

Puritan Reading II

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### **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the information contained in three Puritan Classics: *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* by John Owen, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs, and *The Almost Christian Discovered* by Matthew Mead. The writer addresses these works with the aim of interacting with the doctrines presented within as well as presenting methods whereby one might apply those doctrines to his life. While an exhaustive treatment of these works is not possible given the limited parameters of this assignment, it is hoped that a summary presentation of the most salient points in each work will prove beneficial to the reader.

### **Overcoming Sin and Temptation**

According to Beeke and Pederson (2006), John Owen is often referred to as the “prince of the English divines” and considered by many to be “a genius with learning second only to Calvin’s” (p. 455). Born in 1616 in Stadham, near Oxford, John was the second son of Henry Owen, the local Puritan vicar. According to Thomson (1853), little is actually known about Owen’s childhood “and no records whatever have descended to tell us of the mother to whom was committed the training of his most susceptible years.” At the age of twelve, however, the details of Owen’s life begin to emerge.

Showing a tremendous aptitude for learning early on, young John entered Queen’s College, Oxford at the age of twelve where he studied the classics, mathematics, philosophy, theology, Hebrew, and rabbinical writings. According to Cornish (2005), Owen received his B.A. at sixteen and his M.A. at nineteen. While it was fairly commonplace for the brightest young men of his day to enter college between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, Owen’s accomplishments remain unparalleled. By way of comparison, the thoughtful reader today must

agree that the veritable gulf of disparity between education then and now renders any meaningful comparison between Owen and his contemporaries and the students of today impossible.

In addition to holding various offices at Oxford (including the vice-chancellorship), Owen served as chaplain to Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil Wars and, later in life, preached in London. According to Beeke and Pederson (2006), it was during this rather tumultuous period (1665-1673) that Owen contributed greatly to the ministries of “Independent pastors such as Robert Asty and John Bunyan, offering them financial assistance as well as spiritual advice” (p. 460).

Owen would serve in this and similar capacities in and around London for several years. Having suffered from asthma and gallstones during his final years of life, on August 24, 1683, Owen crossed over the narrow way and entered his eternal rest. His rich literary legacy contains an astounding number of offerings including his 9,000 page *Works*, his treatise on *Biblical Theology*, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, and numerous other important writings.

The work under consideration in this paper is included in volumes 6 through 9 of *The Works of John Owen* under the title of *Mortification of Sin and Temptation* (modern publishers have updated the title of this work to *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*). To facilitate a better understanding of Owen’s often difficult writing style, this paper is written using the modernized edition of this work edited by Kelly Kapic and Justin Taylor. The reader will understand that this work is not a paraphrase of the original, but has simply undergone slight revisions in terms of seventeenth century spelling and word selection that might prove difficult for the reader of the twenty-first century to understand.

Although bound in a single volume entitled, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, this more than 450 page work is, in fact, comprised of three of Owen’s (2006) most well-known works: *Of*

*the Mortification of Sin in Believers, Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It, and Indwelling Sin.* Each of these works will thus be summarized under separate headings.

### ***Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers***

The author presents this first work in three parts: Part One – The Necessity of Mortification, Part Two – The Nature of Mortification, and Part Three – The Means of Mortification. Before commencing with a summary of this work’s contents, it is necessary that a bit of definition be provided concerning a word predominant in Owen’s writing that is not often used today: mortification. Mortification is simply the act of subduing or putting to death one’s desires. In the context of this work, Owen is addressing the need that believers have for putting to death any remaining sin in their lives to death.

In Part One, Owen (2006) uses an exposition of Romans 8:13 (“...if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit, you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”) as a means of illustrating the need for believers to mortify the remaining sin in their lives. The author begins by explaining the conditional aspect of this passage. In other words, Paul, writing under inspiration, tells his readers that *if* they, as believers, behave one way, death will result, *but* if they behave another way, they will live. This “but if” proposition, Owen (2006) writes, may denote two things. The first possibility is that it denotes “The uncertainty of the event or thing promised, in respect of them to whom the duty is prescribed” (p. 46). This suggestion cannot be the case, Owen maintains, because Paul is speaking, not of uncertainty but the second possibility within this proposition: certainty. In other words, Paul is using this “but if” proposition much as one would use the same terminology in speaking to a sick man: “If you will take such a potion, or use such a remedy, you will be well” (p. 46). Owen wants his readers to

know, with absolute certainty that one's mortification of sin will lead to life while the failure to do so will result in death.

Owen is also quite clear in making the point that he is addressing, not the natural man, but believers. This observation certainly stands to reason given that, in keeping with the context in which his text appears (Romans 8), Paul is himself specifically addressing those for whom there awaits no condemnation (Romans 8:1); those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells and serves as "the principal efficient cause of the performance of this duty" (p. 47). While unbelievers are simply incapable of doing anything to help themselves in terms of getting rid of their sin, according to Owen (2006), believers, having been freed from the condemning power of sin, can and should "make the mortification of indwelling sin their daily work" (p. 50).

One of the most helpful of Owen's points is his astute observation that, even though the believer has been saved and stands positionally on the merits of the finished work of Christ, it does not excuse him from attending to his daily duty in mortifying remaining sin. Owen (2006) surmises, "Indwelling sin always abides, therefore, it must always be mortified" (p. 50). Paul states in his letter to the Philippians that the Christian dare not speak as "though we had already attained, or were already perfect" (Phil. 3:12). Instead, the "inward man is to be renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16) because we have a "body of death" (Rom. 7:24), "from whence" Owen (2006) observes, "we are not delivered but by the death of our bodies (Phil. 3:20)" (p. 51).

This truth sets the stage for Owen's further discussion of the fact that sin not only abides in the believer but is still very much active, "still laboring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh" (p. 51). He further notes:

When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep, when they are still, so

ought our contrivances against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion. (p. 51)

In other words, even when one experiences periods in which he thinks sin to be the least active, there yet remains cause for alarm as sin is the believer's constant nemesis from which he will only be freed at death.

Owen (2006) further explains that one's daily efforts to mortify sin are especially important because any sin that remains unchecked and unmortified "will bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins" (p. 52). These sins are enumerated by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians, "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like" (Gal. 5:19-21).

The importance of the Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer and has given them a new nature through His regenerative power, cannot be understated in terms of what is necessary to mortify remaining sin. As noted previously, without the divine assistance of the indwelling Holy Spirit, any attempt at mortifying sin under one's own perceived power to do so is a fool's errand. Owen (2006) relates:

The contest is for our lives and souls. Not to be daily employing the Spirit and new nature for the mortifying of sin is to neglect that excellent succor which God has given us against our greatest enemy. If we neglect to make use of what we have received, God may justly hold his hand from giving us more. His graces, as well as his gifts, are bestowed on us to use, exercise, and trade with. Not to be daily mortifying sin is to sin

against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who has furnished us with a principle of doing it. (p. 54)

Owen (2006) continues by pointing out that seeking any other solution to putting sin to death is futile. He writes, “In vain do men seek other remedies; they shall not be healed by them” (p. 58).

Owen (2006) then describes three ways in which the Holy Spirit mortifies sin: (1) “By causing our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh, and the fruits thereof and principles of them” (p. 61); (2) “By a real physical efficiency on the root and habit of sin, for the weakening, destroying, and taking it away” (p. 61); and (3) “He brings the cross of Christ into the heart of a sinner by faith, and gives us communion with Christ in His death and fellowship in his sufferings” (p. 61). The author then moves on to answer a question that frequently arises from the realization that the Holy Spirit mortifies sin in the believer, namely, “If the Spirit alone mortifies sin, why are we exhorted to mortify it?” Owen (2006) cleverly responds to this seeming conundrum by remarking very simply that it is “in us” that the Holy Spirit dwells. Paul explains to the Philippians that He “works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). According to the prophet Isaiah, the Holy Spirit works “all our works in us” (Is. 26:12). In working in us, Owen (2006) concludes, the Holy Spirit still works contingently in accordance with our obedience. The author writes:

He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; He works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that His assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself. (p. 62)

In Part Two of this work, Owen (2006) writes with more specificity concerning how one is to go about mortifying sin. He begins by explaining that, contrary to fairly common belief,

mortification does not involve the complete and utter destruction of remaining sin. That is certainly the believer's aim, but such utter destruction of sin is simply not possible in this life. Owen (2006) also explains that mortifying sin is not merely the concealing of it. To conceal sin, in the author's estimation, is simply to play the hypocrite. Mortification of sin is also not realized in the occasional conquest that one may experience over a particular sin. So what does true mortification of sin involve? According to Owen (2006), mortification of sin "consists in a habitual weakening of sin" (p. 73) and a "constant fighting and contending against sin" (p. 76). Since the believer will never be able, this side of heaven, to rid himself of his remaining sin, the only means at his disposal are for him to continually fight against his sin in hopes of weakening it in terms of its mastery over him.

How does mortification take place? Owen (2006) instructs the reader in this regard under the heading of "General Directions for Mortification" (p. 78). First of all, the author insists, mortification is simply not possible unless a man is a believer. Remember, in the author's foundational text, Romans 8:13, the apostle prefaces his teaching concerning mortification with the words, "If you through the Spirit..." While an unregenerate man may indeed give the appearance of having mortified particular sins in his life, only the believer in whom God's Holy Spirit is pleased to dwell, can genuinely mortify sin.

In the ninth chapter of this work, Owen (2006) offers the reader nine particular directions for the mortification of sin, each of which he explains in substantial detail. Helpfully, the editor enumerates these in his overview as follows:

- (1) consider whether the sin you are contending with has any dangerous symptoms attending it;
- (2) get a clear and abiding sense upon your mind and conscience of the guilt, danger, and evil of that sin;
- (3) load your conscience with the guilt of it;
- (4) get a constant

longing for deliverance from the power of it; (5) consider whether the sin is rooted in your nature and exacerbated by your temperament; (6) consider what occasions and advantages your sin has taken to exert and put forth itself, and watch against them all; (7) rise mightily against the first actings and conceptions of your sin; (8) meditate in such a way that you are filled at all times with self-abasement and thoughts of your own vileness; (9) listen to what God says to your soul and do not speak peace to yourself before God speaks it, but hearken what he says to your soul. (p. 38)

While well beyond the scope of this paper, the writer would heartily recommend a full reading of the author's thoughts in this regard.

In Part Three of this work, Owen (2006) is very careful to point out that everything he has said to this point has merely been preparatory to the task of one's mortifying the remaining sin in his life. Surprisingly, by the time he arrives at the point where he instructs the reader in how to mortify sin, he has only two suggestions or exhortations. The first thing Owen (2006) writes is that one should "Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of your sin" (p. 131). He continues writing, "[Christ's] blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and you will die a conqueror; yea, you will, through the good providence of God, live to see your lust dead at your feet" (p. 131). Secondly, Owen (2006) writes, the believer should "Raise up [his] heart by faith to an expectation of relief from Christ" (p. 133). In other words, the believer should have faith enough to believe that Christ will assist him in his time of need. If one who believes thus trusts in Christ, he can be assured of this promise: "...your soul shall be satisfied, He will assuredly deliver you; he will slay the lust, and your latter end shall be peace. Only look for it at His hand; expect when and how He will do it" (p. 133).

***Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It***

This work is divided into four parts: Part One – The Nature of Temptation, Part Two – The Danger of Entering Temptation, Part Three – The Great Duty of All Believers, and Part Four – Particular Cases and General Directions.

In Part One of this work, Owen (2006) once again uses a primary text as a springboard or foundation upon which he builds his doctrinal case for the nature and power of temptation. In this instance, his text is Jesus' exhortation to His disciples in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation." Owen (2006) observes and expounds upon three particular points stemming from this verse: (1) The thing which is to be avoided – temptation; (2) How one becomes subject to temptation – by entering into it; and (3) How one can avoid temptation – by watching and praying.

Owen (2006) begins by discussing the general nature of temptation. In so doing, he defines temptation as the trying, proving, or testing of something with a specific purpose in mind. Very often, believers are commanded to try or search themselves so as to determine their authenticity. Likewise, we are sometimes prone to pray that God would also try us in the same way. In Psalm 26:2, for example, the psalmist prays, "Examine me, O Lord, and try me; Test my mind and my heart." What is revealed following such "tempting" will be either good or bad. Owen (2006) helpfully notes that "Temptation is like a knife, that may either cut the meat or the throat of a man; it may be his food or his poison, his exercise or his destruction" (p. 152).

The author then moves beyond the general nature of temptation to discuss its special nature. He speaks of temptation as being active or passive. Active temptation, Owen (2006) notes, is that which leads to evil. Passive temptation, on the other hand, while it contains evil and suffering, is often regarded as affliction (James 1:2). When one encounters the passive form, we

are instructed to “count it all joy when we fall into temptation”; concerning active temptation, however, we are exhorted to “enter not into it” (Matt. 26:41). It is said that “God tempts no man” (James 1:13). This proposition is true in the sense that God leads no man into sin, however, in Genesis 22:1, Moses says that “God tempted Abraham.” What is the reader to make of this suggestion? Only that God provided Abraham with a test that was designed for a specific purpose.

Owen (2006) proceeds to explain “The end for which God tempts” (p. 153). In doing this, he observes that God’s general ends are two: (1) “He does it to show unto man what is in him” (p. 153). In other words, in Abraham’s case, the patriarch never would have known what kind of faith (and in what degree) he actually possessed unless and until God put him to the ultimate test; (2) God does it to show himself unto a man, and that, in a way of preventing grace (p. 153).

Owen (2006) continues:

A man shall see that it is God alone who keeps [him] from all sin. Until we are tempted, we think we live on our own strength. Though all men do this or that, we will not. When the trial comes, we quickly see whence is our preservation, by standing or falling. (p. 153)

Not only does God’s testing reveal to man that God alone can prevent him from sinning, it also reveals God’s renewing grace. Owen (2006) observes:

We know not the power and strength that God puts forth in our behalf, nor what is the sufficiency of his grace, until, comparing the temptation with our own weakness, it appears unto us. The efficacy of the antidote is found when poison has been taken; and the preciousness of medicines is made known by diseases. We shall never know what

strength there is in grace if we know not what strength there is in temptation. We must be tried, that we may be made sensible of being preserved. (p. 154)

Part Two of Owen's treatise on temptation focuses on the dangers associated with entering into temptation. The first thing the author points out in this regard is that *entering temptation* is not the same as *being tempted*. This critical distinction underscores the fact that the believer should never expect to be free from temptation; rather he should work to avoid entering into it. To enter into temptation means to fall prey to it and to commit the act suggested by the temptation. The reader would do well to remember that Jesus Himself was tempted, even referring to that particular time in his ministry as the time of His "temptations" (Luke 22:28), and yet He never submitted Himself to the temptations before Him.

Additionally, Owen (2006) relates, entering into temptation is "more than the ordinary work of Satan and our own lusts" (p. 159). Indeed, Satan is at work every moment of every day and yet, it is only at certain times that believers legitimately enter into the sins brought on by temptation. Even then, however, Owen (2006) argues that one may not have needed to enter into temptation because God always provides a way of escape before the point where sin actually comes to fruition. According to the author, the "entering in" to which Jesus refers in Matthew 26:41 is to "fall into temptation and be entangled in it" (p. 160). Entering into temptation is, as Paul expresses it, "'to fall into temptation' (1 Tim. 6:9), as a man falls into a pit or deep place...where he is entangled; the man is not presently killed and destroyed, but he is entangled and detained" (p. 160).

Owen (2006) relates that this kind of temptation comes about in several ways. First, it comes after one spends an inordinate amount of time contemplating it. In Owen's (2006) words, succumbing to temptation often results when "by long solicitations, causing the mind frequently

to converse with the evil solicited unto, it begets extenuating thoughts of it” (p. 162). Secondly, Owen (2006) notes, one falls into temptation when he sees others doing something which he himself has not appropriately judged to be sin or, in his words, “When it has prevailed on others, and the soul is not filled with dislike and abhorrency of them and their ways, nor with pity and prayer for their deliverance” (p. 162). In the third place, one can fall into sin when temptation “[complicates] itself with many considerations that, perhaps, are not absolutely evil” (p. 163). In other words, very often temptation is strongest when the believer attempts to rationalize it and dismiss it on the grounds that it is not absolutely evil. Owen (2006) remarks that this situation was similar to the situation in which the Galatians found themselves when they fell from the purity of the gospel by readopting some of the less odious and legalistic practices of the Judaizers. This situation, of course, led to Paul’s stern rebuke in his letter to them:

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed *as* crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal. 3:1-5)

Owen’s (2006) instruction here, if diligently applied, is extremely helpful in enabling the believer to avoid falling into temptation. When tempting thoughts enter the mind, instead of entertaining them at length, they should be eliminated at once. Likewise, one should neither be enticed by or approve of the sins of others lest they fall into the same temptation. Finally, the believer should avoid the tendency to “sugar coat” his sin or to concentrate on the “not so evil”

aspects of it. This tactic is without a doubt one of Satan's most effective in tempting God's children to fall into sin.

In Part Three, the author exhorts all believers to recognize that it is their great duty to use any and all of those means Christ affords them to avoid falling into temptation. Owen (2006) exhorts those who believe, "It is the great duty of all believers to use all diligence in the ways of Christ's appointment, that they fall not into temptation" (p. 167). The author then provides two fundamental considerations that should be at the forefront of every believer's mind concerning the avoidance of falling into temptation.

In the first place, Owen (2006) writes, "Our Savior instructs us to pray that we not enter into temptation" (p. 167). When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray in Matthew 6, He instructed them to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). The author provides a helpful exegetical note here in pointing out that when one prays this prayer, it must be understood that "it is not so much the *not giving us up to* [temptation] as the powerful *keeping us from* it that is intended" (p. 167). In other words, God does not lead His children to be tempted but, in His leading them, He is able (and inclined) to lead them from it. Jesus' desire that His children would not be tempted is reflected in John's recording of what is often called Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. Concerning His disciples, both present, and future, the Lord prays:

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. (John 17:14-15)

The Lord knows our weaknesses; He knows the power of temptation that we face, having experienced it Himself (Heb. 2:18); He knows how vainly confident we can pretend to be, and so He assists His own in overcoming the temptation that can so easily consume them.

The second consideration Owen (2006) provides in helping the believer avoid temptation is that “Christ promises freedom and deliverance as a reward for obedience” (p. 168). Owen (2006) points out that “This is the great promise made to the church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10), wherein Christ found nothing that He would blame, ‘You shall be kept from the hour of temptation’” (p. 168). As the author suggests, one should note very carefully that Jesus didn’t promise to preserve His children “*in* the temptation” as a reward for their obedience, but promised that they would be “kept *from* it.” What a wonderful promise it is indeed to know that one who practices obedience will be graciously rewarded with a reprieve from the temptation that so easily plagues him.

The great duty of all believers then is to avail themselves of the means Christ affords them to avoid falling into temptation. These means include: (1) Reading the Word of God frequently and with a mind predisposed to obeying what is read; (2) Praying regularly for the Lord to intercede in one’s life and to provide the divine enablement that will allow him to avoid falling into temptation; (3) Availing oneself of the help of like-minded believers who can assist when temptation does arise; (4) Carefully consider the end of the given temptation which will always be the dishonoring of God and the ruin of one’s soul; and (5) Remember the devastating effects of having fallen into temptation in the past. Owen (2006) queries, “Have they not defiled your conscience, disquieted your peace, weakened you in your obedience, and clouded the face of God?” (p. 181). Indeed, if one will only avail himself of these prescribed means of avoiding temptation, he will find that the sin that was once so attractive, suddenly begins to lose its luster.

In Part Four, Owen (2006) writes at considerable length about how one might know whether or not he has, in fact, entered into temptation, how to watch the heart, and how one

might keep Christ's word concerning patience. The author begins by offering three primary points useful in determining whether or not one has entered into temptation.

The first point made by Owen (2006) as a means of determining whether or not one has entered into temptation is as follows: "When a man is drawn into any sin, he may be sure that he has entered into temptation" (p. 187). The author further observes that "Sin is a fruit that comes only from that root" (p. 187). While this point may seem overly simplistic to some, it is fundamental to understanding the foundational premise that all sin first presents itself in the form of temptation. Owen (2006) further states:

This men sometimes take no notice of, to their great disadvantage. When they are overtaken with a sin they set themselves to repent of that sin, but do not consider the temptation that was the cause of it, to set themselves against that also to take care that they enter no more into it. (p. 187)

Indeed, if man thought more about the temptation leading to his sins than he does about the sins themselves, he would be better equipped to nip his sins in the proverbial bud rather than to allow them to come to full fruition.

The second means of determining whether one has entered into temptation is stated by Owen (2006) in this way:

When by a man's state or condition in life, or any means whatsoever, it comes to pass that his lust and any temptation meet with occasions and opportunities for its provocation and stirring up, let that man know, whether he perceive it or not, that he is certainly entered into temptation. (p. 190)

When temptation meets with opportunities that provoke it and stir it up, one can be assured that he has already entered into it. Though not nearly as astute an observation as the author's, very

simply stated, if one has a problem with gluttony, he should probably avoid frequenting places where temptation might be stirred up. If a man has a particular problem with lust, for example, visits to the beach or the pool will most likely not be in his best interest. The believer who is conscious of his sins and the things that tend to trigger them would do well to avoid putting himself in situations that contribute to those sins. When he does give opportunity and occasion to his sins, he has already entered into temptation. Owen (2006) notes:

If your business, course of life, societies, or whatever else it be of the like kind, do cast you on such things, ways, persons, as suit your lust or corruption, know that you are entered into temptation; how you will come out God only knows. (p. 190)

Owen (2006) expresses his third point in this regard as follows:

When a man is weakened, made negligent or formal in duty, when he can omit duties or content himself with a careless, lifeless performance of them, without delight, joy, or satisfaction to his soul, who had another frame formerly; let him know, that though he may not be acquainted with the particular distemper wherein it consists, yet in something or other he is entered into temptation, which at the length he will find evident, to his trouble and peril. (p. 190)

There are many reasons why professing believers suddenly find themselves disinterested in the things of God and become lax in the performance of their Christian duties. Owen (2006) notes that a man may be in this condition and yet not know precisely how he arrived there. He will, however, in time, discover the nature of his sin and it will cause him considerable trouble. The key to dealing with this condition is for one to determine, as soon as possible, what particular temptation has befallen him. In Owen's (2006) words:

If he find his pulse not beating aright and evenly toward duties of worship and communion with God—if his spirit be low and his heart faint in them—let him conclude, though his lust does not yet burn nor rage, that he is entered into temptation, and it is high time for him to consider the particular causes of his distemper. (p. 191)

Entering into temptation is similar to falling ill physically. The sooner the doctor can determine the cause of one's illness, the easier it will be to make the body whole again.

Owen (2006) follows his previous diagnostic measures with a chapter entitled, "General Directions to Preserve a Soul from Entering into Temptation: Watch and Pray." Although the author spends considerable time developing his ideas on what it means to watch and pray, his views to this end can be summed up quite simply by saying first, believers are to be ever watchful. The believer is to be on constant watch over his own heart, recognizing temptation when it first arises and stopping it before it comes to fruition in sin. He is likewise to be watchful over other people and circumstances that may contribute to temptation and sin. In addition to watching, one is also to pray that God would continually make him mindful of the dangers posed by the sin that is so easily brought on by temptation. He is also to pray that God would put a hedge around him, protecting him from the evil one who desires nothing more than to see him fall irretrievably into temptation. And finally, he is to pray that he would continue to avail himself of the means afforded him by Christ which will ensure his continual peace and safety.

### ***Indwelling Sin***

This third work, like the first, is divided into three parts: Part One – The Nature of Indwelling Sin, Part Two – The Power and Efficacy of Indwelling Sin, and Part Three – The Effect and Strength of Indwelling Sin. Owen's (2006) foundational text is Romans 7:21 where

the apostle Paul states, “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.” Contrary to the opinion of some, the apostle Paul made this statement, not in a moment of reflection upon his days as a lost man, but as a regenerate man. Owen (2006) displays his understanding of this reality in the opening words of the first chapter of this book saying, “It is of indwelling sin, and that in the remainders of it in persons after their conversion to God, with its power, efficacy, and effects that we intend to treat” (p. 233). Owen (2006) acknowledges that, even in his day, this passage was the subject of debate. Rather than arguing, however, he simply writes:

I shall not at present enter into that dispute, but take that for granted which may be undeniably proved and evinced – namely, that it is the condition of a regenerate person, with respect unto the remaining power of indwelling sin which is there proposed and exemplified, by and in the person of the apostle himself. (p. 233)

According to the author, the reader can observe four things in Paul’s words in Romans 7:21. The first of these involves the name that Paul gives to indwelling sin in describing its power and efficacy. He refers to indwelling sin as “a law” (which is a reference to his previous statement concerning the “sin that dwells in” him). In referring to indwelling sin in this way, Paul is expressing the similarity that sin bears to an actual law as both exhibit a directing and commanding influence. Like any other law, Owen (2006) relates, sin “moves and regulates the mind and the will as to the things which it requires or forbids” (p. 234). Paul, Owen (2006) further notes, refers to the law as “a powerful and effectual indwelling principle, inclining and pressing unto actions agreeable and suitable unto its own nature” (p. 234). Paul wants to do good, but it is as if there is a law of sin at work in his heart actively dictating his activities to the contrary.

In the second place, Owen (2006) maintains, Paul proposes how he came to discover this law: He found it in himself (“I find then a law”). Paul had not discovered this law on the basis of someone having told him about it; he had experienced (and was yet experiencing) its power and effectiveness from the moment of his conversion. This experience, the author contends, is proof that Paul was a regenerate man when he penned these words. The man who remains in his sin does not sense this law within himself. Only those who, by God’s grace, have been given the spiritual faculties to discern spiritual truths can attest to the existence of this law within them. Owen (2006) writes the following concerning all true believers:

They find it in themselves; they find it as a law. It has self-evidencing efficacy to them that are alive to discern it. They that find not its power are under its dominion.

Whosoever would contend against it shall know and find that it is present with them, that it is powerful in them. He shall find the stream to be strong who swims against it, though he who rolls along with it be insensible of it. (p. 235).

The third observation stemming from Paul’s words in Romans 7:21 concerns the effect that his discovery of indwelling sin had on him. He wanted to do good. Having been given a new heart by the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit, Paul was inclined to do good. Owen (2006) noted in this regard that “There is, through grace, kept up in believers a constant and ordinarily prevailing will of doing good, notwithstanding the power and efficacy of indwelling sin to the contrary” (p. 236).

Finally, the words of the apostle Paul reflect that, even while he desired to do good, evil seemed to be his ever-present companion. As he expressed in his letter to the Galatians, “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that I cannot do the things that I would” (Gal. 5:17). It is this war between the Spirit and

the flesh that the author seeks to address in the remainder of this work. Owen (2006) offers a bit of indispensable advice illustrating the importance of this subject:

Awake, therefore, all of you in whose hearts is anything of the ways of God! Your enemy is not only upon you, as on Samson of old, but is in you also. He is at work, by all ways of force and craft, as we shall see. Would you not dishonor God and his gospel; would you not scandalize the saints and ways of God; would you not wound your consciences and endanger your souls; would you not grieve the good and holy Spirit of God, the author of all your comforts; would you keep your garments undefiled, and escape the woeful temptations and pollutions of the days wherein we live; would you be preserved from the number of the apostates in these latter days? Awake to the consideration of this cursed enemy, which is the spring of all these and innumerable other evils, as also of the ruin of all the souls that perish in this world! (p. 239)

Owen (2006) begins Part Two of this work by pointing out that every law has two general characteristics: dominion and efficacy to provoke. The law of sin which operates in the believer only shares one of these characteristics. Since the believer has been set free from the power of remaining sin (if he will only obey and not fall into temptation), it cannot be said that sin still has dominion over him. Having said that, however, sin can remain a dominating factor in the life of the believer in some respects.

What is indisputable is that the law of sin most certainly retains the power to provoke even the strongest believer. Owen (2006) sets forth Moses as an example of this principle. According to Hebrews 11:25-26, "He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he looked unto the recompense of reward." In other words, there was a battle going on in Moses' mind between the law of sin and the law of

grace. The motive of the law of sin was to entice Moses with the enjoyment of sin's pleasures. The motive of the law of grace, on the other hand, was to have Moses look to his eternal reward as a result of his obedience. By way of example, all who profess Christ should seek to follow the law of grace, looking forward to the eternal rewards it offers as opposed to the law of sin with its temporal pleasures.

In Part Three, Owen (2006) discusses the effect and strength of indwelling sin. He begins by discussing the need for believers to recognize that the law of sin is not only common to all believers but has frustrated even the most mature believers throughout history. Men like Noah, Lot, David, Hezekiah, and others, the author writes:

...were not men of an ordinary size, but higher than their brethren in profession, yea, in real holiness. And surely that must needs be of a mighty efficacy that could hurry such giants in the ways of God into such abominable sins as they fell into. (p. 363)

Owen (2006) continues, remarking that these same men fell into their respective sins, not at the beginning of their walks with God "when they had had but little experience of the goodness of God, and the sweetness and pleasantness of obedience, or the power and craft of sin...but after a long course of walking with God" (p. 364). This simple yet profound observation should cause all believers to examine themselves and to respect the power of indwelling sin.

In the pages that follow, Owen (2006) illustrates how the power of indwelling sin can be seen from its devastating effects. For example, indwelling sin "manifests its power in the habitual declensions from zeal and holiness" (p. 365). Many professing believers, having begun well in their walks with Christ, soon become overwhelmed by indwelling sin that is evidenced by their gradual decline in terms of zeal and holiness. Owen (2006) uses the example of the seven churches of Asia Minor to which John refers in his revelation. All of them began well and

remained well until indwelling sin in the lives of their members robbed them of their zeal and holiness. The apostle John exhorted his readers pointing out that, as believers, they are to be careful that they “lose not the things that we have wrought” (2 John 8).

Owen (2006) follows this observation with some very sage advice designed, not only to accurately assess the situation in the churches of old, but to help those in the church at any time examine themselves to determine whether or not they are adversely affected by indwelling sin. For example, one should ask:

Is their zeal for God as warm, living, vigorous, effectual, solicitous, as it was in their first giving themselves unto God? Or rather, is there not a common, slight, selfish frame of spirit in the room of it come upon most professors? (p. 367)

In addition to this particular question, Owen (2006) asks a couple more. First, “Is men’s delight in the ordinances and worship of God the same as in former days? Do they find the same sweetness and relish in them as they have done of old?” (p. 368). Secondly, he asks:

Is there the same conscientious tenderness of sinning abiding in many as was in the days of old, the same exact performance of private duties, the same love to the brethren, the same readiness for the cross, the same humility of mind and spirit, the same self-denial? (p. 368)

Negative responses to these questions will certainly reflect the existence and effects of indwelling sin in those who profess Christ. If left unchecked, the fate of the church in which this indwelling sin remains will undoubtedly be similar to that of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea (Rev. 2 and 3).

In the following chapter (Chapter 15), Owen (2006) addresses “the ways and means whereby indwelling sin prevails on believers into habitual declensions and decays as to degrees

of grace and holiness” (p. 374). The material presented in this chapter is actually just a further refinement of the ideas presented in the previous chapter, except here the author reminds the reader of the experience of believers during the initial stages of their conversion. For example, he notes that “They have a fresh, vigorous sense of pardoning mercy” (p. 375) and “They have a fresh taste of spiritual things” (p. 375). Indwelling sin, however, “taints these springs” (p. 376) “By sloth and negligence” (p. 376), “By unframing the soul” (p. 377), and “By false and foolish opinions corrupting the simplicity of the gospel (p. 378).

The goal of every believer, of course, should be to avoid falling prey to the power and efficacy of indwelling sin. Although certainly easier said than done, the believer can have great success insofar as he is committing himself to living in obedience to the Word of God and availing himself of those means afforded him by Christ to promote his spiritual growth. No believer will ever escape the power of indwelling sin this side of heaven. All believers, however, have at their disposal the means of reducing the power and effect of indwelling sin considerably.

### **The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment**

While relatively little is known about Jeremiah Burroughs’ childhood, scholars have been able to determine that he was baptized in 1601. According to Beeke and Pederson (2006), the next mention of him in the historical record places him at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1617 from which he “graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1621 and a Master of Arts degree in 1624. His tutor was Thomas Hooker” (p. 118).

Burroughs’ career in Christian ministry began in 1627 when he became Edmund Calamy’s assistant in Suffolk. Both Burroughs and Calamy would later become members of the Westminster Assembly. From 1631 to 1636, Burroughs served as rector in Tivetshall, a Norfolk church which, according to Beeke and Pederson (2006) still stands today (p. 118). In 1636,

Burroughs was relieved of his position at Tivetshall because of his staunch refusal to read King James' *Book of Sports*, a book that promoted the enjoyment of various sports on the Lord's Day. He was also relieved of his duties because he refused to stop praying extemporaneously versus simply reading from the church's book of prayer.

Burroughs would eventually recover from these temporary setbacks and, according to Beeke and Pederson (2006), from 1640 until his death in 1646, would serve as pastor of two of London's largest congregations: Stepney and St. Giles, Cripplegate (p. 119). Thomas Brooks referred to Burroughs as "a prince of preachers."

In 1646, following a fall from his horse, Burroughs passed away. Despite his comparatively brief ministry, Burroughs was rather prolific in terms of his literary contributions. These include: *The Evil of Evils, or The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin, The Excellency of a Gracious Spirit, An Exposition of the Prophecy of Hosea, Gospel Conversation, Hope, The Saints' Happiness, The Saints' Treasury*, and many other important works, including the one under consideration for this paper, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.

The foundational text for this work is Philippians 4:11, in which the apostle Paul declares, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Burroughs (2013) begins his treatise on this passage, appropriately enough, by describing what is meant by Christian contentment. He does so by first stating his purpose. He writes:

This text contains a very timely cordial to revive the drooping spirits of the saints in these sad and sinking times. For the 'hour of temptation' has already come upon all the world to try the inhabitants of the earth. In particular, this is the day of Jacob's trouble in our own bowels. (p. 1)

Of particular interest to Burroughs (2013) is the fact that the word “state” or “estate” does not appear in the original text of Philippians 4:11. This omission thus expands Paul’s meaning to include whatever should befall him. In other words, whether he has little to nothing, whatever he has or whatever he is, he has resolved to be content with what his all-sufficient God has provided for him. Burroughs (2013) is also quick to deflect the suggestion that Paul was claiming self-sufficiency, rather that he found a sufficiency in his own heart through the grace of Christ that was in him. In effect, the apostle is saying, “Though I have not outward comforts and worldly conveniences to supply my necessities, yet I have a sufficient portion between Christ and my soul abundantly to satisfy me in every condition.” (p. 2).

Burroughs (2013) further notes, “There is no other apostle or writer of Scripture who deals so much with this spiritual mystery of contentment as this our Apostle has done throughout his epistles” (p. 2). Some examples appear in such passages as 1 Timothy 6:6-8; Hebrews 13:5 (the authorship of which Burroughs undoubtedly attributes to Paul). One of the more interesting arguments the author makes concerning the biblical doctrine of contentment is that belief in the doctrine does not preclude or prevent one from seeking to better himself. Burroughs (2013) substantiates this important truth with a couple of key observations.

In the first place, it is no sin to complain to God. He writes, “Though a Christian ought to be quiet under God’s correcting hand, he may without any breach of Christian contentment complain to God” (p. 4). This privilege does not imply, the author clarifies, that one can approach God with a “tumultuous clamor and shrieking out in a confused passion, yet in a quiet, still, submissive way” in an attempt to “unbosom his heart to God” (p. 4). In like manner, one is also encouraged to speak with his brethren about the way God is dealing with him, again, not as

a way of calling into question God's methods or character, but in hopes that one might offer a word of encouragement to another's weary soul.

Secondly, the author maintains, contentment is not reduced or destroyed by one's seeking to be delivered out of certain afflictions by the use of lawful means. God's providence not only places the believer in situations from which he longs to be delivered, that same providence often affords him escape through lawful means. In fact, God providentially established the law-based system by which man has governed himself from the beginning of his existence for this very reason. The believer, Burroughs (2013) notes, must simply be one who, while certainly availing himself of lawful means, resigns himself to be delivered "when God wills, as God wills, and how God wills, so that our wills are melted into the will of God" (p. 4).

Having made these observations, one must note that there are certain attitudes and actions that are opposed to contentment. These include: "(1) Murmuring and repining; (2) Vexing and fretting (which goes beyond murmuring); (3) A tumultuousness of spirit; (4) An unsettled and unstable spirit; (5) distracting and heart-consuming cares; (6) Sinking discouragements; (7) Sinful shiftings and shirkings to get relief and help, and (8) Rebellion" (pp. 4-6).

The author explains the scope of biblical contentment in three points. First of all, one is expected to be content, submitting to God in affliction, regardless of what that affliction might be. It is quite easy to be content when faced with certain afflictions but not with others. Burroughs (2013) contends that the believer exemplifies true contentment when he finds comfort in God no matter what befalls him.

Secondly, the author explains, true contentment is displayed when one has no regard for the duration of the affliction. Some are prone to complain, not about the particular affliction they may be enduring but the time for which they have had to endure it. Burroughs (2013) reasons,

“...though we be shut up in great affliction, yet till God opens the door, we should be willing to stay; God has put us in, and God will bring us out” (p. 14).

The author’s third point is that the believer must be content, not only with the particular affliction or its duration, but with whatever other circumstances may accompany it, which includes other afflictions that may come on the heels of one’s current affliction. Very often, God’s purpose is to bring one affliction on top of another for His purposes and, even in this situation, the believer is to be content.

Burroughs (2013) moves on from a purely definitional treatment to a conceptual investigation of contentment. He begins by pointing out that contentment is a mystery. This mystery, as the author sees it, is predicated on the idea that “while a Christian may be the most contented man in the world, he also may be the most unsatisfied” (p. 17). In other words, while the Christian may indeed be content with what the Lord provides for him as necessary to live in the here and now, he remains discontent because what he has now cannot compare with what yet awaits him in glory. The author very helpfully cites Philippians 4:7-9 in making his point even clearer (p. 19). When Paul states that “the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard [the believers’] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” he does so on the basis of what he goes on to say in verse 9, “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” Burroughs (2013) then writes:

Here is what I would observe from this text. That the peace of God is not enough to a gracious heart except it may have the God of that peace. A carnal heart could be satisfied if he might but have outward peace, though it is not the peace of God; peace in the state, and his trading, would satisfy him. But mark how a godly heart goes beyond a carnal. All outward peace is not enough; I must have the peace of God. But suppose you have the

peace of God. Will that not quiet you? No, I must have the God of peace; as the peace of God so the God of peace. That is, I must enjoy the God who gives me the peace; I must have the Cause as well as the effect. (p. 19)

Another component in this mystery called contentment is that, contrary to popular belief, “A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by way of addition, as by way of subtraction” (p. 19). By this statement the author means to say that contentment is gained, not merely by the addition of the virtue itself but by subtracting from one’s desires in such a way “so as to make his desires and his circumstances even and equal” (p. 19).

In short, Burroughs (2013) relates, the Christian “lives upon the dew of God’s blessing” (p. 26). In other words, whatever it is that God, in His grace and mercy, is pleased to dispense, the believer is to be content with it. One is reminded of Solomon’s prayer in Proverbs 30:7-9 when he says:

Two things I asked of You, do not refuse me before I die: Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, that I not be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or that I not be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God.

It is also worth noting here that the Christian has “the dew of God’s blessing” not only in good things but everything (p. 29). Burroughs (2013) notes that “All God’s strokes are strokes of love and mercy, all God’s ways are mercy and truth, to those that fear him and love him (Ps. 25:10)...affliction, as well as...prosperity, are mercy and love to him” (p. 29).

From where does this contentment come? According to the author, it comes from two things. First, contentment comes from the covenant God has made with those who believe (p. 35). When, by His grace, God is pleased to enter into an eternal covenant relationship with the

believer, He also provides him with the assurance of that covenant relationship that, in turn, brings about contentment. This source of contentment is repeatedly evidenced in His word (e.g., Heb. 7:23-25; John 6:37-39; Rom. 8:35-39; 1 Pet. 1:3-9, etc.).

In addition to God's covenant as a source, contentment often derives from the realization concerning the glorious things of heaven. Burroughs (2013) shares a quote from the martyrs in this regard who said, "Though we have but a hard breakfast, yet we shall have a good dinner, we shall very soon be in heaven" (p. 43). The apostle Paul shares a very similar sentiment when he writes:

We do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

Burroughs (2013) continues by suggesting various ways through which Christ teaches contentment. In summary, these include: (1) Self-denial. To the extent that one practices self-denial, he will learn to live with what he possesses and be content; (2) The vanity of the creature. The author writes, "Whatever there is in the creature has an emptiness in it... There is nothing in the creature that is suitable for a gracious heart to feed upon for its good and happiness" (p 48); (3) The soul's coming to understand its relation to the world. Burroughs (2013) writes, "Consider what your condition is, you are pilgrims and strangers; so do not think to satisfy yourselves here" (p. 51); (4) The burden of a prosperous outward condition. Note carefully the author's intent. He does not argue that a prosperous outward condition is a blessing (though it certainly can be), only that it can also pose a tremendous burden for some. Jesus spoke of this burden in Matthew 6:24

when He pointed out that no one can serve two masters as he will either hate one and love the other. One simply cannot serve both God and mammon; (5) Finally, Burroughs (2013) writes, the Lord teaches contentment by pointing out “the great and dreadful evil it is to be given up to one’s heart’s desires” (p. 59). One of the more poignant examples the author provides is from Psalm 81:11-12, “But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.” In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul also addresses God’s reaction to man’s continual sin. Having discussed at length how the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man who neither honored God or gave Him thanks and had exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for idols, Paul writes:

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.  
(Rom. 1:24-25)

If this sobering indictment were not enough, the apostle uses the phrase “God gave them over” twice more in the seven verses that follow. The writer to the Hebrews warned that “if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment” (Heb. 10:26). It is indeed “a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

The excellence of contentment is demonstrated in several important ways. For example, Burroughs (2013) writes, “By contentment we come to give God the worship that is due Him” (p. 66). True contentment always contains an element of humility stemming from the recognition

of where one stands in relation to God. This recognition results in worship. Burroughs (2013) explains:

I beseech you: in active obedience we worship God by doing what pleases God, but by passive obedience we do as well worship God by being pleased with what God does.

Now when I perform a duty, I worship God, I do what pleases God; why should I not as well worship God when I am pleased with what God does? (p. 67)

The author summarizes that “It is but one side of a Christian to endeavor to do what pleases God; you must as well endeavor to be pleased with what God does, and so you will come to be a complete Christian...” (p. 68).

Another blessed byproduct of contentment is its ability to deliver the believer from all kinds of temptation. The author writes, “Oh, the temptations that men of discontented spirits are subject to! The devil loves to fish in troubled waters. That is our proverb about men and women, their dispositions is to fish in troubled waters” (p. 71). When one lacks contentment, the author relates, he is far more likely to attempt to secure it from wherever he can find it. Those who are content in Christ, however; those who want for nothing in terms of true spiritual needs are far less prone to be drawn into temptation than those without.

According to Burroughs (2013), achieving true contentment is an “art of divinity” (p. 78) and is therefore intensely practical. In other words, contentment is not merely a speculative thing intended solely for the believer’s contemplation, rather it is something that should be sought and labored for. The first step toward gaining contentment is for one to be humbled by his lack of contentment in the past. One of the most effective ways for the believer to experience this humility is to abstain from his innate tendency to “murmur” in discontent. Burroughs (2013) observes:

A murmuring heart is a very sinful heart; so when you are troubled for this affliction you had need to turn your thoughts rather to be troubled for the murmuring of your heart, for that is your greatest trouble. There is an affliction upon you and that is grievous, but there is a murmuring heart within and that is more grievous. Oh, that we could but convince men and women that a murmuring spirit is a greater evil than any affliction, whatever the affliction... a murmuring spirit is the evil of the evil, and the misery of the misery. (p. 79)

How evil is a murmuring heart? Burroughs (2013) explains the extent of this evil in great detail. First of all, he writes, “The evil of a murmuring heart is such that when God would speak of wicked men and describe them... he instances this sin in a more special manner” (p. 80). In other words, God often speaks in His word about the grievousness and danger associated with the sin of murmuring in discontent. One such example, the author contends, is in Jude 14-16:

It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” These are murmurers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.

Burroughs (2013) writes of this passage, “This one Scripture should make the heart shake at the thought of the sin of murmuring (p. 80).

In the second place, Burroughs (2013) writes, murmuring “is a wickedness which is greatly contrary to grace, and especially contrary to the work of God, in bringing the soul home to Himself” (p. 81). Said a different way, the author means that for one who has experienced the

grace of God in salvation only to murmur and complain about what he is lacking is a sin like few others. Burroughs (2013) writes:

Has God made me see the dreadful evil of sin, and made my soul sensible of the evil of sin as the greatest burden? How can I be then so much troubled for every little affliction? Certainly, if I saw what the evil of sin was, that sight would swallow up all other evils, and if I were burdened with the evil of sin, it would swallow up all other burdens. “What! Am I now murmuring against God’s hand? says such a soul, whereas a while ago the Lord made me see myself to be a damned wretch, and apprehend it as a wonder that I was not in Hell? (p. 81)

It is on this basis that the author concludes, in the third place, that “Murmuring and discontent is exceedingly below a Christian” (p. 83). Is the Christian not a son of the living God? Is he not the son of the King of kings and Lord of lords? He is, and as such, he is to comport himself with the utmost of dignity and deportment. A Christian professes to be dead to the world and alive to Christ; he professes to have his life hidden with Christ in God and to find satisfaction in Him alone. If he should then murmur in discontent, he might as well deny his profession.

Fourthly, another of the interesting observations Burroughs (2013) makes is that, by murmuring, one undoes his prayers:

When you come to pray to God, you acknowledge his sovereignty over you, you come there to profess yourselves to be at God’s disposal. What do you pray for, unless you acknowledge that you are at his disposal? Unless you will stand, as it were, at his disposal never come to petition him. (p. 87)

One of the greatest misunderstandings about prayer is that it somehow bends or redirects the will of God to the will of the one praying. On the contrary, when one prays, he is to pray that his own will be aligned with the will of God. Praying in this way will greatly reduce one's tendency to murmur about current afflictions and will instead seek to resolve those afflictions with God's perfect will.

In the fifth place, Burroughs (2013) argues, "There is a great deal of folly, extreme folly, in a discontented heart; it is a foolish sin" (p. 91). His reason for saying this as follows:

It takes away the present comfort of what you have, because you have not something that you would have. What a foolish thing is this, that because I have not got what I want, I will not enjoy the comfort of what I have! Do you not account this folly in your children?... Though you account it folly in your children, yet you deal thus with God? (p. 91).

Upon further reflection, it is indeed the height of folly, as adults, to act in the same unbecoming way as warrants the immediate chastisement of one's children.

Finally, Burroughs (2013) observes, "There is a great deal of danger in the sin of discontent, for it highly provokes the wrath of God" (p. 93). This provocation, the author writes, is made evident in passage like Numbers 14:26 wherein the Lord says to Moses and Aaron, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are murmuring against Me?" The Lord's response comes only a couple of verses later, "Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you; your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men...who have murmured against Me'" (Num. 14:28-29).

Those who are discontent will rarely, if ever, admit to being so. Instead, a variety of excuses is offered in explanation of what may merely appear to be discontent. For example, one

may argue that what appears to be discontent is simply a condition arising from some affliction. This excuse, Burroughs (2013) warns, may appear to be legitimate for a murmuring heart, but it is not. He writes, “There is no sense of any affliction that will hinder the sense of God’s mercies. . . . But you are so sensible of your affliction that it takes away the sense of all your mercies. Oh, this is a sinful discontent” (p. 110).

Others may argue that what appears to be discontent is merely sorrow over sin. This excuse, Burroughs (2013) contends, is very dangerous and deceiving in that it is just another way of letting one’s afflictions be the source of discontent. As the author astutely observes:

They were never troubled for their sin before the affliction came. But you will say, ‘It is true I was not before, for my prosperity blinded me, but now God has opened my eyes by afflictions. Has He? Then your great care will be rather for the removing of your sin than your affliction. Are you more solicitous about the taking away of your sin than the taking away of your affliction?’ (p. 111).

This truth is especially convicting given the fact that it is very often not until the believer suffers the consequences of his sin that he entertains thoughts of ridding himself of it. As Burroughs (2013) explains, “If you are troubled for your sin, then it will be your great care not to sin in your trouble, so as not, by your trouble, to increase your sin” (p. 112).

In the final chapter of this work, Burroughs (2013) addresses the question of how one might attain contentment. He answers this question by providing his readers with some helpful points to that end. Among the most salient of these points is the consideration every believer should make concerning “the greatness of the mercies we have and the meanness of the things we lack” (p. 124). All one must do to gain contentment is to focus on what God has provided in terms of that which is eternal in light of the temporal afflictions he occasionally experiences.

Hymn writer Helen Lemmel noted in her now classic hymn *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.”

### **The Almost Christian Discovered**

According to Beeke and Pederson (2006) “Matthew Mead was born in 1629 to Richard and Joanne Mead, at Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire” (p. 444). Following his studies at Eton College (1645-48), Mead became a scholar at King’s College, Cambridge in 1649. This assignment, however, would only last until 1651, ending with his resignation.

Like his contemporary, John Owen, Mead was, in terms of ecclesiastical affiliation, an Independent. As such, he served under Oliver Cromwell who, according to Beeke and Pederson (2006), in 1658, appointed him to the position of curate of New Chapel, Shadwell, near Stepney (p. 444). This position would also be short-lived as Mead would be relieved of his duties following the Restoration.

*The Almost Christian Discovered* (Mead’s most popular work) was not initially written as a stand-alone work but, as Beeke and Pederson (2006) relate, resulted from seven sermons Mead had preached in 1661 with the hope of “[unmasking] hypocrites and [awakening] drowsy professors” (p. 444).

Mead spent the last approximately thirty years of his life serving an Independent congregation at Stepney. According to Beeke and Pederson (2006), Mead’s congregation was reportedly London’s largest (p. 445). Despite some rather tumultuous events during this period, Mead remained one of the most popular Puritan preachers in England until his death on October 16, 1699, at the age of seventy.

In addition to *The Almost Christian Discovered*, Mead's literary contributions, mostly published posthumously, include: *A Name in Heaven the Truest Ground of Joy*, *The Young Man's Remembrancer*, and *Youth's Best Choice* and *Original Sermons on the Jews*; and on *Falling into the Hands of the Living God*. The latter work is now published simply as *The Sermons of Matthew Mead*.

*The Almost Christian Discovered* is a work that could perhaps be best characterized as the seventeenth century's version of what is referred to today as "shock journalism." By Mead's (2012) own admission, the sermons from which the book originated were intended to convey to his hearers the dangers of a deceptive heart, namely, in the area of making one's "calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). The author presents this work with Acts 26:28 as a backdrop. He writes:

In this chapter, you have the apostle Paul's apology and defensive plea, which he makes for himself against those blind Jews which so maliciously prosecuted him before Agrippa, Festus, Bernice, and the council. In which plea he chiefly insists upon three things: (1) The manner of his life before conversion (Acts 26:4-13); (2) The manner of his conversion (Acts 26:13-18); and (3) The manner of his life after conversion (Acts 26:19-23). (p. 17)

While Festus seems to censure Paul, thinking him to be mad, Agrippa appears to have been convinced by him saying, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." It is the simple word "almost" that captivated Mead's thoughts concerning the tragedy of those in the church who, thinking themselves to be Christians, are not. By way of contemporary observation, this work is desperately necessary for many who have fallen prey to the false gospel of "easy-believism" and decisional regeneration. Many are convinced that their salvation depends, not on God alone who

has mercy, but on their intellectual acknowledgment that Jesus can save all who are clever enough to choose Him. Having thus chosen wisely, many feel as though their salvation is iron-clad regardless of what corroborating evidence may or may not be on display in their lives.

It is to this end that Mead (2012) presents twenty statements intended, not to cause an unhealthy sense of spiritual paranoia in his readers (though that is a distinct possibility), but to stimulate serious introspection concerning one's true standing in God's saving grace. The author frames his statements in the context of a simple question: "How far may a man go in the way of heaven, and yet be but almost a Christian?" (p. 29).

The first of Mead's statements in response to this question is that "A man may have much knowledge, much light; he may know much of God and his will, much of Christ and his ways, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 29). Mead (2012) notes that one can never divorce grace from knowledge, but one may possess a great deal of knowledge and yet be without grace. Further, he writes, "To make a man altogether a Christian, there must be light in the head and heat in the heart" (p. 29). Only God can create in man this combination of light and heat. Simple intellectual acknowledgment of the existence of Christ is simply not enough to save one's soul. James acknowledged this truth in the epistle bearing his name, writing, "Even the demons believe, and shudder" (James 2:19). Likewise, the Pharisees were known for their extensive knowledge of all things religious and yet, as Mead (2012) relates, "they were devils still" (p. 30). Only those who both know the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has taught and, with the assistance of the indwelling Holy Spirit, put into practice what they know, exemplify true Christianity.

The second statement Mead (2012) makes concerning genuine Christianity is that "A man may have great and eminent gifts, yea, spiritual gifts, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 31). A man may indeed have a particular penchant and accompanying skill in the area of public

speaking, but he may not possess the gift of preaching and prophesying. Likewise, a man may be very eloquent in prayer and yet may have never uttered a single word of true prayer to God.

After all, these things were characteristic of those in Matthew 7 who will say to the Lord, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” (Matt. 7:22) and yet the Lord will deny having ever known them. The genuine believer in Christ is one whose gifts are a work of the Holy Spirit and who utilizes them for the edification of the saints and the glory of God.

Thirdly, Mead (2012) states that “A man may have a high profession of religion, be much in external duties of godliness, and yet be but almost a Christian” (p. 35). The Lord refers to this particular situation in Matthew 7:21 when He says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.” Consider Judas. He undoubtedly had a godly profession, followed Christ, sat at His feet as He taught, witnessed His countless miracles, and, in the end, was but a hypocrite. Mead (2012) astutely observes that the ostrich may have great wings but it does not fly. In like manner, “Many have the wings of a fair profession, but they used them not to mount upward in spiritual affections, and a heavenly conversation” (p. 35). Churches are often full of individuals who possess the right vocabulary, are present at every function, and faithfully contribute to the various ministries of the church, and yet there is no guarantee that they are true Christians. Mead (2012) further observes that they may be professors but not confessors:

Profession is a swimming down the stream. Confession is a swimming against the stream, like the dead fish, that cannot swim against the stream, with the living fish. Many may profess Christ, that cannot confess Christ; and so, notwithstanding their profession, yet are but almost Christians. (p. 39)

Mead's fourth statement is, "To come yet nearer; a man may go far in opposing his sin, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 39). Conviction of wrongdoing is not always a spiritual response. On the contrary, one for whom the word may make sense concerning a particular sin may simply rationalize that he is wrong and yet experience no inner working of the Spirit. Similarly, a man may mourn over a particular sin and its effects without having ever known true spiritual conviction. This situation was certainly exemplified in Esau's case as he mourned the loss of his birthright and it was also evident in Judas who, feeling an overwhelming sense of remorse, committed suicide. True mourning, however, is born of the Spirit and, according to Mead (2012) presents itself in the ongoing conviction of the "evil, and vileness, and damnable nature or sin" (p. 40).

Fifthly, Mead (2012) observes that "A man may hate sin, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 45). Qualifying this statement, the author writes, "Absalom hated Amnon's uncleanness with his sister Tamar; yea, his hatred was so great, that he slew him for it; and yet Absalom was but a wicked man" (p. 45). The hatred of sin that accompanies true Christianity goes much farther than a mere hatred for that which causes one to be inconvenienced, uncomfortable, sad, etc. The true believer will hate sin, not because of what it does to him but what it is to God. God considers sin to be an offense to His glorious being, a wrong committed against His majesty. To hate sin is to recognize it "as being a grieving and quenching of the Spirit of God...and thus every true Christian hates sin" (p. 46).

Mead's (2012) sixth statement is that "A man may make great vows and promises – he may have strong purposes and resolutions against sin, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 47). There are many instances in Scripture in which men make false promises to forsake their sin (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar, Saul, Pharaoh) and yet each one of them perished in their sins. Many who

find themselves undergoing various trials or in the midst of afflictions will “make a deal” with God that if He only removes the cause of their discomfort, they will serve Him for the remainder of their days. The author quotes Pliny in this regard who said, “That we should continue to be such when we are well, as we promise to be when we are sick” (p. 48). Mead (2012) adds, “Many are our sick-bed promises, but we are no sooner well, than we grow sick of our promises” (p. 48). The true believer forsakes his sin with the intent of never returning to it. At the same time, he recognizes that such an aim is not within his innate ability but requires divine enablement.

The seventh statement Mead (2012) makes concerning the “almost Christian” is that “A man may maintain a strife and combat against sin in himself, and yet be but almost a Christian” (p. 49). While it may sound similar to the previous statement, this one differs in that a man may go beyond making simple verbal resolutions concerning his sin to striving against it and still be but almost a Christian. Pilate went so far as to declare Jesus an innocent man, thinking himself to be innocent of his shed blood and yet Pilate’s actions were not designed to glorify God but to satisfy his conscience in the matter. This “natural conscience” is not to be confused with the inner working of grace that seeks to strive against sin so that God might be glorified. Thus, a man intent only on placating his conscience proves himself to be but almost a Christian.

In the eighth place, Mead (2012) observes that “A man may be a member of the church of Christ, he may join himself to the people of God, partake with them in all ordinances, and share of all church privileges, and yet be but almost a Christian” (p. 55). Churches are full of those who, while members of the local body, are not members of Christ Himself. Because of this common phenomenon, theologians have long considered the church to exist in two states: the *visible* church (comprised of all who join themselves to the people of God and participate in all

of the church's activities) and the *invisible* church (which is made up of all of God's redeemed). The former resides in every building bearing the "church" moniker. The latter, however, is known only to God Himself. The true Christian will strive with every fiber of his being to ensure his membership in God's invisible church.

Ninthly, Mead (2012) writes, "A man may have great hopes of heaven, great hopes of being saved, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 56). There is a particular type of hope that is unassailable. This hope is spoken of in Hebrews 6:19 as "an anchor for the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil." This hope, according to Mead (2012) "never miscarries, and is known by four properties" (p. 56). First, it purifies the heart and purges sin. In his first epistle, the apostle John noted that "everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). Secondly, it fills the heart with gladness: "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2). Thirdly, this hope is founded upon God's promises. In the fourth place, it is a hope wrought by God Himself in the soul. If a man has a kind of hope that is not characterized by these four things, he remains but almost a Christian.

The tenth observation made by Mead (2012) in identifying the "almost Christian" is that "A man may be under great and visible changes, and these wrought by the ministry of the word, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 58). Mead (2012) very cleverly and very effectively uses the example of Saul in support of this point. Saul, he maintains, was given "another heart" by God (1 Sam. 10:9), however, it is not said that God gave Saul "a new heart." One may indeed be given another heart that can render him another sort of man, however, unless he is given a new heart making him a new man, he will remain but almost a Christian. Man may indeed undergo any number of moral changes that manifest themselves outwardly in his conduct, but unless he

has been converted by the grace of God and changed inwardly, he cannot be said to be a true Christian.

In the eleventh place, Mead (2012) maintains, “A man may be very zealous in the matters of religion, and yet be but almost a Christian” (p. 61). While zeal may, in fact, be an admirable quality, only that zeal that has as its chief end the glory of God is indicative of a man who is a true Christian. Mead (2012) further observes that there are several kinds of zeal that are false and counterfeit. These include blind zeal or zeal without real knowledge, partial zeal which is zealous of only certain aspects of service to God, and misplaced zeal which, though it may appear to be Godward is aimed at “trifling things that are not worth it, and trifling in the things that most require it” (p. 63). A man in possession of these false types of zeal is but almost a Christian.

The twelfth observation Mead (2012) provides is that “A man may be in much prayer – he may pray often, and pray much; and yet be but almost a Christian. So did the Pharisees, whom yet our Lord Christ rejects for hypocrites” (p. 65). Spurgeon (1855) made a very fitting observation about this very thing in the life of Saul (soon to be Paul) in Acts 9:11. Speaking of Saul’s past as a revered rabbi, he said:

You might have found him pouring out a fine oration before the throne of God. And yet it saith, "Behold, he prayeth." What! Had he never prayed before? No, never. All he had ever done before went for nothing; it was not prayer. I have heard of an old gentleman, who was taught when a child to pray, "Pray God bless my father and mother," and he kept on praying the same thing for seventy years, when his parents were both dead. After that it pleased God, in his infinite mercy, to touch his heart, and he was led to see that notwithstanding his constancy to his forms, he had not been praying at all; he often said his prayers, but never prayed. So it was with Saul. He had pronounced his

magniloquent orations, but they were all good-for-nothing. He had prayed his long prayers for a pretense; it had all been a failure. Now comes a true petition, and it is said, "Behold, he prayeth."

The natural man may indeed pray in pretense and yet be in love with his sin. He may pray for temporal things while neglecting his true spiritual needs altogether. A man may pray perfunctorily as a means of simply "checking a box" or fulfilling some perceived religious duty. Until a man prays in earnest, however, as he is enabled by God's Holy Spirit, he will remain but almost a Christian.

The thirteenth statement Mead (2012) makes is that "A man may suffer for Christ in his goods, in his name, in his person; and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 69). There have been many who, thinking themselves to suffer for Christ, have simply been deceived. The author points out that "Every man that bears Christ's cross on his shoulders, doth not, therefore, bear Christ's image in his soul" (p. 69). There are, in fact, many who suffer in the name of Christ who are far from Him in terms of salvation. "Love to Christ," the author maintains, "is the only noble ground of suffering; but a man may suffer much upon other ends" (p. 70). A man may suffer simply because of a desire to be identified with his fellow professors. By the same token, he may suffer because, like the ascetic, he believes there to be some merit in his suffering. If, however, a man's suffering is not predicated on a sincere love for Christ and an undying sense of gratitude for the grace that has been freely given him, he may yet be but almost a Christian.

Mead's (2012) fourteenth proposition is that "A man may be called of God, and embrace this call, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 71). This situation was certainly evident in Judas' experience. He was called by God and embraced his calling, but he was but almost a Christian. The reader will understand that the author does not deny the truth of Romans 8:29-30 (the *ordo*

salutis) wherein the apostle clearly states that those whom God foreknew, He predestined, and those He predestined, He called and ultimately glorified. What Mead (2012) is expressing in this admittedly controversial statement is that there is a two-fold call of God: internal and external. Not every man who is called by God externally to a specific function will be saved. Salvation is reserved exclusively for those whom God calls internally. If a man is called only externally, though he may be called indeed, he is yet almost a Christian.

The fifteenth statement made by Mead (2012) is that “A man may have the spirit of God, and yet be but almost a Christian” (p. 72). In this statement, the author points out that it is quite possible that a man may have the Holy Spirit:

...only transiently, not abidingly. The Spirit may be in a man, and yet not dwell wherever he is; he is in all, but dwells in saints only. The hypocrite may have the Spirit for a season, but not abide in him forever. (p. 73)

Generally speaking, the Holy Spirit does not limit His ministry to the true believer. His omnipresence and omnibenevolence render Him not only ever-present but ever-working even through those who have not known the grace of God in salvation. It is, after all, the Holy Spirit who convicts all men of wrongdoing and serves as the great restraint in terms of man's being “utterly depraved” versus “totally depraved.” In this sense, a man may be said to have the Spirit of God and yet be but almost a Christian.

Mead's (2012) sixteenth statement is that “A man may have faith, and yet be but almost a Christian” (p. 74). Jesus' parable of the soils serves as a fitting backdrop for this proposition as the “stony ground” hearers of the word believed for a little while and then withered away because they had no firm root (Luke 8:13). Similarly, there are many in Scripture who are said to have trusted in Christ and yet “Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He

knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25). Mead’s (2012) statement in this regard is thus predicated on the truth that there is a two-fold faith: (1) Special and saving; and (2) Common and not saving. The one in possession of the former is a true Christian while the one merely possessing the latter is but almost a Christian.

The author’s seventeenth observation is that “A man may go further yet: he may possibly have a love to the people of God, and yet be but almost a Christian” (p. 77). Simply because one possesses and displays a particular love for the people of God is no sure indication that he is a Christian. Pharaoh, the author writes, loved Joseph and promoted him to the second-highest office in the land and yet Pharaoh was a wicked man. That being said, there is indeed a love for the brethren that does serve as proof of one’s being a true Christian. This love, however, has none of the selfish motives that so often characterize that displayed by the world. Mead (2012) writes, “A carnal man’s love to saints is a limited and bounded love; it is not universal ‘to the seed’” (p. 80). The true believer’s love, however, a love that serves as evidence of regeneration, “is a spiritual love, the principal loadstone and attracting whereof is grace and holiness; it is a love which embraceth a ‘righteous man in the name of a righteous man’” (p. 80). If a man possesses only a limited love, not extended to all the people of God, while it is possible (and commendable from a purely human standpoint) that he may indeed love some of the people of God, he is yet nothing more than almost a Christian.

Mead’s eighteenth statement is that “A man may obey the commands of God, yea, many of the commands of God, and yet be but almost a Christian” (p. 80). The true Christian’s obedience is characterized by three important properties: (1) It is evangelical. In other words, it has as its end the desire to do all things to the glory of God so that others might learn something

about God through the believer's obedience; (2) It is universal. The true believer's obedience is not characterized by his picking and choosing only those commands that he finds preferable. He who is a true follower of Christ desires to obey Him fully; and (3) It is continual. The true believer sets his hand to the proverbial plow and does not look back, continuing in his obedience to the Lord. Although a man might obey the commands of God partially; though he may obey out of a sense of duty instead of true love for God, he may yet be but almost a Christian.

Mead's nineteenth observation is that "A man may be sanctified, and yet be but almost a Christian" (p. 83). As has already been observed concerning other things, there is a two-fold work of sanctification spoken of in Scripture: (1) Common and ineffectual; and (2) Special and effectual. These will perhaps be better understood as inward and outward sanctification. Inward sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit who enables the Christian to mortify all sin and obey every command. Though he will not perform these perfectly, the Holy Spirit ensures that they remain at the forefront of the believer's mind as well as his constant pursuit. Outward sanctification, however, differs profoundly in that it is generated, not by the indwelling Holy Spirit, but by a simple outward performance. Mead (2012) states, "Many have clean hands, but unclean hearts. They wash the outside of the cup and platter, when all is filthy within" (p. 85). True sanctification occurs first inwardly and then it manifests itself outwardly. Both are essential in proving oneself to be a new man in Christ. If a man is devoid of one or the other, he may yet be but almost a Christian.

Finally, Mead (2012) argues that "A man may do all, as to external duties and worship, that a true Christian can; and, when he hath done all, be but almost a Christian" (p. 86). This statement is simply a restatement of what has already been said in different ways. A man may indeed play the part of the Christian, participating in worship, attending to all of the external

duties that are associated with Christian conduct, and find that, in the end, he is yet but almost a Christian.

On the pages that follow, the author asks and answers three more very important questions about the subject at hand. The first of these (which is actually second after the primary question answered in this work) is: “Why, or whence is it, that many men go so far, as that they come to be almost Christians?” (p. 89). In answering this question, the author indicates that conscience often plays a great part in one’s desire to almost become a Christian. Every man born has both a conscience and, therefore, a god who must be worshiped and satisfied. This reality is what French mathematician Blaise Pascal once reportedly referred to as the “God-shaped vacuum in the heart of man that can only be filled by God.” He states further that, although the conscience of a natural man may not be sanctified with grace, “yet it is often troubled at sin. Trouble of conscience is not incident to believers only, but sometimes to unbelievers also” (p. 91).

Mead (2012) then addresses a third question: “Whence is it that many are but almost Christians when they have gone thus far? What is the cause of this?” (p. 101). There are indeed many who go only so far in being true Christians and no farther. This situation, the author maintains, arises for two reasons. First, “it is for want of right and sound conviction” (p. 101). In other words, if a man is not thoroughly convinced of sin and his heart truly broken by it, it does not matter how sincere his profession of godliness may be, he is “sure to miscarry” (p. 101). Again, there is a vast difference between the working of man’s natural ability to discern right from wrong and the spiritual conviction that is wrought only by God’s Holy Spirit and then only in those to whom He is pleased to reveal Himself.

The second reason why men go only so far and no farther in becoming true Christians is, the author maintains, because “Natural convictions deal only with a man’s conversation, not with his state and condition: with sins actual, not original.” True spiritual conviction extends to all sins, not merely to those which one knowingly commits (and perhaps even laments), but to the actual source of man’s enmity with God: original sin.

Mead’s (2012) final question concerns the reason many go no farther in the profession of religion, than to be almost Christians. They do so, he maintains, because they “deceive themselves in the truth of their own condition; they mistake their state, and think it good and safe, when it is bad and dangerous” (p. 108). This particularly fatal mistake arises from man’s innate proud heart. Unless God is pleased to conduct a heart transplant on him, removing his heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh (Ez. 36:26), man will continue to be plagued with the pride that keeps him retaining the status of an “almost Christian.”

In addition to his pride, many also deceive themselves by confusing God’s common grace with saving grace. God is good to all, causing the rain to fall on the field of the saint as well as the sinner (Matt. 5:45) and yet one must distinguish between this common grace and the special, efficacious grace that God bestows on man in salvation. To mistake the two is truly a matter of life and death.

Mead’s (2012) closing words in this work make for a fitting close to this summary treatment thereof:

Now therefore, hath the spirit of the Lord been at work in your souls? Have you ever been convinced of the evil of sin, of the misery of a natural state, of the insufficiency of all things under heaven to help, of the fullness and righteousness of Jesus Christ, of the necessity of resting upon him for pardon and peace, for sanctification and salvation?

Have you ever been really convinced of these things? O then, as you love your own souls, as ever you hope to be saved at last, and enjoy God forever, improve these convictions, and be sure you rest not in them till they rise up to a thorough close with the Lord Jesus Christ, and so end in a sound and perfect conversion. Thus shall you be not only almost, but altogether a Christian. (p. 148)

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