it out to be, then I'd be a lot happier. The tempter said that even if I knew these to be lies and that I was still heading for judgement, at least by deceiving myself with the lie I would be able to enjoy life here and now. Ok, he said, you're going to perish, but why torment yourself about it now? Drive the thought of hell from your mind, and instead maybe become an Atheist or a Ranter to help yourself get by.

Whenever I entertained thoughts like these, suddenly the reality of death and judgement seemed very close, as if the judge were standing at the door and my doom was almost upon me. There was therefore no chance I'd embrace a lie to delude myself. This showed me, though, that Satan will use any means to keep a soul from Christ. He doesn't like anyone being awakened to God. False security, blindness, darkness and error - this is the home and kingdom of the wicked one.

I found it so hard now to pray to God, because despair was swallowing me up. It was like a gale-force wind driving me away from God. Whenever I cried to God for mercy, I'd think "no its too late, I'm lost, God has let me fall, to condemn me not to correct me. My sin is unforgivable, and I know that Esau after selling his birthright wanted later on to receive it but was rejected". Around this time I read the story of that miserable man Francis Spira, which was like salt in my wounds. Every sentence in that book, describing that man's suffering, his tears, his prayers, his anguish under God's heavy hand, every word was like a dagger in my soul. This sentence really spoke to me: Man knows the beginning of sin, but who knows what the end results of the sin will be? That of course led me to think again of Esau, his casual rejection of his birthright, and rejection when he later realised its worth and wanted to receive it.

Sometimes I'd be struck by a deep and terrible fear of the dreadful judgement of God that was coming on me, who had committed the unforgivable sin. It would strike me for whole days at a time and make me physically ill with a blockage and heat in my stomach which sometimes was so strong my chest felt like bursting under the pressure. Of course, this made me think of Judas, who fell headlong and burst open, his entrails gushing out (Acts 1:18).

Perhaps, I thought, this continual fear and foreboding under a heavy load of guilt was the mark the Lord set on Cain after he'd murdered his brother Abel. In this way I kept wriggling and twisting under the oppressive burden I carried, which gave me no peace in anything I did.

Sometimes this verse would come into my mind: "He has received gifts for the rebellious" (Psalms 68:18). To be a rebel, I thought, you must once have been loyal and then turned against your master - and that's me, I thought. I once loved Him, feared Him, served Him, but now I'm a rebel because I've sold him, saying "Let Him go if He wants to". He has gifts for rebels though, so why not for me?

I dwelled on this verse sometimes, trying to get some help, some encouragement from it, but it was in vain. The force of guilt and judgement that drove me was much too strong - I was like a man being marched to his execution, who wanted to run off and find a place to hide, but couldn't.

So, now I'd weighed the sins of each saint against my own and found that mine was worse, perhaps I thought I should lump all of theirs together and stand them against mine alone, then see how they compared. Surely if the sum of their sins was at least equal to what I'd done, I could find hope and encouragement? The blood of Christ was enough to wash all their sins away, so maybe I could be forgiven too? Therefore I decided to total up the sins of David, Solomon, Manasseh, Peter and the rest.

I looked at David shedding blood to cover up his adultery, using the swords of the Ammonites to do it as well. This wasn't the work of a moment, but rather something he'd have to live with day after day, denying all the while that he'd done it. Despite all this, I'd then realise that these were sins against the law of Moses, from which Jesus was sent to save. Mine was a sin against the Saviour, and who can save me from that?

So I thought on Solomon, his sin in loving foreign women who turned him to worshipping idols and building them temples. He did this in his old age after he'd received great mercy and wisdom throughout his life. Again, all these were sins against the law, for which God had provided a remedy. I had sold my Saviour, and there was no sacrifice left for me.

I added on Manasseh's sins, how he built idol altars in the Lord's temple, got involved in the occult magics and even burned his children in sacrifices to devils. He made the streets of Jerusalem run with the blood of innocents. These, I thought, are great and bloody sins, but again they were against the law. I had been saved, then parted with Jesus, selling my Saviour.

My hopes would be killed by this one thought, that my sin was point blank against my Saviour. I had said in my heart "Let Him go if He wants to". This sin was bigger to me than the sins of a whole country, a whole kingdom. It was bigger than the sins of the whole world. All pardonable sins put together were still smaller than mine.

I was sometimes desperate to run from God, to hide from his dreadful judgement, but I couldn't escape Him. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10). Blessed be His grace, in the worst of my despair this verse would chase after me, "I have swept away your sins like a cloud. I have

scattered your offenses like the morning mist. Oh return to me, for I have paid the price to set you free" (Isaiah 44:22). I was trying to escape God, unable to face Him in my guilt, and this word would cry with a great voice, "Return to Me, for I have paid the price for you". I'd stop, feeling that the God of grace was following me with a pardon in His hand. This would straightaway be blotted out by that horrible sentence: "You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears." So I had to flee from God, though the words "Return, return" sounded hollow after me. I was afraid to embrace them in case it was a false hope, not from God, and the verse about Esau dominated my thoughts.

One day I was in a man's shop walking back and forth in my misery, hating myself for the sin I'd committed, lamenting my fate and fearing there was no hope of pardon. I prayed in my heart that if my sin was not, in fact, against the Holy Spirit, that the Lord would let me know. Suddenly it was as if a strong (but very pleasant) wind had rushed through the window and beat against me. I thought I heard a voice saying "Did you ever refuse to be made right with God by Christ's blood?". My whole life as a believer flashed past me, and I could see that I had never refused, so my heart groaned "No" in response. Powerfully the word of God fell on me, "do not refuse to listen to the One who is speaking" (Hebrews 12:25). My heart was strangely stilled and lightened by this word. All the tumultuous thoughts that had ripped and torn at me non-stop were suddenly silent. I saw that Jesus Christ still had a word of grace and mercy for me, He had not forsaken me and cast me away. It was also like a rebuke against my tendency to despair, warning me against looking at my terrible sins instead of trusting the Son of God for salvation. Even now I don't understand this word of grace, how it came to me and broke through my despair. Truly that rushing wind was like a visit from an angel, but I'll leave it to the day of judgement to sort it out. I'll only say this - it commanded a great calm in my soul, it persuaded me that there was hope, it showed me that I hadn't committed the unforgivable sin, and that I could flee to Jesus Christ for mercy. Mind you, my salvation wasn't and isn't based on this experience, only on Jesus Christ and His promise. The savour of it lasted about three or four days, and then I began to mistrust and despair again.

My life still hung in doubt, and I didn't know which way I would tip. My soul's desire was to cast myself by prayer at the foot of grace, but this was so hard for me now. How could I dare look Christ in the face and ask Him for mercy, given the vileness of my sin against Him? I've found it very difficult to pray after backsliding away from God. The shame I felt now was overwhelming! I'd so lightly dismissed Him, and now I was going to pray to Him for mercy? I was so ashamed of what I'd done, but I saw only one option before me - I had to go to Him, humble myself before Him and beg that He in his wonderful mercy would show pity to me and have mercy on my wretched sinful soul.

Of course the tempter strongly suggested that I shouldn't pray to God, for prayer couldn't do me any good. I had rejected God's Mediator, without whom no prayer would come into God's presence. Therefore to pray now would be to sin even more. To pray, seeing God has cast me off, would surely anger and offend Him more than anything I'd done before.

God is tired of you, has been for several years now, said the tempter. You're not His, and He hasn't enjoyed your bawling in His ears. He let you sin like you have in order to cut you off and be done with you, and now you'll pray to Him again? The devil reminded me of Numbers 14 (verse 36 and onwards), where Moses told the children of Israel that because they wouldn't go in to possess the land when God wanted them to, now the land is barred to them, though they prayed for it with tears.

Its said in another place, Exodus 21:14, that a man who sins presumptuously shall be taken from God's altar and be killed, as Joab was by King Solomon when he thought to find shelter there (1 Kings 2:27 etc). These examples pinched me sorely, yet my case was desperate. I thought to myself, I'm already going to die and that's the worst that can happen to me, so why not die at the foot of Christ in prayer? So I prayed. God knows it was hard, for together with the other temptations the thought of Esau still stuck in my heart like the angel's flaming sword, barring the way to the tree of life lest I eat of it and live. How hard it was to come to God in prayer!

I really would have liked God's people to pray for me, but I feared that God would give them no heart to do so. I was scared that God would tell them, "Pray no more for this person. Do not weep or pray for him, for I will not listen to him when he cries out to me in distress" (Jeremiah 11:14). I thought perhaps God had whispered this to some of them already, but they didn't want to tell me. Neither did I want to ask them

about it, for fear it'd be true - if so I'd be beside myself with fear and despair. Man knows the beginning of sin, said Spira, but who knows where it'll end up?

Finally I had an opportunity to share my mind with an older Christian. I told him what I'd done and how it had cut me off from God, that I was afraid I'd sinned against the Holy Spirit - and he agreed with me! This was cold comfort, but talking with him some more I found that though he was a good man, the devil had never attacked him like he had me. So I still went to God, as well as I could, seeking mercy.

Now the tempter began to mock me in my misery. "You've parted with the Lord Jesus, you've angered Him, who would have protected you from the devouring fire of hell. Perhaps you now need to pray to God the Father to intercede for you with His Son, and then you'll have a chance to be reconciled".

Then another scripture seized my soul, "He is of one mind, and who can dissuade Him!" I realised that it was as easy to persuade Him to create a new Earth, or a new covenant of salvation, perhaps a new Bible, as to pray for Him to change his mind. Surely that's what I was trying to do, telling Him that He was foolish to reject me, and that he needed to come up with a new way of salvation! Then my soul was torn in two by this verse: "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

The most free, full and gracious words of the gospel were now the greatest torment to me. Nothing hurt me more than thoughts of Jesus Christ and remembering Him as my Saviour, because I had cast Him away. Thinking of Him, his grace, love, goodness, kindness, gentleness, meekness, death, blood, promises and blessed instructions, comforts and encouragements - it went to my wicked soul like a sword. Whenever I'd think of Him these thoughts would arise in my mind: Yes, this is Jesus, the loving Saviour, Son of God, who you despised, insulted and abused. This is the only Saviour, the only Redeemer, the only One who loves sinners so much that He'd wash their sins away with His own precious blood. You have no share in Jesus, you've rejected Him, you've said in your heart "Let Him go if He wants to". So you're cut off from Him, you did it yourself. You can look at His goodness, but you can't share in it. What have I lost, I thought, what have I thrown away! What a birthright I have lost! How sad it is to be destroyed by the grace and mercy of God, to have the Lamb, the Saviour, turn into a Lion and Destroyer (Revelations 6). As I said earlier, the sight of God's people also made me tremble inside with fear, especially those that really love Him and had a close walk with Him. Their words, their actions, their expressions of tenderness and fear of sinning against their precious Saviour, they all laid guilt, shame and condemnation on my soul. I feared them, as the city elders feared Samuel (1 Samuel 16:4).

Then the tempter mocked me anew in another way, saying that Christ was actually sorry for me, but given how I'd sinned there was nothing He could do, He had no way of saving me now. My sin was different from those for whom Christ bled and died. No, my sin put me in with the people who nailed him to the cross. Even though He pitied me I couldn't be saved unless He could come down from heaven and die again for this sin. This might seem ridiculous to you, but to me these thoughts were a torment, making my misery worse. That Jesus Christ should still love and pity me, even though He couldn't help me. It also wasn't that He didn't have the power to save me, or that his grace was used up on others already, but that showing mercy to me would involve breaking His word, which He obviously couldn't do. I was convinced that it was easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for me to have eternal life. My fears therefore arose from the unchanging truth of God's holy word, combined with my mistaken understanding of the nature of my sin.

How this added to my sorrow, to think that I was guilty of a sin for which He didn't die. I was confounded, imprisoned, tied up, and faith was impossible for me. What should I do? Where could I turn? Oh that He would come down and die again, I thought. Oh that He hadn't finished His work of redemption yet! How I'd pray and beg Him to count my sin among those for which He'd died! Then this scripture would strike me down dead: "Christ being raised from the dead will die no more. Death has no hold over Him" (Romans 6:9).

The tempter's strange and unusual attacks had left my soul a broken vessel, driven by the wind and tossed headlong into despair. Sometimes I'd wish for forgiveness by Christ's blood, other times I'd forlornly hope he'd redeem me some other way, but these were like a boat being jostled against the rocks, being broken, scarred and torn. Guilt and desperation provoke such terrible imaginations, fears and outright terrors! I was like the man living in tombs with the dead, always crying out and cutting himself with sharp stones (Mark 5:1-3). Its all for nothing, I thought. Desperation won't comfort me and God's covenant won't save me. In

fact, heaven and earth will pass away before even a tiny pen-stroke in the word and law of grace is changed. Even though this made me groan in despair, it also made me certain beyond doubt that Jesus Christ is God's way of salvation, and that the scriptures are His word. It's hard for me to describe now, but I saw how sure and steady Jesus Christ is, the rock of man's salvation. What was done was done, it couldn't be undone or changed. I saw too that a man's sin could drive him beyond Christ to commit the unforgivable sin, and woe to him who does this because the word would shut him out.

So I was always sinking in my heart, whatever I thought or did. One day I walked to a neighbouring town, sat down to rest on a roadside seat, and fell to thinking about the fearful state my sin had brought me to. After musing on this a long time I looked up and thought I saw the sun reluctant to shine on me, the stones in the street and tiles on the houses bent against me. I thought everything was ganging up to banish me from the world. They hated me, for I was unfit to live among them or enjoy their benefits, because I had sinned against the Saviour. How happy all other creatures in the world were compared to me! They stood fast, keeping their place in the world, but I was lost.

In the bitterness of my soul I sighed to myself, How can God comfort such a wretch? I had no sooner said it, but an echo came back to me, "This sin is not unto death". At this it was as if I'd been raised from the grave. I cried out in my heart "Lord, how could you give me this wonderful word!", for I was filled with amazement at how this unexpected word lifted me. It was just what I needed in my deepest despair, its power, sweetness, light and glory were marvellous to me. Suddenly the doubt that had totally possessed me for so long - it was gone. I had feared that my sin was unforgivable, so I had no right to pray or to repent, for if I did it would do me no good. But now, I thought, if this sin isn't "unto death", then it can be forgiven! Therefore I am encouraged to come to God by Christ for mercy, to think of His promise of forgiveness as welcoming me with open arms as with other Christians. My mind was so put at rest now, to think my sin was forgivable, it was not the sin unto death (1 John 5:16,17). Only those who have experienced my trouble for themselves can know the relief that came to my soul now. It released me from my chains, and sheltered me from the tempter's storm. I felt I now stood on the same ground as other sinners, with as good a claim to the word and prayer as any other.

So as I say, I now hoped that my sin could be forgiven, but oh how Satan tried to bring me down again! He couldn't do it, not that day or the next, for that good sentence "this sin is not unto death" stood like a post at my back. Towards the evening of the next day, however, I felt this word begin to leave me and its support began to fade. I returned to my old fears again, but I hated doing so. I feared the sorrow of despair, yet my faith couldn't hold onto the word I'd received.

The next evening, under many fears, I prayed seeking the Lord. As I prayed my soul strongly cried out to Him, "Oh Lord, I beg You, show me that You love me with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). I'd no sooner said it, but another sweet echo came, "I have loved you with an everlasting love". I went to bed in peace, and when I woke the next morning it was fresh on my soul, and I believed it.

The tempter didn't leave me. A hundred times or more that day he tried to break my peace. Oh the fighting and conflict in my mind as I tried to hold onto this word. Esau's fate would fly into my face like lightning, I'd be up and down twenty times in an hour, yet God did bear me up and kept my heart on His word. For several days I had such sweet, comforting hopes of forgiveness, for I heard His words to me "I loved you while you committed this sin. I loved you before, I love you still, and I will love you forever".

Despite this, I saw my sin as a barbarous, filthy crime. To my shame and astonishment I realised that I had indeed horribly abused the holy Son of God, and this made me love and pity Him for I saw that He was still my friend, rewarding me with good in exchange for evil. The love and affection that burned within me toward my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ made me hate myself for what I'd done to Him. If I'd had a thousand gallons of blood in my veins I'd have freely spilt it all at the Lord's feet if He had asked it of me.

I was thinking on this, considering how to love the Lord and express my love to Him, when this saying came to me: "If You kept a record of sins, Oh Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You and therefore you are feared." (Psalms 130:3,4). These were good words to me, especially the part about forgiveness. As I understood it, I could love and revere the Lord, for He so valued the love of us poor creatures that to win our love He'd willingly forgive our sins.

Now this word was fulfilled for me, and it refreshed me too: "You will remember your sins and cover your mouth in silent shame when I forgive you of all that you have done" (Ezekiel 16:63). I was set free at last from my guilt.

After a few weeks past I began to feel despondent once more, fearing that despite all the mercy I'd been shown, it might be a deception and I could still be heading for judgement. This thought was strong in my mind - whatever comfort and peace I thought I had from the word, promising life to me, I needed to find other scriptures that confirmed it. I could believe what I wanted, but it was worthless without God's word backing it up, for the scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35).

My heart began to ache again with the fear that I might be disappointed on the last day. I seriously examined the thoughts and words in which I'd found comfort. Having sinned as I had, did I really have a right to confidently trust the faithfulness of God on which I now relied? I remembered the verse "For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened - those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come - and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance" (Hebrews 6:4-6). "If we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies" (Hebrews 10:26,27). And, of course, Esau who sold his birthright. "You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears" (Hebrews 12:16,17).

By this means the word of the gospel was forced out of my soul. The Bible held no promises or encouragements for me, instead I was afflicted by this verse: "Don't rejoice like other people do, oh Israel." (Hosea 9:1). I saw that those who held to Jesus had much cause to rejoice, but I had cut myself off by my sins. I had no right to any of the promises in the precious word of life.

With this I collapsed, like a house whose foundation is destroyed. I was like a child that had fallen into a well, who could find nothing for their hands or feet to hold on to. They could flounder and struggle in the water, but eventually they'll die. As soon as this attack had fastened itself on my soul this scripture came to me: "This for many days" (Daniel 10:14). Indeed I found it so, for I wasn't delivered, nor did I have any peace again, until nearly two and a half years passed. These words, "This for many days" seem discouraging, but for me they gave hope that my condition wouldn't last for eternity.

I thought to myself, "many days" is not "forever". "Many days" will eventually end, and even though I was to suffer for many days and not just a few, I was glad that it was only "many" days. I'd sometimes recall these words and get help from them, for as soon as they came into my mind I knew my trouble would not last long. Often though I was too sunk in gloom and despair to take much encouragement from them.

The Path to Deliverance

In reading the scriptures and being convicted anew of sin, I was encouraged by verses like Luke 18:1 to pray. The tempter would attack me again, suggesting that Christ's blood and God's mercy were not for me, and praying was just an exercise in futility. "I'll pray anyway", I thought. "But your sin is unforgivable" said the tempter. "Well, I'll still pray" I said. "Its a waste of time and effort", he said. "I will still pray" I said. So I prayed, and said words to this effect: "Lord, Satan tells me that neither Your mercy or Christ's blood can save my soul. Lord, shall I honour You most by believing that you can and will save me, or honour Satan by believing that you can't and won't? Lord, I'd much rather honour You and believe that you can and will."

As I was praying this, Matthew 15:28 came to me: "Oh man, great is your faith". It felt like someone had given me a cheerful slap on the back as I knelt there. I couldn't believe this, that I'd prayed a prayer of faith, till almost six months later. I couldn't think that I had any faith, or that there was a word of scripture left for me to act in faith on. Therefore I stayed stuck in the jaws of desperation, and went around mourning in my misery.

All I wanted was to have my questions answered, my doubts put to rest, over whether there was really hope for me or not. These words came to me, "Will the Lord cast a man off forever, and never show His favour

again? Has his steadfast love ceased forever? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" (Psalms 77:7-9). While I considered this, I thought it gave me a glimpse - the verse asked the question, but didn't answer it. Maybe God hadn't cast me off. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed to say that indeed He hadn't, nor would he do so, but would indeed show His favour to me again. His promise does not fail, He has not forgotten to be gracious, nor would He in anger shut away his compassion. There was something else in my heart at the time, which I can't recall now, that encouraged me to believe that his mercy might not be gone forever.

Another time I struggled with the question of whether the blood of Christ was enough to save my soul. That day I struggled from morning till night with this, and became worn out with fear. At last I heard these words sound suddenly in my heart, "He is able". This word "able" spoke loudly to me, as if written in huge letters, and for the time it stayed with me (about a day) gave a mighty jostle to my fears and doubts. I've never had a word like that in all my life, both before or since (Hebrews 7:25).

One morning I was again praying, trembling under the fear that no word of God was left to help me, when this sentence darted in: "My grace is sufficient". At this, I felt hope again. How good it is when God sends His word! About a fortnight earlier I'd been reading this scripture, but at the time thought it couldn't help me and I'd thrown the Bible down. I'd thought it wasn't large enough to reach me, but now it was as if there were arms of grace so wide they could enclose not only me, but many others as well.

Despite my usual conflicts, these words sustained me for seven or eight weeks. I found peace in them often, sometimes twenty times a day, yet interspersed just as often with periods of overwhelming trouble, fear and guilt. I was up and down like this the whole seven weeks. Thoughts of the sufficiency of grace, then of Esau parting with his birthright; these were like scales in my mind, tipping first one way then the other.

Therefore I didn't stop praying to God, that He'd fill my heart with this scripture, and that he'd help me apply the rest of the sentence, for as yet I couldn't. He'd given me the word, I'd accepted it, but further than that I couldn't go. "My grace is sufficient" helped me to hope that there might be mercy for me. Though that's where it stopped, it answered my earlier question by saying yes there is hope. It left out the "for you" though, so I wasn't content and prayed to God for that as well. One day I was in a meeting of God's people, full of sadness and terror for my fears were strong again. I was thinking that my soul hadn't improved and my case was still a sad and fearful one, when these words suddenly and powerfully broke in: "My grace is sufficient for you. My grace is sufficient for you. My grace is sufficient for you." Three times it came. Every word was a mighty word to me. My Grace Is Sufficient - For You. They were huge, bigger than any other scripture to me then, and sometimes still now.

At this my understanding was so enlightened that it was as if I'd seen the Lord Jesus look down at me from heaven (through the roof tiles) and directed these words to me. I went home with a broken heart, filled with joy yet laid as low as the dust. The glory and comfort it gave didn't stay long, but the word itself was with me several weeks and encouraged me to hope. As soon as its power began to fade, the other word about Esau returned to me as it had before, so my soul was hanging in a pair of scales again, sometimes up and sometimes down, now in peace and now in terror.

For many weeks I went on like this, sometimes comforted and sometimes in torment. My torment was severe sometimes, for the verses I mentioned earlier from Hebrews would be set before me, barring me from heaven. Then I'd repent of thinking that way, and I'd reason with myself "there's only three or four scriptures against me. Can't God ignore those and save me anyway?" Sometimes I'd think "oh if only these few verses didn't exist, how I'd be comforted!" I could hardly stop myself from wishing them gone from the Bible.

Then I'd imagine seeing Peter, Paul and John and the other writers looking at me in scorn and derision. It was as if they'd said to me "All our words are truth, each as much as the other. We haven't cut you off, you've done that yourself. There are no scriptures left for you but these: "It is impossible" (Hebrews 6), "There is no more sacrifice for sin" (Hebrews 10), "It would have better for them not to have known God's will, than after knowing it to turn away from the holy commandment given to them" (2 Peter 2:21), and "For the scriptures cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

These men were elders of the city of rest, and I saw they were going to judge both my crime and me, while

I stood with the avenger of blood at my heels. With me trembling at their gates for deliverance, with my thousands of fears and doubts, I thought they'd shut me out forever (Joshua 10:3,4).

I was stymied again, not knowing whether the scriptures as a whole could tell me if I'd be saved, or how to find out. I knew I couldn't ignore verses that were uncomfortable or inconvenient, for I feared the apostles and knew that their words were true and eternal.

I recall a particular day when, as usual, I was alternating between peace and torment in my spirit depending on whether I was thinking of the sufficiency of Christ's grace or the fate of Esau. Lord, I thought, if both these scriptures met together in my heart, which would get the better of me? I began to wish that they might, and I asked God for this to happen.

So it did, about two or three days later. Both verses bolted into my mind at the same time, and there was a strange struggle in me between them for a while. Eventually the verse about Esau began to weaken, fade and then vanish, while the verse about the sufficiency of grace prevailed with peace and joy. Then another scripture came in to me, "Mercy rejoices over judgement" (James 2:13).

I wondered at this, but I do think it was of God. The word of law and judgement must give way to the word of life and grace, which is far more glorious (2 Corinthians 3:8-11, Mark 4:5-7, John 6:37). Moses and Elijah will vanish, leaving only Christ and His saints.

Now another scripture came to mind, and it really helped me: "Whoever comes to Me, there's no way I will ever cast them out". Oh the comfort I had from this word "there's no way I will ever"! Satan tried hard to pull this promise from me, saying that Christ didn't mean me, but lesser sinners who hadn't done what I'd done. I'd answer back, saying that the words made no such exception; "whoever comes, whoever, there's no way I will ever cast them out". I remember that of all the doubts Satan used, he never tried to suggest that I hadn't really come to Christ properly. The reason, I believe, is that I knew full well the proper way to come to Him - as I was, a vile and ungodly sinner, casting myself at his feet for mercy and condemning myself for my sin. If Satan and I ever fought over a word of God it was this one - it was like a tug of war with he at one end of the rope and me at the other. God be praised, I got the better of him, I held onto this promise and was encouraged by it.

Notwithstanding all the help I'd received along with the blessed words of grace, my conscience was still troubled at times by the verse about Esau selling his birthright. Whenever it came to mind I began to fear again. I couldn't get rid of it, it followed me around every day. I decided to look at it another way - Esau had literally sold his birthright. I, on the other hand, had just left it to the Lord Jesus Christ to take His choice. "Let Him go if He wants to"; these were the wicked words that had condemned me. This scripture, then, gave me hope: "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). "But Lord", I said, "I have left You". It answered again, "But I will not leave you". For this I thanked God.

I was so afraid that He would leave me though, and found it really hard to trust Him seeing I'd so badly offended Him. I would have been so glad never to have had this thought, "Let Him go if He wants to", for then I could have relied on His grace with far more ease and freedom. I was like Joseph's brothers, whose guilt made them afraid that their brother would despise and judge them (Genesis 45:1-5).

Above all I got the greatest encouragement from Joshua 10, which speaks of a man guilty of accidentally killing someone fleeing to a city of refuge. If he was pursued by those who wanted vengeance, Moses said the elders of the city of refuge would refuse to hand him over, because he didn't kill deliberately or with hate in his heart. Oh blessed be God for this word! I was convinced that I was the killer, and the avenger of blood was after me. In terror I wanted to enter the city of refuge, and it only remained to be seen whether I'd killed intentionally or not. A man who killed accidentally, not out of spite, grudge or hatred, may go in.

I therefore thought I was truly a man who could enter the city of refuge, because I had hurt my Lord without intending it or planning it, and certainly didn't hate Him. I prayed to Him, was afraid of sinning against Him and had fought against this wicked temptation for a year before I'd succumbed. When the thought had passed through my heart it had done so against my will, as if it forced its way through my clenched teeth. I had a right to enter this city, and the elders (the apostles) were not to hand me over for judgement. This was of great comfort to me, and gave me grounds for hope.

I still wanted to be sure of where I stood though, for I'd become very critical and careful over what I relied on. I had another question I very much wanted to resolve: Is it possible for someone who has committed the unpardonable sin to afterwards receive true spiritual comfort (however small) from God through Christ? After I'd considered and studied this, I found that the answer was no, they couldn't, for these reasons:-

Firstly, those who've sinned that sin have no share in the blood of Christ. Because of that, they have no grounds for hope and therefore no spiritual comfort, for there remains no more sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:26,27). Secondly because they are denied a share in the promise of life, their sin shall never be forgiven neither in this world or the world to come (Matthew 12:32). Thirdly, the Son of God does not intercede for them, being forever ashamed to own them, both before His holy Father and the blessed angels in heaven (Mark 8).

After I'd given this a lot of thought, I was sure that the Lord had comforted me, even after I'd committed my wicked sin. With this, I dared look anew at the fearful and terrible scriptures that had so frightened me before. I'd avoided reading them, almost wishing them gone from the Bible, for fear they'd condemn me. Now, however, I was encouraged to read them again, consider them, and weigh their meaning for me.

When I did this I found they'd changed. They weren't as grim as I'd remembered. I read Hebrews 6, trembling with fear that it would strike me. It described a state of absolutely falling away and denying the gospel and of Jesus Christ's remission of sins. The apostle begins his argument from this in verses 4-6. I then found that this falling away must be done openly, in view of the world, so that Christ is put to shame by it. Those who did this were then forever shut away from God, in blindness, hardness and an inability to repent: It is impossible that they be renewed again to repentance. Eternal praise be to God, for my sin was not the one described here.

First, I confessed that I was fallen, but not fallen away from profession of faith in Jesus leading to eternal life.

Second, I confessed that I'd put Jesus Christ to shame by my sin, but not an open shame. I didn't deny Him before men, or condemn Him to others as a false saviour.

Third, God hadn't shut me away or denied me access to Him by sorrow and repentance (though it was indeed hard to come to Him). Blessed be God for his unsearchable grace!

I then looked at Hebrews 10, and found that the "deliberate" sin described there isn't every deliberate sin; its wilful rejection of Christ and His commandments. Secondly, this must be done openly, before two or three witnesses, as required by the law (verse 28). Third, this sin can't be committed without intentionally spiting the Spirit of Grace, despising His urgings against sin and persuasions towards holiness. The Lord knows, though my sin was devilish, it wasn't the same as these.

Finally I reconsidered that deadly passage in Hebrews 12; Esau selling his birthright. This passage had stood like a spear against me for so long, yet now I studied it with new eyes. Firstly, his was not a hasty thought that was the opposite of his continued mental efforts and strivings. No, he'd given thought to it, consented to it, and deliberately went ahead and did it. It was done in the open, before his brother and possibly many others; this made his sin far worse than if had been done in secret. He also continued to despise his birthright afterwards. He ate, drank, and went on his way. Even twenty years later he didn't want it back: "Esau said, Brother I have enough, keep what you have for yourself" (Genesis 33:9).

Esau did seek a chance to repent, but it wasn't for the birthright but the blessing of his father. The apostle makes this clear, as does Esau himself: "He took away my birthright and now he's taken away my blessing too" (Genesis 27:36). With this in mind I looked at Hebrews again, trying to understand what the apostle was saying from a New-Testament perspective. I believe this to be the meaning God wants us to grasp: the birthright stands for our regeneration into new creations in Christ, and the blessing is the inheritance of eternal life. The apostle seems to imply this: "Lest there's a profane person like Esau, who for a morsel of meat sold his birthright". It was as if he said "Lest there be someone who disregards God's work in his life to make him a new creation, and later when he wants to receive the blessing of eternal life he is rejected".

There are many who, in the day of grace and mercy (in other words, now), resist and despise God's transforming work in their life, which is the birthright of heaven, yet on the day of judgement they'll cry out like Esau, "Lord, Lord, let us in". Isaac wouldn't relent, and neither will God the Father, who'll say "I've blessed others, but as for you evildoers, depart from me." (Genesis 27:32, Luke 13:25-27).

Considering these scriptures and finding that this interpretation was supported by other parts of the Bible, I was further encouraged and comforted. I no longer feared that the scriptures ruled me out from being saved. Now only the trailing edge of the storm remained, for the thunder was gone and only a few scattered raindrops were falling. These still hurt, as my former fears and anguish had scarred me deeply, and every touch would hurt my tender conscience.

One day I was walking in the field with a sore conscience, afraid that perhaps all was not yet right. Suddenly this sentence fell on my soul, "Your righteousness is in heaven", and I thought my soul saw Jesus Christ at God's right hand. There was my righteousness. Wherever I was, whatever I was doing, God couldn't say of me "He needs my righteousness", for there it was right before Him. I also saw that my righteousness wasn't improved whenever I felt ok and at peace, nor was it lessened when I'd sinned or was troubled with fears and doubts. No, my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

Now my chains fell off my legs. I was freed from my afflictions and burdens, and my temptations fled. From that time on those dread scriptures of God stopped troubling me. I went home rejoicing at the grace and love of God. When I came home, I went looking for the sentence "Your righteousness is in heaven", but couldn't find it. Therefore my heart began to sink again, until I remembered 1 Corinthians 1:30, "God has made Christ Jesus to be our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption". By this word I saw that the other sentence was true.

This scripture showed me the contrast between our sinful state and the righteousness and sanctification Jesus Christ gives us before God. I've therefore lived in the light of that verse for a long time, very happily at peace with God through Christ. There was nothing in my mind now but Christ. I was not only seeking the separate benefits of Christ, such as His blood, burial or resurrection and what they meant to me. No, I was looking at Him. All his other virtues, the things He's done for us and offers us, meet together in His person, and He's sitting on the right hand of God in heaven.

It was glorious to me to see Him exalted, along with all the good things He provides. Now I could compare myself to Him and see that all God's graces given to me here were just loose change compared to what was waiting in heaven. My true riches were safely stored there at home for me! In Christ my Lord and Saviour. Now Christ was all; all of my wisdom, all my righteousness, all my sanctification, and all my redemption.

The Lord also lead me into the mystery of union with the Son of God. I was joined to Him, flesh of His flesh, bone of His bone, and Ephesians 5:30 was also a great blessing to me. My faith in Him, like my righteousness, was increasingly established in me. If He and I were one, then His righteousness was mine. His merits, mine. His victory also mine. Now I could see myself in heaven and on earth at once - in heaven by Christ, who is my righteousness and life, though physically still here on earth.

Now I saw how Christ represents us before God, and all believers should think of Him in this way. God regards us as having fulfilled the law's requirements, because Christ fulfilled them. When Christ died, God sees us as dying with Him. His victory over sin, death, the devil and hell is ours, and His resurrection is ours too. "Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise" (Isaiah 26:19). "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hosea 6:2). Christ fulfilled these promises when He sat down on the right hand of God - as it says in Ephesians 2:6 "God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus".

How these blessed thoughts and scriptures which, with many others like them, sparkled before my eyes, and gave me reason to say "Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary! Praise Him in the firmament of His power! Praise Him for His mighty acts; praise Him according to His excellent greatness!" (Psalm 150:1,2).

Honey from the Lion

In a few words I've given you a taste of the sorrow and torment my soul went through, and the guilt and terror I lay under thanks to that wicked thought. I've also shown you how I was delivered from these, and the sweet and blessed comfort I found later. For about a year this comfort lived in my heart, making me admire and love God more than I can express. Before I move on, I will now (God willing) tell you what I believe caused this temptation, and how it was to my soul's benefit in the end.

There were two principal causes, and I was convinced of these during my time of trouble. Firstly, when delivered from earlier temptations I didn't keep praying that God would keep me from future temptations. In my prayers before the trial seized me, I was only praying that present troubles would be removed and that I'd discover more of His love in Christ. I saw afterwards that this was not enough - I should have prayed that God would keep me from the evil that was to come. "Then", he said, "I will be blameless, and innocent of the great transgression" (Psalm 19:13). This very word galled and condemned me through my long temptation.

There was another verse that also condemned me for my folly in neglecting to pray for deliverance from temptation - "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). I hadn't done this, and therefore was allowed to sin and fall. Jesus said "Pray that you do not enter temptation", and truly to this day I am under the weight and awe of this word. When I come before the Lord on my knees, I dare not leave until I've asked Him for help and mercy against the temptations to come. I beg you, reader, learn from my negligence and the afflictions I suffered, for I went through months and years of sorrow because of it.

The second cause of this temptation was that I had tempted God. This is how I did it: My wife was heavily pregnant, but her pains began too early and it looked like she'd give birth prematurely. At this time I'd been strongly tempted to question whether God really existed, so as my wife lay crying before me I thought "Lord, if You'll save my wife from this and take her pains away tonight, I'll know that you really do know the secret thoughts of the heart".

I had no sooner said this in my heart than her pain ceased and she fell into a deep sleep until morning. I greatly marvelled at this, not knowing what to think. Eventually, as she slept and didn't cry in pain again, I fell asleep too. When I awoke the next morning I remembered what I'd said in my heart the night before and how the Lord had showed me that He knew my secret thoughts. For several weeks this was a source of great astonishment to me.

About a year and a half later, that wicked sinful thought went through my heart - "Let Christ go if He wants to". Having fallen under the guilt of this, I remembered my other thought and what resulted from it, and now it was a rebuke to me, for I knew full well how God knows the secret thoughts of the heart.

Then the passages about the Lord and His servant Gideon fell on my spirit. Gideon tempted God with his fleece, both wet and dry, when he should have believed and gone ahead on God's word. Because of this, God sent against Him innumerable enemies, and Gideon had to face them without any outward appearance of strength (Judges 6:7). I too should have believed His word, and not doubted whether God truly sees everything.

These, however, are some of the advantages I gained through this time of trial. Previously I'd gone through a time where my soul was perplexed by unbelief, hardness of heart, blasphemy and doubts. I questioned the reality of God, Christ, the truth of the word and the certainty of the world to come, and was assaulted and tormented by atheism. That was no longer a problem now, as God and Christ were continually before me, not as a comfort but as a source of overwhelming dread and terror. I was tortured and broken by seeing the glory of God's holiness and Christ's compassion, for I thought I'd lost and rejected Him. Remembering Him was like breaking my bones over and over.

The scriptures were now wonderful to me. I saw their truth and reliability as the keys to heaven. Those that the scriptures favour will inherit bliss, but those the scriptures oppose and condemn must perish forever. "For the scriptures cannot be broken", oh how that word would tear my heart, as would "Whoever's sins you forgive are forgiven, but sins you don't forgive are not forgiven". I now saw the apostles as elders of the city

of refuge (Joshua 10:4), with the power to let some in to life, but shut others out to be killed by the avenger of blood.

One sentence of scripture that stood against me (and sometimes I thought they all did) was more terrifying than if I'd been attacked by an army of forty thousand men. Woe to him that the scriptures accuse and condemn!

This temptation made me understand more about the nature of God's promises than I ever had before, for now I was lying trembling under God's mighty hand, continually torn by the thunder of His justice. This made me search carefully and fearfully through the scriptures, considering the meaning and intent in each and every sentence.

This temptation stopped my foolish practice of ignoring promises that didn't immediately comfort or help me. Now I could hardly get help from any promises, yet like a drowning man I'd clutch at them all. It was no time to be picky and choosy about which parts of God's word suited me, as the avenger of blood was close on my heels.

Therefore I gladly took hold of promises, even if I felt I had no right or grounds to own them. I even grabbed onto promises that I feared I was excluded from. I just wanted to take the word of God as it was written, without changing the natural force of even one syllable. What help I now found in John 6:35, "He that comes to me, I will in no way cast out". I began to see that God had far more to say than I could ever hope to grasp and understand. I saw that He didn't speak in haste or rashly, but with infinite wisdom and judgement, and in absolute truth and faithfulness (2 Samuel 3:28).

I was like a horse in mud that flounders towards solid ground. In the same way I'd grope for a promise, even though my mind was a turmoil of fear, thinking that I'd seize hold of it and rest, leaving the fulfillment of the promise to the God in heaven who made it. I fought so hard and long with Satan over John 6:35. I wasn't looking for promises to make me feel better (though how welcome that would have been!), no, I just wanted something solid and firm to lean my weary soul against, that it might not sink forever.

Often, when reaching to lay hold of a promise, I've felt that the Lord was refusing my soul forever, and that I'd run into a hedge of spears, or as if the Lord had stabbed me with a flaming sword to keep me from Him. I'd think then of Esther, who, contrary to the law, went to petition the king (Esther 4:16). I'd also remember Benhadad's servants, who went with ropes on their heads to their enemies for mercy (1 Kings 10:31). There was also the woman of Canaan who wouldn't be daunted, though Christ had called her a dog (Matthew 15:22), and the man that went to borrow bread at midnight (Luke 11:5-8). These really encouraged me to keep at it and not give up.

I never knew the heights and depths of God's grace, love and mercy until I'd gone through this temptation. Great sins draw out great grace, and where guilt is most terrible and fierce, there the mercy of God in Christ is most amazing and powerful when shown to the soul. When Job had passed through his trials he ended up with twice as much as he'd had before (Job 42:10). Blessed be God for Jesus Christ our Lord. There's much more here I'd like to talk about, but I'll leave it for now as I want to be brief. I pray to God that my sufferings will make others fear to sin, lest they also end up carrying the iron yoke as I did.

Around the time I was delivered from this temptation I had two or three experiences of God's grace that were so intense I could hardly bear them. They so overwhelmed me at the time that, if they had lasted too long, I could no longer have managed the business of daily life.

I'll go on now to describe some of the other ways the Lord has dealt with me, and other temptations I experienced. I'll begin with what I found when I became part of the fellowship of God's people in Bedford. I had told the church of my desire to join with them in following Christ, and they had accepted me. I was thinking about communion, which is based on Christ's last supper with his disciples when He told them "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). This word was made very precious to me, for by it the Lord impressed on me a realisation of His death for my sins, and I felt cleansed and made whole by it. However, it wasn't long before I was assailed by fierce and sad temptations whenever I went to take part in communion, both to blaspheme the practice of communion itself and also to wish deadly and hateful things against others that ate of it. I was forced to keep a firm grip on myself and pray to God at all times to save

me from these blasphemies, lest I find myself giving in to them. I also cried to God to bless the bread and cup to the others as it went from mouth to mouth. I believe I experienced this temptation because I'd let go of the reverence with which I'd initially approached communion.

I continued with this for nine months or so, without rest or peace, till at last the Lord brought that same scripture to me again, "Do this in remembrance of Me". After that I've usually been at ease in taking communion, and have, I trust, recognised the Lord's body broken and his precious blood shed for my sins.

Trials through Illness

At one time I had developed a bit of a cough, and during the spring it got quite suddenly and violently worse. My body became quite weak and I began to think that I wouldn't survive the illness. Therefore I seriously began to examine afresh my state and condition before God, and consider again the evidences for the blessed world to come. I thank God's blessed name that it has been my usual practise, and especially when afflicted with illness, to try to keep my interest fixed on the life to come.

I recalled to mind my former experiences of the goodness of God to my soul, but then flooding into my mind came the recollection of my many sins. It especially hurt me to remember my deadness, dullness and coldness in praying, reading and other holy duties. I'd remember the way my heart would wander, the way I'd get tired of godly things, my lack of love for God, His ways and His people, and I'd think 'are these the fruits of Christianity? Are these what you'd expect to see in a man who's been saved?'

As I thought about these things my sickness became worse and worse, for now I was also sick inside, my mind clogged with guilt, and my experience of God's goodness to me gone beyond recall, as if it had never happened. I was pinched between a rock and a hard place - I was ashamed and afraid to live, but I dare not die. I sunk and fell in my spirit, and was giving it all up as lost. While walking up & down in my house in this woeful state, this word of God took hold of my heart, "You are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). Oh how this helped me, how it turned me around!

Now I was like a man wakened from a troubled dream. As I listened to this heavenly sentence it was as if it said to me "Sinner, you thinking that because of your sins and weaknesses I can't save you, but My Son is here with me and it's on Him I look, not you. I will treat you in accordance with how pleased I am with Him". This really lightened my mind, and I understood that God could justify a sinner at any time. When He looks at a sinner He sees not us but Christ Jesus - all of Christ's goodness He regards as ours, that's all it takes.

As I was thinking about this, another scripture came with great power on my spirit, "He has saved us, not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy" (2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 3:5). This lifted me up so high, I saw myself within the arms of grace and mercy; and though I'd previously been afraid to think of dying, now I cried "Let me die!". Now death was lovely and beautiful in my sight, for I saw that we'll never really live until we enter the other world. This life is just a slumber compared to that above. I began to see more in these words, "heirs of God" (Romans 8:17) than I'll ever be able to express while I live here. Heirs of God! God Himself is the saint's reward. I saw this and wondered at it, but I can't describe what I saw.

There was another time when I was very ill and weak, during which the tempter attacked me strongly. He likes to attack a soul when it gets closer to death, for that gives him opportunity. He tried to hide from me my former experience of God's goodness, instead showing me the terrors of death and the judgement of God. This made me terribly afraid of dying forever (should I now die), and I felt myself already beginning to descend into the pit. I thought to myself "there is no escape, to hell I must go", but in the midst of my fears I remembered the angels carrying Lazarus to Abraham's arms. I felt sure that that would happen to me as well when I left this world. My spirit was revived, and I could hope in God again. After thinking on this a while, a new word came to me, "Oh death, where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). At this I recovered both in body and mind at once, for my sickness vanished and I could serve God once again.

At one time I was physically well and in good spirits, yet suddenly a great cloud of darkness fell on me, hiding from me the things of God and Christ. It was as if I'd never seen or known them in my life. I was

overrun by a senseless, heartless spirit, so that the grace and life of Christ didn't stir my heart. It was as if my spiritual strength was broken, my hands and feet bound with chains. I then began to feel physically weak too, which made my inward affliction more intense and unpleasant.

I'd been like this for a few days when, sitting by the fire, I thought "I must go to Jesus" in my heart. At this, my darkness and atheism disappeared, and the blessed things of heaven came back. Taken by surprise by this sudden change, I asked my wife if there was a scripture that said "I must go to Jesus". She didn't know, so I sat thinking, trying to remember a scripture with those words. After a couple of minutes another word sprang to mind, "countless thousands of angels", and the full passage about Mount Zion in Hebrews 12:22-24 came to me.

Joyfully I told my wife, "Oh, now I know. I know!" That was a good night to me, I've had few better. I longed to share this experience, this revelation, with some of God's people. Christ was precious to my soul that night: I could scarcely lie in my bed for my joy, peace and triumph through Christ. The great glory of this didn't last till morning, yet that passage in Hebrews was a blessed scripture to me for many days afterwards.

That passage is as follows: "You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel." The Lord led me over and over through this blessed passage, first to this word and then to that, showing me the wonderful glory of each one. Often these words have since been a source of great refreshment to my spirit. Blessed be God for having mercy on me.

My Call to Ministry

As I'm talking about my experiences, I'll say a word or two about my preaching, and how God dealt with me in that matter. I'd been awakened for about five or six years, and by myself had come to see my need for (and the value of) Jesus Christ our Lord, and to put my faith in Him. Some of the wisest and most discerning saints in my fellowship saw that God had allowed me to understand something of His will through His holy and blessed word. They said I should explain and teach others about what I saw in the scriptures. They earnestly asked me if I'd be willing to speak a word of teaching and encouragement in our meetings.

At first the thought of doing this embarrassed me, but they kept asking so I eventually agreed. I spoke twice at private gatherings, and though I was nervous and spoke poorly I discovered my gift. The people listening seemed to be really moved and comforted, indeed they told me so, and thanked the Father of mercies for the grace he'd given me.

After this, whenever some of them went into the country to teach they'd ask me to go with them. I daren't use my gift publicly, but as I met people in private I'd sometimes speak a word of admonition to them. They too told me that their souls were edified, and rejoiced at God's mercy to me.

Anyway, to keep things brief, the church still wanted me to speak so, after solemn prayer and fasting to the Lord, I was appointed to preach the word publicly, not only to believers but also to bring the gospel to those who hadn't yet heard or believed. At this time I realised that I really wanted to do this work, but I bless God that this desire was not tainted by pride, for at that time I was again afflicted with the devil's fiery darts concerning my eternal destiny.

Despite this, I couldn't be content unless I was putting my gift into practice. I had strong motivation to go ahead and preach, not only from the frequent urgings of godly people but also from 1 Corinthians 16:15,16 - "You know that Stephanas and his household were the first of the harvest of believers in Greece, and they are spending their lives in service to God's people. I urge you, dear brothers and sisters, to submit to them and others like them who serve with such devotion".

I could see by this text that the Holy Spirit doesn't want us to bury our gifts and abilities. No, He wants us to put our gifts to use. He stirs up a desire to serve, and commands us to be ready and willing to do so. "They are spending their lives in service to God's people". This scripture was now continually in my mind, to encourage and strengthen me in this my work for God. I was also encouraged by several other scriptures and examples of godly people, both from the Bible and other books (Acts 8:4 and 18:24,25, 1 Peter 4:10, Romans 7:6, Fox's Acts and Mon).

Knowing that I was the most unworthy of all the saints, and full of fear and trembling at my own weakness, I nevertheless started to preach. Within the limits of my gift and my proportion of faith, I preached the blessed gospel that God had showed me in the holy word of truth. Word spread of what I was doing, and hundreds of people came from all parts of the country to hear the word.

I thank God that He gave me some pity and compassion for their souls, which made me search diligently and earnestly for words that might (if God blessed them) seize and awaken their conscience. The Lord heard and answered his servant, for I hadn't preached long before some people began to first be touched, then greatly moved in their minds as they realised the enormity of their sin and their need for Jesus Christ.

At first I couldn't believe that God would speak through me to the heart of anyone, as I still considered myself unworthy. However, those who were touched would love and respect me, and though I'd refuse to believe that I had anything to do with it, they'd tell everyone that God had awakened them through me. They'd bless God for me (unworthy wretch that I am!) and regard me as the means by which God had showed them the way of salvation.

I saw that their words and actions were consistent, that in their hearts they so earnestly pressed towards knowing Jesus Christ, and that they rejoiced that God had sent me to them. I began to conclude that maybe God had worked through a foolish man like me, and then this refreshing word came to me: "I helped those without hope, and they blessed me. And I caused the widows' heart to sing for joy" (Job 29:13).

I rejoiced at this, for the tears of those God had awakened by my preaching were both a solace and encouragement to me. These two verses were in my mind: "For if I cause you grief, who will make me glad?" (2 Corinthians 2:2) and "Isn't it because of my work that you belong to the Lord? Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord's apostle" (1 Corinthians 9:2). These helped convince me that God had called me to, and stood by me in, this work.

There was one thing I took special notice of as I preached the word. The Lord led me to begin where His word begins with sinners; to condemn all "flesh" (the strength and worthiness of our own actions and abilities) and to show that by His law the curse of God was on all men from birth because of our sinful natures. I fulfilled this part of my work very carefully and with great sensitivity, for the terrors of the law and guilt for my sins lay heavy on my conscience. I preached about things which I felt, which continued to hurt me, even things that made my poor soul groan and tremble.

Indeed, it was like I'd been sent to them from the dead. I went to preach as if in chains, and the things I persuaded them to be aware of were burning like fire in my own conscience. I'm not lying or exaggerating when I say that I went to preach full of guilt and terror, but as I stepped up to the pulpit it was taken away and I was free in my mind as I spoke. The guilt and fear returned immediately once I stopped speaking, even before I could get down the pulpit stairs. I was as bad as I've been previously, yet God carried me on with a sure strong hand, for neither guilt nor hell could take me from my work.

I continued this way for two years, crying out against men's sins and the fearful state they were in because of sin. Then the Lord showed me many sweet insights into His blessed grace through Christ, and gave my soul peace and comfort through Christ. Therefore I altered my preaching, for I still preached what I myself saw and experienced. Now I spoke on Jesus Christ and the many things he does for us, and I also tried to reveal and destroy the lies and false beliefs that the world leans on, and by doing so falls and perishes. For another two years I preached on these things.

Next God led me to understand and experience something of the mystery of union with Christ, so I spoke on that as well. After about five years of preaching these three chief aspects of God's word, I was arrested while preaching and thrown into prison, where I have stayed another five years to confirm, through

suffering, the truth of what I preached.

I thank God that, when I was preaching, my heart would earnestly cry to God that He would make the word effective and by it save souls. I was afraid that the enemy would take the word away from the conscience of my listeners, and thus make it unfruitful. Therefore I tried hard to speak the word in such a way that, if possible, made it relevant to the sin and guilt of every person who heard it.

When I'd finished speaking it would go to my heart to think that the word might have fallen on stony ground. I deeply wished that those who'd heard me would see sin, death, hell and the curse of God as vividly as I do, and also see the grace, love and mercy of God through Christ to men who are estranged from Him. Indeed, I often prayed to the Lord in my heart that I'd gladly give myself up to be publicly hanged if that would awaken people and confirm them in the truth.

Often in my preaching, and especially when explaining the doctrine of life by Christ without works, I have felt as if an angel of God was standing at my back to encourage me. Oh what power and evidence of heaven it was to my soul! The things I was labouring to reveal and demonstrate and fasten on people's conscience - I could no longer just say I believed them, no I was absolutely certain that those things I preached were true.

When I first went to preach the word in public, religious authorities came out against me. I was persuaded not to answer their angry criticism. Instead I tried to convince as many of their worldly "believers" as I could of their miserable state according to God's law, and of their need for Christ. In the time to come, I thought, they will speak up for me as I've revealed the truth to them (Genesis 30:33).

I never cared to meddle with controversial things that were in dispute among the saints, especially things of a worldly nature. On the other hand, I was very happy to earnestly debate and argue for the word of faith and the remission of sins by the death and suffering of Jesus. Other things I would leave alone, because I saw they provoked strife and discord, and because they didn't bring anyone closer to knowing God. My work was to carry the awakening word to people that needed it, and I stuck to doing that alone.

I tried never to borrow and repeat words that other men had used, though I don't condemn those that do (Romans 15:18). I truly thought, and found by my own experience, that I only had a sound conscience when I spoke and argued about things that I'd learned myself through the word and the Spirit of Christ. I won't speak now of everything I know about this, but Galatians 1:11-12 has meant more to me than most people are aware.

Some of those (too many I'm afraid) who were awakened by my ministry fell back afterwards. I can truly say that their loss meant more to me than if one of my own children had died. I think I can say, without offending the Lord, that nothing has struck as close to my heart as that, unless it was the fear of losing my own salvation. My heart was so wrapped up in the glory of this excellent work that, in the places where my spiritual children were born I felt as if I was lord of the manor. I counted myself more blessed and honoured by God for this than if He'd made me emperor of the Christian world or lord of the whole earth instead. Oh, these words! "Whoever brings the sinner back will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins." (James 5:20). "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that wins souls is wise" (Proverbs 16:30). "Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever" (Daniel 12:3). "What gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19). These, and many others like them, how they refreshed me!

One thing I've noticed is that God has placed a desire on my spirit to go to certain places to preach, and that when I've gone there I've found a need waiting for me. I've also been strongly urged in my heart to pray for specific people that they may be saved, and then seen these very souls brought to the Lord as the fruits of my ministry. I've noticed that a few words thrown in, off the cuff, during a sermon can have a greater effect than the rest of the sermon put together. Sometimes also when I thought I'd spoken poorly and reached no-one, then I did the most of all, but at other times when I thought I'd surely caught people with my message I've come away with nothing.

I've also observed that where there's been work to do for sinners, there the devil has begun to roar through

the hearts and mouths of his servants. Often when the wicked world has raged the most, there's been the greatest awakening of souls by the word. I could give several examples of this, but I won't right now.

My great desire in my ministry was to get into the darkest parts of the country, to reach people that were furthest from belief. This wasn't because I feared the light - I wasn't afraid to show the gospel to anyone - but because my spirit leaned most towards awakening and converting the lost, and the word I carried was most suited for that as well. I have strived to preach the gospel in places where people did not know Christ, lest I should build on another man's foundation (Romans 15:20).

In my preaching I've really been in pain as I've labored to bring children to God. I couldn't be satisfied unless my work bore fruit. If I was fruitless, it didn't matter who encouraged and directed me, but if I was fruitful then I didn't care if anyone condemned me. I've often thought on this: "Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. Children born to a young man are like arrows in a warrior's hands. How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them! He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates." (Psalms 127:3-5).

I got no pleasure from seeing people drink in opinions and ideas for their own sake. What delighted me were souls that had been ignorant of Jesus Christ and their need for salvation, but that came under conviction of their sin and unbelief, with their heart set on fire to be saved by Christ and a strong desire for a truly sanctified soul - these were souls I counted blessed.

In this work, however, I had all kinds of temptations attending me. Sometimes I'd be assaulted with a great discouragement, feeling that my words wouldn't help anyone, even that my words would simply be nonsense to my listeners. At these times I'd feel strangely faint and weak in my body, such that my legs were scarcely able to carry me to the pulpit.

Sometimes, while preaching, I've been violently assaulted with blasphemous thoughts, and strongly tempted to speak them out loud. At other times I'd been speaking the word clearly and fluently, yet before I'd reached the end of the message I'd felt blinded and estranged from the things I'd been speaking about, and my speech has become halting and uncertain. I so totally lost track of what I'd been talking about that I felt my head had been inside a bag the whole sermon.

Again, sometimes I've been about to preach upon a searching and confronting passage of scripture, when the tempter has said "What? You're going to preach on this? This passage condemns *you*, your own soul is guilty of it. You'd best not preach on it at all, or if you do you'd better gloss over the uncomfortable parts to give yourself an escape. Otherwise instead of awakening others you'll just be laying guilt on your own soul and you'll never get out from under it".

I thank the Lord that He has kept me from giving in to these horrible suggestions. Instead I've tried with all my might to condemn sin and transgression wherever I found it, even though in doing so I brought guilt on my own conscience. I thought as Samson did, "Let me die with the Philistines" (Judges 16:29,30) rather than deal corruptly with the blessed word of God. You that teaches others, do you also teach yourself? It is far better that you do judge yourself by preaching plainly to others, and not hide uncomfortable truths from your hearers in order to appear righteous. Blessed be God for His help in this.

Pride and Spiritual Gifts

While engaged in this blessed work of Christ I've often been tempted to be proud and think I'm something special. I dare not say that this hasn't affected me, yet truly the Lord has had mercy on me, and given me little joy whenever I've given way to pride. Every day the Lord has shown me the evil of my own heart, and the many corruptions and weaknesses inside me, and this has made me hang my head in shame despite my gifts and accomplishments. I've felt this to be my "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:8,9), the very mercy of God to me.

In addition I've also seen various sharp and piercing sentences in the word regarding the death of the soul despite gifts and abilities. For instance, this has really helped me: "If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." (1 Corinthians

13:1).

A skillful musician can make such melodious and heart-inflaming music with a cymbal that all who hear it feel the urge to dance. Yet the cymbal has no life, nor does it produce the music - it only does so through the art of the musician. In time the instrument may be discarded and destroyed, though in the past such music had been made from it.

So it is, I saw, with those who have gifts but lack saving grace. They're in the hand of Christ, like a harp in the hand of David. As David with the harp could make beautiful music in God's service to lift the hearts of worshippers, so Christ can use these gifted men to touch the souls of people in His church. Yet afterwards these instruments will be hung aside, lifeless, for they are merely hollow sounding cymbals.

This thought, together with some others, was like a club smashing my pride on its head. Shall I be proud, I thought, because I'm a nice-sounding gong? Hasn't the least living creature got more of God in it than a dead instrument? Besides, I knew that love is eternal and shall never die, but gifts and abilities will pass away and perish. I concluded that its better to have a little love, a little grace, a little of the true fear of God, than to have all the gifts without them. I'm fully convinced that its possible for one person to have the gift of knowledge and speaking like an angel, but for another person to have a thousand times more grace but be scarcely able to express themselves to others.

So I came to realise that, though gifts in themselves are good and useful in helping others, they are yet empty and without power to save the soul of him that has them if that's all he has. Neither are they evidence of how blessed a man is, as God's given them as gifts to people who must later give an account of how they've grown in love (or not) to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

This showed me that gifts alone are dangerous, not in themselves, but because of the evils that attend those that have them - pride, desire for people's praise, conceit etc. All of these are encouraged and inflated by the applause and commendation of other Christians (who should know better), endangering the poor creature to fall into the devil's condemnation.

Therefore, he that has gifts needs to be shown their true nature, that they don't have the power to truly save him. Otherwise he might put his confidence in his gifts, and so fall away from the grace of God.

A person with gifts needs to walk humbly with God and think little of himself, remembering that his gifts are not his, but are given to benefit the church. Gifts are given to make you a servant to the church, and you must give an account of your stewardship to the Lord Jesus - how blessed it would be to be able to give a good account!

Everyone should value gifts, for they are indeed desirable, but do so with fear of the Lord. Having great grace and few gifts is much better than having great gifts but no grace. It doesn't say "the Lord gives gifts and glory", but "the Lord gives grace and glory". Blessed is the one to whom the Lord gives true grace, for that is a certain forerunner of glory.

Lies and Slanders

Satan realised that his temptations and attacks weren't achieving his goal of stopping me doing God's work or making it ineffective. Therefore he tried another way, which was to stir the minds of ignorant and malicious people to spread slanders and lies about me. All sorts of evil allegations - everything the devil could devise and his servants invent - whirled up and down the country against me. He thought that in this way he'd make me abandon my ministry.

For instance, it was rumoured that I was a witch, then that I was a Jesuit, and again that I was a fraud out for people's money.

God knows that I am innocent of all these things. I will gladly meet my accusers before the Son of God to face His justice together, unless God gives them repentance which is what I pray for them with all my heart.

The loudest and most commonly repeated lie was that I secretly slept with other women, even that I had illegitimate children by them. I glory in all these slanders and lies thrown at me by the wicked world, for they are one of the proofs of being a child of God. "You are blessed", said the Lord Jesus, "when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way." (Matthew 5:11)

Therefore I wasn't troubled about these things, nor would I have been if they'd been twenty times worse than they are. I have a good conscience before Christ, and the evil-doers that speak evil of me shall be ashamed of their accusations.

So what shall I say in reply to those who are slinging mud at me? Shall I threaten them? Shall I argue with them? Perhaps I should flatter them, or maybe beg them to be quiet? No, not I. I'd actually urge them to slander me all the more as it would increase my glory, if it weren't for the fact that spreading these lies makes them ripe for damnation.

I therefore treat these lies and slanders as a badge of honour. I profess Christ, and to be vilified, slandered and condemned is all part of serving Him. I actually rejoice in these attacks for Christ's sake.

There's one thing I would say to those foolish liars who've made it their business to accuse me of sleeping with other women. I'd like them to produce proof that I've ever slept with any other woman, or even attempted to seduce a woman, anywhere at any time. I don't care if these people have a good opinion of me or not - that means nothing to me - but I do care about their state before God in spreading such lies.

My enemies have really missed their target with this. I am not the man they accuse me of being, and I wish that they too were free of the guilt they lay at my door. If all the fornicators and adulterers in England were hanged by the neck until dead, John Bunyan would still be alive and well. The only woman for me under heaven is my wife.

I admire God's wisdom, for since the time of my conversion He has made me shy of women. People who know me can tell you that its rare to see me talk freely and easily with a woman. I can't stand seeing men treat women with a casual intimacy, it repels me whenever I see someone doing it. I avoid being alone with a woman, and I seldom even touch a woman's hand; for me these things are wrong. I've seen men greet women who they've visited or who have visited them, and when I've objected they've just said its common friendliness and good manners. I've told them that its not appropriate behaviour for a believer. Some men practice giving the "holy kiss" of greeting, but I've asked them why they only greet attractive women this way and balked at those who are less desirable? I don't care if others praise this practice - to me it looks and feels wrong.

Let me summarize with this: neither men nor angels can prove me guilty of having sex with any woman other than my wife. Before God, who knows everything I've done and thought, I am innocent of this, and not because of my own goodness but because God has been merciful to me and kept me from this sin. I pray that He'll continue to keep me not only from this, but every evil practice, and bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. Amen.

So Satan had spread slanders and attacks, trying to make my countryman have contempt for me and my preaching. To add to that he now subjected me to a long and tedious imprisonment, hoping both to scare me away from serving Christ and make men afraid to hear me preach.

MY ARREST IN THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 1660

Under God's good hand I had freely preached the blessed gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for five or six years, and He had graciously blessed my work and encouraged me. Then the devil, the enemy of man's salvation, fired up the hearts of his servants against me, which in the end resulted in my being arrested and thrown into prison. This is how it happened.

On the 12th of November I was invited to come and teach at Samsell, near Harlington in Bedfordshire. Justice Francis Wingate heard about it, issued a warrant for my arrest and sent men to watch the house where I was to preach as if we were criminals or terrorists! Anyway, when the constable charged in he only found us holding our Bibles and praying that God would bless the message I was about to deliver. The constable stopped the meeting and I was forced to go with him.

However, if I'd wanted to, I could have been a coward and escaped arrest. When I arrived at my friend's house he told me of the rumour that I'd be arrested that day. He was a little afraid and asked if perhaps the meeting should be cancelled and I return home, as he didn't want to see me hauled before the justice and sent to prison - he knew the Justice Wingate better than I did and feared what was likely to happen. Anyway, I said "No, not on your life. I'm not leaving, and the meeting should not be cancelled. Cheer up, we shouldn't be afraid, for our cause is good and we needn't be ashamed of it. To preach God's Word is such a good work that we'll certainly be rewarded if we suffer for doing it."

My friend was more afraid for me than he was for himself. I walked out into the garden and seriously considered the matter, and this came into my mind:-

I'd been brave and dedicated in my preaching, and God's grace had enabled me to encourage others. If I was to run away now it would not look good. What will my weak, newly-converted brothers think when they hear that my words were braver than my actions? If I ran because there was a warrant for my arrest, other believers might also become afraid to make a stand, but if I stayed then they'd be encouraged to be bold in serving God. I saw that God in His mercy had chosen me to be the first to be attacked for preaching the gospel, and if I ran away then it could discourage everyone who came after me. Not only this, but the world would see my cowardice and use it to deride and blaspheme the gospel and those who preach it.

After I'd thought it through I went back inside with a firm resolution to go ahead with the meeting and not leave, even though I could have been gone an hour before the officers came to arrest me. I would not go, for I'd decided to see the worst of what they'd say or do to me. Blessed be the Lord, I knew of nothing I'd said or done that was wrong. Therefore I started the meeting, which was soon stopped by the constable.

Before I was taken away, I gave the people some words of advice and encouragement. They could see that we weren't allowed to meet and hear God's Word, but I told them not to be discouraged because it was good to suffer for serving God. We weren't being arrested as thieves, murderers or some other criminal, but blessed be God, we were suffering as Christians for doing good and it was better to be persecuted than to be persecutors.

The constable and his men were waiting on me though and wouldn't allow me to keep speaking, so I had to go with them. The justice wasn't at home that day, so a friend arranged bail for me to be released and return the next morning (else I'd have been held by the constable's men all night, so great was my crime!). The next morning we came before the justice, who asked the constable what we'd done, where we met, and what he'd found when he arrested me. I think he'd expected the constable to find weapons, but the constable told him there'd only been a few of us there to preach and hear the Word of God, with no sign of anything else. The justice was taken aback by this, and began to ask me why I was there, what was I up to, and why wasn't I content to stick to my trade as a tinker? He said what I'd been doing was against the law.

I answered, "The reason I came here was to teach people to turn away from their sins and come to Christ, otherwise they'd perish for eternity. I have no problem practicing my trade and preaching the Word as well, there's no conflict between the two."

When I said this he became angry, and said that he'd "break the neck" of our meetings. I said "Maybe you will".

He told me to find people who'd secure my bail, otherwise I'd be sent to jail. I'd already done this, so I called my friends in to present the bond. The justice then told them that they had to stop me preaching, and that if I preached their bond would be forfeit. I answered that I couldn't stop preaching the Word of God, for I must keep teaching, urging, comforting and encouraging the people around me, and that this work didn't harm anyone and should actually be commended.

Justice Wingate then said, "If you won't be bound by my conditions, I'll send you to jail where you'll be kept until the quarterly court sessions."

The justice then left, and in came an old enemy of the truth, Dr Lindale, who started taunting and sneering at me.

I said "I'm not here to talk to you, only to the justice."

Dr Lindale replied, "I suppose you had nothing much to say for yourself", and smirked as if he'd gotten the victory over me. He accused and condemned me for meddling in things I had no right to pursue. He asked if I'd taken oaths (as a minister in the church), and it was such a pity that I hadn't because now I'd be sent to prison.

"Ask me a serious question", I said, "and I will answer you". Instead he kept on asking whether I could prove my preaching was legal, acting as if he knew I was in the wrong.

At last, in order to show that I could answer him if I wanted, I recited the verse in Peter that says "Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you."

"All right", said Lindale, "tell me who that verse is speaking to?"

"Who?", I asked. "Why it speaks to everyone who's received a gift from God. 'God has given each of you a gift' it says. Also Paul wrote saying that everyone can prophesy, only to take it in turns rather than all speak at once".

At this Lindale was taken aback and stopped to think, but not wanting to give up he came back with "Oh yes, I remember a man called Alexander the coppersmith, who did great harm and upset the apostles...", insinuating the same of me, because I was a tinker.

I answered, "I've read of many legally qualified priests and Pharisees who took part in shedding the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ".

"Yes", said Lindale, "and you are one of those priests and Pharisees, for you pretend to pray and look all holy while robbing the houses of widows."

I answered him again, saying "Seeing you're much richer than me, you're obviously better at prayer and preaching than I am!" Then the scripture came to my mind, "don't answer a fool according to his folly", so I bit my tongue and from then on kept my answers short and truthful.

The justice now came back in and committed me to the constable to be sent to Bedford jail.

Two of my Christian brothers met me as I left and asked the constable to stay while they went and spoke to the justice on my behalf. So we waited while they went in, and after a long discussion they came out and said I could be released if I agreed to say certain words before the justice. I said I'd say the words if I could do so with a good conscience, otherwise I wouldn't. So I went back in, not expecting to be delivered for I feared the justice was too opposed to the truth to let me go unless I'd do something to dishonour God and hurt my conscience. So as I went, I lifted up my heart to God for His light and strength, to be kept from doing anything that might either dishonour Him or hurt my own soul, or to discourage anyone else who might be seeking the Lord Jesus Christ.

Anyway, when I came before the justice again, there was Mr Foster of Bedford coming out of another room. Seeing me by the candlelight (for night had fallen), he said "Who is that? John Bunyan?" with such apparent affection I thought he was about to hug me. This was confusing, for I hardly knew him and anyway he'd always been an enemy of God's ways - why should he be so friendly toward me? When I saw what he did later I remembered the sayings "their tongues are smoother than oil, but their words are drawn swords", and "Beware of men, etc".

"Thanks to God, I am well", I answered.

Mr Foster asked, "So what are you doing here?"

I responded, saying I'd attended a small meeting nearby to speak a few words, the justice had heard of it and had me arrested.

Mr Foster said, "Ok, I understand. Well, if you promise not to arrange any more meetings you'll be free to go home. The justice really doesn't want you in jail, so please just agree to this condition and you'll be released."

"Sir", I said, "what do you mean by arranging meetings? When these people gather together, all I do is encourage them to pursue the salvation of their souls."

"Look", said Foster, "I don't want to argue about it. If you'll just promise not to arrange these gatherings you'll be set free. Otherwise you're going to prison."

I replied, "I don't force or compel anyone to listen to me, but what if I visit a place and find a meeting of people who want to hear me? Its only right that I should speak to them, encouraging them as best I can to seek the Lord Jesus Christ so their souls may be saved."

To this, Foster replied, "But that's not your job! Stick to being a tinker and stop this preaching business, then the justice will be happy and you'll be acquitted."

"I can follow my trade as well as preach the Word", I said, "and I consider it my duty to do both."

"But these meetings are against the law!", Foster exclaimed. "Please, you must put a stop to them! Promise me that you will."

"I can't promise that with a clear conscience.", I replied. "Its my duty to do as much good as I can, not only as a tinker, but also in preaching the Word to people everywhere I go."

"You, sir, a practically a Roman Catholic, and I can prove it."

"How?", I asked.

Foster answered, "Its because you take the Scriptures literally."

"Some of the Scriptures that are meant to be taken literally", I said, "but there are others that are allegorical or prophetic and need to be interpreted, and that's what we try to do."

"So", said Foster, "which of the Scriptures do you think are literal truth?"

I replied, "Whoever believes shall be saved. This was meant to be understood just as it was spoken - whoever believes in Christ shall be saved, the text is simple and straightforward."

"You're an ignorant fool, and you don't understand the Scriptures at all", he said. "You don't know Greek do you? That's the language they were written in, so you can't possibly understand."

"Well, that's your opinion, and if its true then only people who understand ancient Greek can possibly grasp the meaning of Scripture. That means only a few educated scholars can hope to be saved, while all the ordinary people are excluded. The Scripture, however, says that God hides these things from the wise and reveals them to little children."

Foster said, "Only the foolish and ignorant would listen to your deluded nonsense."

"No, that's not true", I replied. "Quite a few wise and educated people listen to me, as well as those you call foolish. Also those we commonly consider foolish are the wisest in God's eyes, and those who appear wise,

mighty and noble are rejected by God who has chosen ordinary, ignorant people instead."

At this Foster changed tack, saying "You make people neglect their trades and professions, yet God's commanded us to work six days and serve Him on the seventh."

"People, rich or poor, need to look after their souls during the week as well as their bodies", I told him. "God wants His people to encourage each other every day, while its called today."

"Its as I said, only poor ignorant fools would listen to your nonsense, so what's the point? Its a waste of time."

"The foolish and ignorant need teaching and education the most", I replied, "so my work is definitely worthwhile."

"Enough", he said. "Will you promise to stop calling people together for these meetings? If you do you'll be free to go home."

"I can't promise anything", I said. "I can't stop doing the work that God's called me to do."

At this he left the room. Then several of the justice's servants came in, and repeated what Mr Foster had said - if I promised not to call people together for meetings I could go home.

I asked them what exactly they meant by "calling people together". What if I went to a marketplace and started to read a book out loud, and even though I didn't say "Hey everyone, come here and listen", people came up and listened because of what I was reading? Would this be calling people together, even though the people were already there at the market and I hadn't specifically gathered them? If so, then I couldn't make that promise, because every time I opened my mouth to speak I could be accused of calling people together.

The justice and Mr Foster then returned, and they saw I couldn't make the promise they wanted and nor would I be persuaded. Then Mr Foster, who'd at first expressed such love for me, told the justice that he must send me away to prison, and that it'd be a good idea to imprison the people who'd helped me arrange these meetings. With that, the hearing was over and I was taken away.

As I left I was strongly tempted to tell them I was going with the peace of God, but I kept silent. Blessed be the Lord, I went to prison with God's comfort in my poor soul.

I'd been in jail for five or six days, when my Christian brothers again tried to bail me out (the justice's warrant said that I'd be held until there was security for my release). They went to Justice Crumpton at Elstow and asked him to take the bond for my release until the quarterly court sessions. At first he agreed, but then changed his mind and asked to see my warrant. Written there was this: "Mr Bunyan has attended several conventions in the county where the church of England was disparaged and slandered."

When the justice saw this he said that couldn't have been the only reason I was sent to prison, there must have been some other crime of which I was guilty. As he was only a young man he dared not release me.

My jailor told me all this as he took me back to prison, but I wasn't daunted - instead it made me rather glad, for I saw that the Lord had evidently heard me. Before I'd gone to this justice I'd prayed, "Lord, if I can do more good while free then please keep me from prison; but if not then Your will be done." I'd hoped that my imprisonment might awaken other Christians, so I couldn't tell which to choose - imprisonment or freedom. Therefore I committed it to God and left it in His hands. When I returned to my cell God met me, comforting me and satisfying my mind that it was His will I should be there.

Also, as I returned to prison I was thinking about the justice's narrow decision, which could easily have gone either way. This word fell upon my heart, "He knew they'd imprisoned him out of envy".

Anyway, in this brief chapter I've described the events that sent me to prison, where I lie now waiting on the good will of God to do with me as He pleases. I know that not one hair of my head can fall to the

ground without the will of my Father in heaven. No matter how great man's rage and malice against me is, they can only do what God permits them, no more. When they've done their worst, we know that all things shall work together for the good of those who love God.

Farewell.

TRIAL AND PUNISHMENT

Here is a summary of my cross-examination before Justice KEELIN, Justice CHESTER, Justice BLUNDALE, Justice BEECHER, Justice SNAGG, etc at the quarterly court sessions.

More than seven weeks passed while I lay in prison, when finally I was brought before the quarterly court session in Bedford. A bill of indictment was produced against me, which read:

"John Bunyan, a labourer from the town of Bedford, has (here it named a time period) wickedly avoided coming to church to hear Divine service. He frequently holds unlawful meetings and conventions, disturbing and distracting the good citizens of this kingdom, contrary to laws of our sovereign lord the King, etc".

After this was read to the court, the clerk said to me, "What is your answer to this charge?"

I replied, "Regarding the first part, I regularly attend the Church of God's services. By God's grace I am also a member of this church, of which Christ is the Head."

Justice Keelin spoke up, saying "Yes, but do you attend the Divine services in the local parish church?"

"No", I answered, "I don't."

"Why not?"

"Because God's Word does not command us to attend the local parish church."

"We were commanded to pray", said Justice Keelin.

"Yes", I said, "but not out of the common prayer-book."

"How then are we supposed to pray?"

"With the spirit", I said. "As the apostle said, I will pray in the spirit, and with words I understand." (1 Corinthians 14:15).

Keelin replied, "We can pray with the spirit and with understanding using the common prayer-book."

"The prayers in that book were written by other men, not by the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our own hearts. As I said, the apostle prayed with the spirit and with understanding, not with the spirit through words in a book."

Another justice spoke up then, saying "What do you consider prayer? Don't you think its reciting specially prepared words to people in a church meeting?"

"No, not at all", I said. "I've heard many elegant and excellent words from men in church, but they may not be praying at all. When a man prays, he pours out his heart before God through Christ, even though his words may be few and rough compared to those spoken by others."

A few of the justices agreed, murmuring that this was true.

"This", I said, "can be done without the Common Prayer-Book."

One of them (either Justice Blundale or Justice Snagg) said, "How do we know you don't write out your prayers first, and then read them afterwards to the people?", laughing as he spoke.

"We don't do that", I said. "Its not our practice to write our prayers at all, let alone read them in a meeting."

"And how can we know you're telling us the truth?", he said.

"We just don't pray that way."

Then Justice Keelin said, "Using the Common Prayer is lawful. Christ taught his disciples to pray, and John taught his disciples as well. Also, can't one man teach another how to pray? Faith comes by hearing, one man can convince another of sin. Therefore prayers can be written down and later read. They are a good for teaching and helping men to pray."

While he was saying this, God brought Romans 8:26 to my mind - I hadn't thought of it before, but it jumped into my mind with such freshness as he spoke that it was as if the scripture had said "Take me, take me".

When he'd finished speaking, I replied "Sir, the scripture says that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. We don't know what to pray, but the Holy Spirit prays for us in groanings that can't be expressed in words. Notice that it doesn't say the Common Prayer-Book teaches us how to pray, but the Spirit. Its the Spirit that helps us in our weakness, not the Prayer-Book."

"As for the Lord's prayer", I continued, "its easy enough to recite. However there are very few who can, in the Spirit, say the first two words of the prayer and call God their Father, having been born again of the Holy Spirit. Everyone else who merely recites the words is just babbling, not praying."

"I guess there's some truth in that", muttered Justice Keelin.

I went on, "Also, you said one man can convince another of sin, that faith comes by hearing and that one man can tell another how to pray. Yes, men can confront others with evidence of their sin, but it is the Holy Spirit that convinces the hearer. Faith comes by hearing, yet its the Spirit that creates faith in the heart of the one who listens - otherwise they gain nothing (Hebrews 4:12). Yes, one man can teach another how to pray, yet that man can't pray, he can't reach out to God unless the Spirit helps him. The Common Prayer-Book can't do this. Its the Holy Spirit that shows us our sins, reveals the Saviour to us (John 16:16), and stirs up in our heart the desire to come to God. For all these things we need His help (Matthew 11:27), including pouring our souls out to Him with groans that can't be expressed."

"Tell us", says Justice Keelin, "What have you got against the Common Prayer-Book?"

I said, "Sir, if you'll hear me, I'll give you my reasons against it."

"Very well, I'll allow it, but first I must caution you. If you speak irreverently about the Common Prayer-Book you'll get yourself in a lot of trouble."

So I proceeded. "My first reason is this. Using the Common Prayer-Book is not commanded in God's Word, therefore I cannot use it."

One of the justices said, "Scripture doesn't command us to go to Elstow or Bedford, does it? Yet its not unlawful to visit either place."

I replied, "Going to Elstow or Bedford is merely a worldly thing. God's Word doesn't command I go there, yet it does allow me to practice my trade, and if doing so takes me to a town then so be it. Prayer, though, is a huge part of worshipping God, and therefore it should be done only as described in God's Word."

Another justice commented, "He will cause harm talking like this, he should be silenced."

"No, no, don't be afraid of him", said Justice Keelin. "We know far more than he does, what harm can he cause? We know the Common Prayer-Book has been used since the time of the apostles, so it is lawful to use in the church."

"Really?", I asked. "Show me the place in the New Testament where the Common Prayer-Book is mentioned. Show me just one verse in scripture that commands me to read it, and I will gladly do so. Look, anyone who wants to pray from it is free to do so - I wouldn't forbid them. At my church though we have no use for it, we can pray to God without it. Blessed be His name!"

With that, one of them said, "And who is your God? Satan?"

They then began to accuse me of being possessed by delusion and the devil himself. I let this go without comment, thinking "the Lord forgive them!". Then I replied, "Blessed be the Lord, who encouraged us to meet together, to pray, encourage and warn each other. We've had the comforting presence of God among us. Blessed be His holy name forever!"

"This is just a peddler's gibberish", stormed Justice Keelin, "Stop your raving, and may the Lord open your eyes!"

"As I said", I replied, "we must encourage and warn each other daily, while it is called today, so that none of us will be deceived by sin and hardened against God."

"You should not be preaching," said Justice Keelin. "By what right do you stand up and preach? If the Church of England hasn't authorised it your preaching is illegal!"

"It is lawful for me, and others like me, to preach, and I'll gladly prove it", I said.

"What Scripture gives you this right?" asked Keelin.

I began to reply, "1 Peter 4:10-11, Acts 18 ..."

"Hold on, not so many at once. Which should we consider first?"

"God has given each of you a gift from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God Himself were speaking through you."

"Okay", said Keelin, "let me explain that scripture to you. Where it says "God has given each of you a gift", its referring to your trade. You have received the gift of tinkering, and that's what you should follow. Other men have their trades as gifts from God, and the clergy have received their calling as a gift."

"Sir, no." I said. "It is very clear that the apostle is speaking of preaching the Word. If you look at the verses you'll see that it explains this gift for what it is - 'speak as though God Himself were speaking through you.' Its plain that this verse isn't talking about worldly professions, but about the spiritual gifts God has given us by the Holy Spirit..."

"Stop right there." said Keelin. "Look, you can talk like this at home all you want, but not in public."

"If its ok to speak and help some people, it must also be lawful to help others as well. If its good to teach our families, its good to teach others too. If you consider it a sin to meet together to seek God and encourage each other to follow Christ, I'm afraid I'll have to keep 'sinning', as its the right thing to do."

Keelin replied, "I haven't studied the Scriptures enough to argue with you. Anyway, enough talk. So I take it that you confess to the charges in the indictment?" I suddenly realised that I was going to be indicted.

I replied, "I'm only guilty of attending many meetings with other Christians to pray to God, teach and encourage each other, where we've experienced the Lord's sweet comforting presence among us, blessed be His name."

"Very well, this is our sentence." said Keelin. "You'll be returned to prison for a period of three months. If, after three months, you do not agree to return to the Church of England's Divine services and stop your preaching, you will be banished from the realm. If you're caught within the realm after that date you'll be stretched by the neck until dead." With that he told the jailor to take me away.

"I'm at odds with you then", I said, "for if I was released today I'd preach the gospel again tomorrow, with God's help."

One of the justices answered me, but my jailor was dragging me away so I didn't hear what he said.

With that my court case was over. I can honestly say (and I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for it), that my heart was lifted up and refreshed during the cross examination and also afterwards when I returned to prison. When Christ said "I will give you the right words and such wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to reply or refute you!" (Luke 21:15), He meant every word, and He gives us peace that no man can take away.

So ends my account of my trial and conviction. I hope the Lord makes this profitable to everyone who reads or hears of it. Farewell.

THE CLERK OF THE PEACE

A summary of the conversation I had with the Clerk, who came to argue the legalities of the case that had sent me to prison.

I'd been in prison for another twelve weeks and still had no idea what they intended to do with me. On the 3rd of April 1661 Mr Cobb, the Clerk of the Peace, was sent by the justices to demand that I submit to the church of England. This is roughly what was said...

When Mr Cobb arrived at the prison he had me brought from my cell. When I came to the interview room, he said "Neighbour Bunyan, how are you?"

"Very well thank you Sir, blessed be the Lord", I answered.

"I've come to tell you that you must submit to the laws of the land." said Cobb. "Otherwise the next court sessions will go badly for you. You're likely to be banished from England, or perhaps even worse."

I said that I was no-one important, and that I just wanted a quiet, humble life in this world as a man and a Christian.

"Fair enough", he said, "but you must submit to the laws of the land, and that means no more of those meetings. The law directly forbids them, and the justices have sent me to tell you that if you won't submit, they'll throw the book at you."

I replied, "Sir, as I understand it, the law isn't against anything I've done, nor does it prohibit the meetings I attend. That law was made to outlaw meetings in which crimes or acts of terrorism are incited under the facade of religion. It doesn't forbid private meetings of people who only want to worship the Lord, to teach and encourage each other. My purpose in meeting with others is to simply do as much good as I can, by teaching and counselling in accordance with the small measure of light God's given me - not disturbing the peace of the nation."

"But of course, that's what I'd expect you to say!!", said Cobb. "Look at that recent insurrection in London - how pious they pretended to be, yet they tried to bring down the kingdom!"

"I detest what they did.", I said. "Just because they used religion to hide their evil plans, it doesn't mean that everyone else is doing the same. I regard it as my duty to obey the King's government as every man should, especially Christians! If I were given the chance I'd gladly prove my loyalty to my Prince, both in

words and actions.”

“Look,” said Cobb, “I’m not good at debating this kind of thing, but there’s something I’d like to say that I truly think you should consider seriously, Mr Bunyan. If you agree to submit yourself to the justices, you’ll be free to teach and encourage your neighbours as you converse with them. Just don’t call together any kind of gathering. If you follow my advice you’ll do much good for the church of Christ, and it won’t be against the law. Its the private meetings that the law forbids.”

“Sir, if I can help one person by talking with them, why can’t I help two? And if I can help two, why not four, or eight?”

“Yes, and soon you’ll be talking to a hundred.” he said.

“Indeed. What’s wrong with doing as much good as I can?”

Cobb replied, “For all we know you can just be pretending to do good, and in reality you’re seducing the people to rebellion. Therefore you are forbidden to meet so many people together, in case you do harm.”

“Yet you say the law is ok with me talking to my neighbour. Surely its against the law for me to seduce even one person to rebel, so if I’m allowed to talk with him it must be because you know I’m only trying to do him good. If the law allows me to do good by talking with one person, surely it also allows me to do good by talking to many.”

“I’m sorry, the law specifically forbids your private meetings. They won’t be tolerated.”

“But surely Queen Elizabeth and her parliament didn’t intend that law to oppress the worship of God in any way? Yes, it can be twisted that way, but the law itself is only directed at men who are intent on causing mischief and use religion as a guise. Consider what it says - if any meetings, under the colour or pretence of religion, etc.”

“That’s true, however the king has seen that these false ‘religious’ meetings are always private in nature. The only way to stop them is to forbid private meetings. However, public meetings are still allowed.”

“Sir,” I said, “let me answer you by way of an illustration. Imagine a street in a town, known for bag snatchers and pickpockets. Should a law be made to arrest everyone who uses that street? Can’t honest men as well as thieves walk there? Its just like that with this case. There can’t be that many who plan to destroy the government and use religious meetings as a cover, so why use this law to ban all private religious meetings? Shouldn’t punishment be reserved for those that are actually guilty? If I ever do or say something wrong, as a man or a Christian, let me be punished for it.”

“Also, you’ve said I can meet in public. I’d gladly do so if I were allowed. Let me hold meetings in public and I won’t worry about private meetings at all. I don’t meet in private because I’m afraid of them being public. Look, if anyone can prove I’ve done anything wrong, or that I’ve preached errors or heresies, I’m willing to stand up before a crowded market place to repent of it and disown it. If, however, I preach the truth, then I’d stand in that market place and defend it to the last drop of my blood.”

“Sir, you should be commending me for this. To be in error and to be a heretic are two different things. I’m no heretic, because I won’t stubbornly hold to any belief that is contrary to the Word. Prove that anything I believe is an error and I’ll recant.”

Cobb replied, “My good man Mr Bunyan, I think you’re getting above yourself, talking about holding public assemblies like this. Can’t you just agree to do as much good as you can in a neighbourly way, without gathering people together, in private or in public?”

“In all honesty sir,” I said, “I’m not trying to bignote myself - quite the contrary, I don’t think much of myself at all. Yet even though I despise myself, the people of the Lord are helped when I speak from the small measure of light that God has given me - they’ve told me so. And when I see that the Lord, through grace, has blessed my work in some way, I have no choice but to keep using the gift God’s given me for the good

of the people. As I said, I'd willingly speak in public if I had the chance."

"Well," said Cobb, "what's wrong with you attending public assemblies and listening to other people preach? What's so great about your gift that you have to speak? Can't you hear what other men have to say?"

"Absolutely, I'm just as willing to be taught as I am to teach. I consider it my duty to do both. Anyone who teaches can also learn from others, as the apostle says: We may all prophesy one by one so that everyone learns (1 Corinthians 14:31). Everyone who has a gift from God should use it so that others will be comforted, and when he's done he can hear and learn, receiving comfort from others."

Cobb replied, "Yes, but how about you stay quiet for a while. Sit still, hear and learn, and we'll see what happens down the track?"

"No sir, I couldn't do that. As Wycliffe said, whoever stops preaching and hearing the Word of God for fear of men rejecting him is already rejected by God, and in the day of judgement shall be guilty of betraying Christ."

"That's right," said Cobb, "those that stop hearing shall be rejected as traitors. So are you willing to sit and hear?"

"Sir, he said those that stop either preaching or hearing. If a man's received a gift its a sin if he doesn't put it to use to encourage and teach others, as well as hearing others preach."

"Ok, how are we to know that you've really received a gift?"

"Any man can listen to my preaching, and search the Bible to prove what I'm saying is true."

"Very well. Would you be willing to have two impartial experts judge your case? Would you stand by their decision?"

"That depends," I said, "are they infallible?"

"No, of course not."

"Well then, its possible that my judgement is as good as theirs. I'll pass on your offer, for I prefer to be judged only by the Scriptures, which are infallible and cannot be wrong."

"But who can judge that? You'll interpret the Scriptures one way, and someone else another way!"

"As I said, the Scriptures should judge, which can be done by comparing one verse or passage with another. If you do that, the meaning of Scripture becomes very clear. For instance, if people have a different idea of what the term 'Mediator' means, the Scriptures can explain it, telling us that a mediator must help two parties reach an agreement, also that God is one, and there is one Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:20, 1 Timothy 2:5). The Scripture describes Christ as a complete, perfect and able High Priest. It shows that He is both man and God. The Scripture says that His blood cleanses us from sin. The Scripture even talks about people meeting together. Its really not hard to understand what it says."

"Well, would you be willing to accept the judgement of the church?", asked Cobb.

"Yes, sir, I would, provided that judgement was based on the Scriptures."

We talked about other things that I can't remember in detail now. We touched on the laws of the nation and submitting to the government, to which I said that I tried to obey all righteous laws whether there was a king or not. If I did anything wrong, I considered it only right that I pay the penalty of the law. I also offered to provide notes of all my sermons to any who wanted them, so no-one need be suspicious of what happened in our meetings. I told him that it was my sincere desire to live quietly and submit to the government.

"Well Mr Bunyan," concluded Cobb, "I do hope you'll seriously consider the things we've talked about between now and the quarterly court sessions. I hope you'll decide to submit to the requests of the justices, for you can do a lot of good if you remain in England. On the other hand, how can you help anyone if you're sent away beyond the seas to Spain, Constantinople or some other remote part of the world? Please, agree to be ruled."

The jailor spoke up, "Indeed sir, I too hope he'll agree to be ruled."

"In all honesty," I said, "I want to be a good citizen here in England. If they decide not to release me, I hope God will help me to bear whatever punishment they give me. However, in the presence of God I tell you that I don't know of anything I've done wrong that would deserve such punishment."

"You do know that the scriptures say that governments are ordained by God?" said Cobb.

"Yes," I replied, "and that I am to submit to the King and his officials."

"Well then, the King commands you not to hold private meetings. Its against his law, and he is ordained by God, therefore you must obey."

"Paul said that the government of his day was ordained by God, yet he was often imprisoned by those governments all the same. Also, even though Jesus Christ told Pilate that he had no power except that given him by God, He still died under Pilate's orders. So I hope you're not implying that either Paul or Jesus were denying God's authority and thereby sinning against God?"

I continued, "The law has provided two ways of obeying. Where I can actively obey the King's rules with a good conscience, I will do so. Where I cannot, I'm willing to quietly suffer whatever punishment they hand out to me."

With that, Mr Cobb sat still and said no more. I thanked him for his polite and friendly discussion, and returned to my cell.

Oh that we might meet in heaven!

Farewell, J. B.

THE MIDSUMMER ASSIZES

Below is a discussion between my wife and two judges at the Midsummer Assizes concerning my deliverance from jail. She told me about it afterwards, for I was in prison when it happened.

So, I'd received the sentence of banishment, and hanging should I return, with a three month period in prison to see if I'd give in and do what the justices wanted. Around the time Mr Cobb came to see me, the King was to be crowned. Usually many prisoners are released when there's a coronation, and that should have included me as my sentence was not yet final. However they treated me as a fully convicted criminal, so unless I sued for a pardon I'd be kept in jail. Even though thousands of prisoners were released, they kept me behind bars until two judges visited Bedford for the twice-yearly hearings known as Assizes, this one taking place in August 1661.

I wanted to pursue every legal means possible to secure my release, so three times I asked my wife to present a petition to the judges, asking for a hearing and an impartial review of my case.

The first time my wife presented it to Judge Hale, who received it from her in a very kind way and told her he'd do the best he could to help us, but was afraid there wasn't much anyone could do. The next day, to make sure they didn't forget about me among all their other cases, she presented it again, this time to Judge Twisdon. When he'd seen it he snapped at her angrily, telling her that I was convicted and couldn't be released unless I'd promise not to preach anymore.

The third time she presented another petition to Judge Hale again, as he seemed willing to listen to her. Justice Chester was there at the time, and stepped forward to say that I'd been convicted by the court, that I was a hot tempered criminal (or words to that effect), and waived the petition. My wife, however, was encouraged by the high sheriff not to give up, and went back into the courtroom to try and persuade them to release me. The courtroom was the "Swan Chamber", where the two judges, many justices of the peace and other important men were present. She entered the chamber blushing and trembling, and began to speak:-

"My Lord," she said to Judge Hale, "I've come here again to ask what can be done for my husband."

Judge Hale replied, "Woman, I told you before I couldn't help you. The words your husband spoke at the quarterly sessions were taken for an admission of guilt, and therefore he was convicted. Unless something can be done to undo that, I can't help."

"My Lord, he is kept in prison unlawfully. They clapped him up before the King made any proclamation against private religious meetings, and the indictment is false. They never even asked him if he was guilty or not, and he didn't confess to the things they accused him of."

One of the justices standing nearby, she didn't know which, spoke up saying "My Lord, he was lawfully convicted."

"No that's not true!" said my wife. "When they said to him 'Do you confess the indictment' he only said that he'd attended several meetings where the Word was preached, there was prayer and that God's presence was among them."

Judge Twisdon answered very angrily, "What? You think we can do whatever we like? Your husband is convicted by law as a breaker of the peace!" Judge Hale then called for the Statute Book.

"My Lord, he was not lawfully convicted." said my wife.

Justice Chester interjected, "My Lord, I can confirm that he was indeed lawfully convicted."

"That's not true! They just took his words as an admission of guilt."

"But it is recorded, woman, it is recorded." said Justice Chester, as if the fact it was written in the book made it irrefutably true. He wanted to intimidate her into silence, but having no arguments to persuade her with he just kept repeating "it is recorded".

"My Lord," said my wife to Judge Hale, "I have been to London to try and secure my husband's release. There I spoke with Lord Barkwood and gave him a petition, and he presented it to the rest of the House of Lords. When they'd seen it, they said they themselves couldn't release him, but that the judges at these assizes would take care of it. Now I've come here to see you, and you give me nothing." At this the judges kept quiet, but pretended not to have heard her.

Justice Chester again refuted her with "My Lords, he is convicted, and it is so recorded."

"So what if its written down, its still wrong." my wife replied.

"My Lord," continued Justice Chester, "her husband is a vile pest, one of the worst we've ever come across."

Judge Twisdon spoke up, "Tell me, will your husband stop preaching? If he will, send for him."

"My Lord," said my wife, "while he's able to speak he doesn't dare stop preaching."

"So why are we wasting our time talking about this fellow?" stormed Twisdon. "Does he think he can do what he likes? He is a breaker of the peace."

"No my Lords, all he wants is to live peacefully, to practice his trade and support his family. I have four small children that can't look after themselves, one of which is blind, and I have nothing to live on except the charity of good people."

"You have four children?" asked Judge Hale. "You're pretty young to have four children."

"My Lord," she said, "I'm a step mother to them. I've only been married for two years, and I was pregnant when my husband was arrested. I hadn't had children before, and when I heard the news I went into early labour which lasted for eight days. Finally the child was delivered, but it died soon after."

Judge Hale looked very sad, and said "Alas, you poor woman!"

"No, she's using poverty to pull the wool over your eyes." said Judge Twisdon. "I'm led to believe that he became quite rich through his preaching, which paid him better than his trade did."

"What is his trade?" said Judge Hale.

Some of those standing nearby said "A tinker, my lord."

"Yes," said my wife, "and because he's a tinker, and poor, he is despised and deprived of justice."

Judge Hale answered very kindly, saying "Listen, if its true that they mistook what your husband said for an admission of guilt, you have three options. You can apply to the king, sue for a pardon, or get a writ of error."

When Justice Chester heard him say this, especially the part about the writ of error, he was clearly offended. "My lord, this man will preach and do whatever he likes!"

"He preaches nothing but the Word of God." said my wife.

"He preaches the Word of God does he?" said Judge Twisdon, looking so angry she thought he was going to strike her, "No. He goes back and forth doing nothing but harm!"

"No my lord, that's not true. God has owned him, and done much good through him."

"God indeed!", sneered Twisdon. "He teaches the doctrine of the devil."

"My lord, he does not, and the Righteous Judge will make that known at the day of judgement."

"My lord," said Twisdon to Judge Hale, "don't pay her any attention. Send her away."

Judge Hale said "I'm sorry woman that I can't help you. You must either apply to the King, sue for a pardon or get a writ of error. The writ of error will be cheapest."

At this Chester again looked fit to explode, taking off his hat and scratching his head furiously. She saw that they wouldn't call me in, though she'd told them I could answer their questions and demands far better than she could. She remembers leaving the chamber and breaking into tears, not because of the hard-hearted way they'd treated her and me, but because they'd have such a poor account of themselves to give when the Lord returns. They'll have to answer for everything they've done, good or bad.

As she left the book of Statutes was brought in, but she doesn't know what they discussed and heard nothing more from them.

THE ASSIZES, JANUARY 1662

Actions Against Me by Enemies of God's Truth.

I'll only touch briefly on what occurred between these two assizes. My jailor had allowed me a degree of liberty, and I took every opportunity to visit God's people and preach, urging them to be firm in their faith in Jesus Christ and avoid the Common Prayer-book. I told them to only trust the Word of God, which gives directions to Christians in every situation. It is able to make the man of God perfect in everything through faith in Jesus Christ and equip him for all manner of good works (2 Timothy 3:17).

I was even able to visit Christians in London, but my enemies heard of it. They created such a stink about it that my jailor almost lost his job, and they threatened to bring him up on charges as well. They accused me of going there to plot an insurrection against the government, which God knows was a lie. Anyway, my liberty was curtailed, and the outside world was closed off from me.

When the next quarterly sessions came in October or November 1661 I fully expected to be hauled before the courts on new charges, but nothing happened. The assizes started a couple of months later, and as I wanted my case heard before the judge I asked the jailor to put my name and a summary of my case on the assizes calendar. I also made friends with both the judge and the high sheriff, who promised that I'd be called.

I thought I'd done everything possible to get my day in court, but it was in vain. When the assizes came, though my name was on the calendar and both judge and high-sheriff had given me their word, the justices and clerks managed to defer my case. I don't know what they said to achieve this, yet I later found that the Clerk of the Peace, Mr Cobb, strongly opposed me. He visited my jailor and told him not to bring me before the judge and to erase my name from the calendar. The jailor told him that he couldn't do that, as the judge and high-sheriff already had a copies of the calendar with my name written down. This made Mr Cobb very angry, and he demanded to see the jailor's calendar. When he looked at it he said it was wrong, and blotted out my entry, writing instead that John Bunyan was lawfully convicted for holding illegal meetings etc.

He was then afraid of what he'd done, so he sought support from the clerk of the assizes and the justices of the peace. He wouldn't stop at anything to hinder me, again visiting my jailor, telling him that if I saw the judge and was released he'd make the jailor pay my court fees, which he said were owed to him. He also said he'd lodge complaints against the jailor at the next quarterly sessions for making false calendars. So I was denied the chance to appear before the judge, and was left in prison instead.

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF MY IMPRISONMENT

I'd professed faith in Christ' glorious gospel quite a long time, and had preached for about five years, when I was arrested at a meeting of some good people in the country, even before I had a chance to speak to them. They brought me before a justice, who refused me bail (even though I offered security for it) because I would not agree to stop preaching.

When I came before the court I was charged with arranging illegal gatherings, and with rebelling against the national worship of the church of England. I spoke plainly and honestly with the justices, but they took this for a confession of guilt and sentenced me to perpetual imprisonment because I refused to conform. The jailors took me back to prison, where I have now been for twelve years, waiting to see what God would allow these men to do with me.

Through God's grace I've been very content in my imprisonment, though my heart has been torn this way and that, both from the Lord's work in me but also Satan's attacks and my own corruptions. Glory be to

Jesus Christ, in all of this I've received many blessings, including convictions, instructions and insights. I won't discuss them here in detail, but I'll gladly touch on a few words to stir godly people to bless God and pray for me, and also to be encouraged not to be afraid of what men can do to them.

In all my life I'd never had so great an insight into God's word as now. Scriptures that meant nothing to me before shine upon me here in prison. Jesus Christ was never more real and apparent than now; here I have seen and felt His presence. Oh this word! "For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:14), and this, "And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory." (1 Peter 1:21). These were blessed words to me as I lay in prison.

I've also been greatly refreshed by these scriptures: John 14:1-4, John 16:33, Colossians 3:3,4 and Hebrews 12:22-24. In the times when these scriptures were opened to me and spoke to my heart I was able to laugh at my circumstances and had no fear of evil men. I've had sweet insights into the forgiveness of my sins in this place and of being with Jesus in the world to come. How sweet has been the thought of Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the thousands upon thousands of angels, God the Judge of all, the spirits of righteous men made perfect, not to mention Jesus Himself. I've seen things here that I don't believe I'll ever be able to express in this life. The truth of this verse has been so real to me: "You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy" (1 Peter 1:8).

Until my imprisonment I'd never really experienced God standing by me to protect me from all Satan's attacks. I've been afraid many times, but then God has supported and encouraged me. Sometimes I've jumped in fear at nothing more than my shadow, yet God has been very tender towards me, and hasn't allowed me to suffer harm. With one scripture or another He has strengthened me against it all, even such that, were I allowed, I'd pray for greater trouble in order to experience greater comfort (Ecclesiastes 7:14, 2 Corinthians 1:5).

I had expected to be imprisoned before it happened, and there were a couple of things that really concerned me. For instance, would I be able, if necessary, to face death? In answer to this, Colossians 1:2 led me to pray that God would strengthen me with His glorious power, that I might be patient and able to suffer with joy in my heart. For almost a year before I was arrested, every time I prayed this prayer would thrust itself into my mind, that if I must go through suffering I would be patient and endure it joyfully.

2 Corinthians 1:9 greatly helped me as well: "We expected to die, but as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead." By this scripture I saw that I must treat everything of my life in this world as being dead to me, including myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyments - all as if they're already dead, and myself as dead to them. Only then would I be able to face suffering the right way.

I also knew I needed to rely totally on the invisible God for everything. As Paul said somewhere, the secret is to ignore the things you can see and focus on things that are not seen. The things we can see are temporary, but the unseen things of God are eternal. I also thought on the futility of trying to prepare myself for what was coming - I could get ready for imprisonment, but what if I was whipped instead? Ok, so I could steel myself against the whip, but then what would happen if I were banished? Right, so I'd prepare to face for banishment, but then what if I received the death penalty? I've realised that this is the best way to go through suffering: trust in God through Christ for the world to come, and consider yourself already dead to everything in this life, presuming yourself to be dead as well, your eyes fixed only on heaven.

Despite knowing this, I was still a man, and a weak one at that. The pain of being parted from my wife and poor children has often felt like flesh being pulled from my bones. It hurts not only because of my fondness for them, but also because I keep thinking of the miseries and hardships they'll be going through without me there - especially my poor blind child who I love so much. Thinking of what my poor blind one might be suffering breaks my heart to pieces.

"Poor child!", I thought, "how sad your life is likely to be in this world! You're likely to be beaten, you'll have to beg, suffer hunger, cold, nakedness and a thousand setbacks. I can't endure it, that this should happen to you." I'd pull myself together, thinking "My child, I must trust you into God's hands, though it hurts so

much to leave you." I realised that I was like a man who pulled his house down on the heads of his wife and children, yet, I thought, I have no choice, I must do it, I must do it. I also thought of the two cows that were to carry the ark of God to another country, leaving their calves behind (1 Samuel 6:10-12).

I was helped through this temptation in several ways, three of which I'll mention here. Firstly there were these verses: "I will protect the orphans who remain among you. Your widows, too, can depend on me for help." (Jeremiah 49:11), and "The Lord said, I will take care of you. Your enemies will ask you to plead on their behalf in times of trouble and distress." (Jeremiah 15:11).

Secondly I had this to consider: if I ventured everything for God, I could trust Him to care for my worldly concerns. If, however, I forsook serving Him through fear of trouble coming to me or my family, I'd be making a mockery of my beliefs. Not only that, I'd also be saying in effect that my loved ones were safer in my care (even though I'd forsaken God to look after them) than they'd be if I continued to serve God and left them at his feet. It hurt to think of this, like barbs tearing at my flesh. This was reinforced by Christ's prayer against Judas who'd selfishly decided to sell His master - Psalms 109:6-9; you should read it soberly.

Lastly I also had the dread of hell and its torments to consider, which I was sure awaited those who shirk away from public profession of faith in Christ, His words and laws because of their fear of suffering, of going to the cross themselves. I also thought of the glory that He has prepared for those that in faith, love and patience kept following Him to the end. These thoughts helped me, relieving the fears of the misery my family would suffer for the sake of my profession.

Sometimes I imagined that I'd be banished because of my preaching, but then I've thought of this scripture: "Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them." (Hebrews 11:37). I've also remembered the saying that goes "The Holy Spirit sees that in every city I've suffered bondage and affliction". I've thought about the sad state of banishment and exile, being exposed to hunger, cold, danger, nakedness, enemies and a thousand disasters, and in the end perhaps to die in a ditch like a lost sheep. I thank God, I haven't been swayed by these thoughts, but rather they've made my heart turn even more towards God.

I'll tell you about a time in my imprisonment, a period of many weeks where I was more depressed than ever before. I was a new prisoner, ignorant of the laws, and kept thinking that for all I knew I'd end up at the gallows to be hanged. Satan laid hard into me, trying to depress me further, saying "You're not only going to die, but when you do you'll be far removed from the things of God, without hope or evidence of anything good waiting for you after death" (at that time the things of God were hidden from my soul).

This troubled me greatly. I thought to myself that, in my current condition, I was not ready to die, nor was I ready to even face death should it happen. If brought to the gallows I'd be likely to struggle and try to escape, or perhaps faint in terror. My display of fear would give the enemy reason to ridicule the way of God. This really troubled me, for how shameful it would be to die in God's cause with a pale face and trembling knees.

Therefore I prayed to God that He would comfort me, and give me strength to go through whatever suffering He called me to - yet no comfort came and the things of God remained hidden from me. The thought of death so possessed me that I often felt like I was standing on the ladder with the rope around my neck. The only bleak encouragement I had was the thought that I'd have the opportunity to speak my last words to the crowd of onlookers who I imagined would come to see me die. I thought, if that's what happens, God willing perhaps one soul will be converted by my very last words, and I won't consider my life to be thrown away for nothing.

All the things of God were still kept hidden from my sight, and still the tempter followed me with "Where will you go when you die? What will become of you? Where will you end up in the afterlife? What evidence do you have that you'll enter heaven and glory, and share the inheritance of those God has sanctified?" I was tossed around like this for many weeks and didn't know what to do. At last this thought fell heavily on me, that I was in prison expecting death for following the word and way of God, and I should not flinch away from it.

I also had this thought, that God could choose whether to comfort me now, or perhaps later at the hour of my death - He had that freedom. I, however, was bound by my profession of faith, and had no choice but to stand by His word regardless of any comfort I might receive from Him. Therefore, I thought, I will go on, and trust my eternal state in Christ's hands, whether he comforts me here or not. If God does not help me, I thought, I'll leap off the ladder blindfolded into eternity, sink or swim come heaven or hell. Lord Jesus, if You'll catch me please do so, but if not I'll still venture everything for Your name.

I'd no sooner made this resolution than this word came mind, "Does Job serve God for nothing?", the accuser said to God. "Job isn't upright, he only fears God because You protect him and his property, making him prosper in everything he does! Look how rich Job is!", said Satan to God, "If you reach out and take away everything he has, Job will surely curse you to your face!" Well, I thought, perhaps this is the sign of a truly upright man, that he still wants to serve God for nothing rather than give up. Blessed be God! I hope then that I too have an upright heart, for I am resolved (God giving me strength) to never deny my profession of faith, though I get nothing in return for my suffering. As I was thinking about this, another scripture came to me: Psalm 44:12 and onwards.

Now my heart was full of comfort, for I hoped my resolution was sincere. I am glad I went through this trial, for it comforts me every time I think of it, and I hope I'll bless God forever for the teaching I've received through it. I could tell you more of my experiences, but these, the spoils of victory I've won in battle, I dedicate to maintain the house of God (1 Chronicles 26:27).

IN CONCLUSION

Of all the temptations I've experienced, the worst is to question whether God really exists and whether His gospel is true. Its the hardest temptation to bear, for when it comes it saps my strength and kicks my feet from under me. How often I've thought of the verse, "Put on the armour of truth", and this, "when the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

Sometimes after I've sinned I've expected God to punish me severely, but instead He has shown me more of His grace. Sometimes when I've been comforted, I've called myself a fool for sinking so deeply into depression in the first place. Also when I've been downcast, I've thought myself foolish to seek comfort as much as I did.

Another thing I've often wondered at - sometimes God gives my soul such blessed insights into Himself, yet I've found that soon afterwards my spirit is filled with darkness and I can't even remember what God had shown me, nor be refreshed by it.

I've sometimes seen so much meaning in a single line from the Bible, more than I could bear to grasp. Yet at other times the whole Bible seems as dry as a stick, or rather my heart has been so dead and dry toward it that I couldn't get anything from the word, though I read it from cover to cover.

Not all fears are bad, indeed fear of sinning against the blood of Christ is the best fear of all. Of all the joys we experience, the sweetest joy is mixed with mourning over Christ. Its such a good thing to be on our knees with Christ before God! I hope I've learned something of these things.

To this day there are still seven terrible wicked tendencies in my heart:-

1. I am inclined to unbelief
2. I suddenly forget the love and mercy shown in Christ
3. I keep trying to be "good enough" rather than relying only on God's grace
4. My mind wanders when I pray, and often my prayers are cold and lifeless
5. I forget to look for answers to prayer
6. I'm apt to complain when I don't have what I want, yet I abuse that which I already have
7. Whenever I try and do the things God commands my corrupt nature comes to life. When I'd do good, evil is present with me.

I continually see and feel these things, which afflict and oppress me, yet God in His wisdom has allowed them for my good:-

1. They make me hate and despise myself, when otherwise I'd be tempted to pride
2. They keep my from trusting my heart
3. They convince me of the insufficiency of my own righteousness
4. They show me the necessity of flying to Jesus
5. They drive me to pray to God
6. They show me how I need to watch and be sober
7. They provoke me to pray that God, through Christ, will help me and carry me through this world.

Farewell.

JOHN BUNYAN.

LIFE AFTER PRISON

The rest of Mr Bunyan's life, beginning where he left off, and ending with the time and manner of his death and burial, along with a description of his character.

Reader, the hard-working author of this book has already given you a faithful and very moving account of his life from his youth through to his middle years. Many things happened during his later life that should be recorded, yet he did not do so, either through lack of time or because was afraid people would accuse him of seeking people's praise by writing about himself. I was a true friend of Mr Bunyan and had known him a long time, so, wanting everyone to know about the good end of his life as well as the evil beginning, I've taken it on myself to write down what happened in his later years through to when he entered eternal life, both from my own recollections and that of other friends.

Mr Bunyan has already told you about his birth and education, the evil habits of his youth, the frequent temptations he struggled against, and the mercies, comforts and deliverances he found. He's described how he began preaching the Gospel, the slanderous attacks and imprisonment he suffered, and how many souls were saved through God's grace. I won't go over them again, but instead I'll describe his life afterwards.

He was imprisoned for over twelve years for non-conformity, during which time he wrote many good books. By his patience he moved Dr Barlow the Bishop of Lincoln and other church-men to pity his hard and unreasonable suffering. They became his friends and eventually secured his release, otherwise he would have died in that cold and filthy place. Now he was physically free (his soul had been freed years before by the abounding grace that filled his heart) he visited those who'd comforted him during his imprisonment, acknowledging their kindness and love. He encouraged many by the example he'd set, that if they too were attacked for serving God they should suffer patiently for the sake of a good conscience and the love God had shown them in Jesus Christ. He especially helped those whose spirits had sunk low through fear of what men might do to them, and many people found wonderful consolation in his teaching.

As often as he could he gathered Christians together (though the law was still in force against such meetings) and through his teaching fed them the sincere milk of the Word, that they might grow in God's grace. When some were taken and imprisoned he worked hard to ensure their families were cared for and not left destitute.

He made sure he visited the sick, strengthening them against the tempter's suggestions which often attack those who are physically ill. Many can bless God for eternity, for putting it into John's heart to go and rescue them from the power of the roaring lion who was trying to devour them. He was happy to travel, even to remote parts of the country, where he knew or believed there were people who needed his help. He went on long jounries like this two or three times a year, to the point where some gave him the mocking name of "Bishop Bunyan" and others became jealous of the way he so earnestly worked in Christ's vineyard. Yet the seeds of God's Word that he continually sowed in the hearts of his congregation, watered with God's grace,

produced an abundant harvest bringing many disciples into Christ's church.

Part of his time was spent reconciling disputes, putting a stop to many evil schemes and saving some families from ruin. He couldn't rest until he'd found a way of reconciling the dispute - he'd become a peace-maker, who as Jesus said will be known as children of God. Indeed, this work occupied his final days, as I'll describe later.

Towards the end of his reign the king unexpectedly allowed freedom of conscience to dissenters of all persuasions, but Mr Bunyan understood his real motives. The dissenters were now freed from the persecution they'd suffered, and even given equal footing with the Church of England (which the papists were trying to undermine and subvert). Mr Bunyan believed that this would bring the dissenters out of hiding into the open and allow the king to crack down on them later. Mr Bunyan made full use of this freedom, knowing that we answer only to God and should do everything possible to keep a good conscience before Him. How beautiful it is to be able to preach the glad news of the Gospel! Nevertheless he acted cautiously in holy fear, earnestly praying that the coming judgements would be averted, for he saw it like a black storm hanging over our heads and about to break because of our sins, and that like the Ninevites we needed a wholesale repentance and turning to God.

Therefore he gathered his congregation at Bedford, where he'd lived most of his life. They had no meeting place big enough now to hold the many followers who'd come to hear his teaching, so they all cheerfully contributed to building a new meeting hall. The first time he stood up to preach in the new hall it was so crowded that many had to stay outside, though the hall was quite large. Everyone tried to hear and follow his teaching, showing their goodwill towards him by attending the hall's opening in large numbers.

Mr Bunyan lived in Bedford in peace and quiet, content with the little that God had given him. He retired from tinkering and other secular employment, devoting himself to his call to ministry. As God said to Moses, "Who makes a person's mouth? ... Is it not I, the Lord? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say." (Exodus 4:11-12). Mr Bunyan had little education, certainly no academic degrees from a university, yet his preaching was greatly blessed by God.

Around this time the government sent regulators to all cities and towns, with the purpose of removing people they didn't like from a range of positions and appointing those they did. Mr Bunyan spoke at length against this, foreseeing bad consequences coming as a result of it, and worked hard to protect his congregation from the regulators. When an important man visited Bedford and sent for Mr Bunyan to come and see him (apparently to give him a government job of some kind), he politely refused to go.

When he took time off from writing and teaching he often went to London, visiting the various non-conforming congregations where his preaching was in great demand. Some people thought little of him on account of his education, but became convinced of his knowledge of Christianity. They saw that he had sound judgement and spoke plainly and powerfully. Many who came to hear him as mere spectators for novelty's sake came away impressed at what they'd heard and wondering, like the Jews did at the Apostles, how this man could have such knowledge, eloquence and authority. Perhaps they didn't realise that God helps those who commit themselves to cheerful hard work in His vineyard.

This was the pattern of his later years, imitating his great Lord and Master Jesus Christ. Wherever he went he did as much good as he could, and even his most prying critics couldn't find anything they could use to stain his reputation. He frequently prayed, even with tears, for all people who in one way or another opposed and oppressed him. He knew that God will answer the prayers of the faithful, even prayers for their enemies. Remember Job, who prayed for the three men who'd attacked him in his grief and sorrow.

I'll now describe some aspects of his life in more detail, so that those of us that knew his work and suffering will not forget it, and to complete the understanding of all who read this book.

He was convicted of how wicked and lost he was, was converted and baptized and in 1655 became a member of his church, and soon afterwards became a zealous evangelist. In 1660 King Charles returned to the throne, and on the 12th of November Mr Bunyan was arrested at a meeting and locked up in Bedford jail for six years. Several friends in positions of trust and power argued for his release, and in 1666 The Act of Indulgence to dissenters gave him his freedom. Very soon afterwards he was arrested again while

preaching on the words "Do you believe in the Son of God?" and imprisoned for another six years. Even his jailer took pity on him in his trials and sufferings, like the Egyptian jailer did with Joseph. After this he was imprisoned again for half a year. During this time he wrote these books: Of Prayer by the Spirit, The Holy City's Resurrection, Grace Abounding, and the first part of Pilgrim's Progress.

In the final year of his imprisonment the pastor of the Bedford congregation died, and he was chosen as the new pastor on the 12th December 1671. In this role he had frequent disputes with scholars who came to oppose him, assuming him to be ignorant and uneducated, yet he would argue in plain words from the Scriptures, without fancy words or leaps of logic. Once a man stood up in church and demanded to know whether or not the Scriptures were really true copies of the originals. On another occasion he was preaching on how hard it was for most people to be saved, and a man accused him of lacking love, for his message would exclude much of the congregation. Mr Bunyan refuted him with the parable of the seed falling on stony ground, and other verses from Matthew 13 where Jesus preached from a boat. He always stayed close to the Scriptures - he wouldn't support any belief or practice that the Scriptures didn't specifically mention except for matters that were plainly obvious to everyone.

Everyone knows how hard he tried, in everything he did, to be considerate to those around him and avoid hurting anyone or giving cause for people to take offense at him. He tolerated many hardships and inconveniences but was never heard to grumble against or rebuke anyone for the harm they'd done to him, and he'd rebuke other Christians if he heard them doing this. The book of Jude describes the dispute between Satan and the archangel over the body of Moses, where the archangel refused to condemn Satan but instead left it to the Lord. That's how Mr Bunyan was, both in his speech and all his writings.

At home he kept strict discipline in prayer and teaching, like Joshua who said "It doesn't matter what others do, as for me and my house we will serve the Lord". Mr Bunyan was blessed with a wonderful family, his wife (as it says in the Psalms) like a fruitful vine and his children olive branches around his table, for that's what is promised the man who fears the Lord. Because of his long imprisonment and frequent sickness his earthly wealth was never great, yet he always had enough to decently provide for his family. He did have the greatest treasure of all, contentment, which as a wise man said, is a feast that never ends.

For a content man even a poor cottage is a kingly palace, and he had this happiness all his life. He didn't worry about this world, knowing that he was a stranger, a traveller passing through on the way to his eternal home made by God for him in heaven. In the end though his sufferings, age and frequent teaching took a toll on his body, and his day of departure drew near. Death unlocked the prison of his soul so it could grow to fill a more glorious mansion, and it put an end to his mortal role. Before earthly princes declare war they first withdraw their ambassadors, and in a similar way heaven had one last task for Mr Bunyan before he was called home - but in this case it was a labour of love.

A young man, a neighbour of Mr Bunyan's, had displeased his father so much that he was going to be disinherited. The young man asked Mr Bunyan to mediate with his father and persuade him to meet with his son. Mr Bunyan, always willing to help where he could, travelled to Reading in Berkshire, and made such pressing arguments against anger and passion and for love and reconciliation that the father was mollified, and yearned to see his son.

Having done all he could to resolve matters Mr Bunyan travelled back to London, but on the way was caught by heavy rain that drenched him through. Arriving in London he fell sick with a violent fever which he tolerated patiently, talking as if he desired nothing more than to die and be with Christ. He considered death as gain, and mortal life just a tedious delay holding him back from the glory ahead. He became weaker, and having settled his earthly affairs as best he could given the short time available and the severity of his illness, he resigned his soul into the hands of his merciful Redeemer. He followed his Pilgrim from the City of Destruction to the New Jerusalem, where his spirit had been all along in his prayers, his contemplations, his search for the manna and water of life, and his many writings and letters. He died after ten days illness at the house of Mr Struddock, a grocer, at the Star on Snow Hill in the parish of St Sepulchre's, London, on the 12th August 1688 at the age of 60. He was buried at the new graveyard near the Artillery Ground, where he sleeps until the morning of the resurrection in hope of rising to a glorious uncorruptible immortality of joy and happiness, free from trouble and sorrow and all tears wiped away, when the just will be given new bodies like Christ's, to reign with Him as kings and priests forever.

A brief Character of Mr JOHN BUNYAN

His face gave the impression that he was stern and bad tempered, but when you spoke to him he was mild and cheerful. He didn't talk much if he didn't have to, preferring to listen to others rather than hearing the sound of his own voice. He was very careful never to boast about himself or his abilities, instead seeming to have a poor opinion of himself, happy to accept the judgement of others. He hated lying and swearing, and kept his word. He didn't seek revenge when people hurt him, and loved to reconcile differences and make friends with everyone. He had a sharp, quick eye and was a good judge of character.

Physically he was quite tall, strongly built (though not fat), had a ruddy complexion and sparkling eyes. He was a redhead with an old fashioned moustache, though time sprinkled his hair with grey. He had a solid straight nose, a large mouth, a high forehead, and always dressed plainly and modestly.

That's what Mr Bunyan was like, inside and out, and he's been sorely missed. Prosperity hadn't puffed him up, and adversity hadn't shaken him - he'd always kept to the "golden mean".

*In him at once did three great worthies shine,
Historian, poet, and a choice divine:
Then let him rest in undisturbed dust,
Until the resurrection of the just.*

POSTSCRIPT

In his pilgrimage through this life God blessed him with four children: Thomas, Joseph, Sarah, and Mary. Mary was born blind and died while he was in prison. His wife Elizabeth didn't survive him for long, but died in 1692 to follow her faithful pilgrim to the new world. His wonderful books (sixty in all), remain to teach and help all who read them.

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