

DIALOGUE IV.

THE CHRISTIAN ARMED AGAINST TEMPTATION;
in a Dialogue between a Minister, and his Parishioner.

Minister. WELCOME, neighbour—in what state do you now find yourself as to spiritual matters?

Parishioner. I thank God, and I thank you, his minister; since I repented and renounced my sins, and gave up myself to my God and Saviour as his servant, I find myself as in a new world. My hopes revive, and I have had already more comfort in believing and in serving God, than ever I had in my life of sin. I am ashamed that ever such trifles and fooleries possessed my heart, and kept me so long from serious thoughts. Had I not now a merciful God, and an all-sufficient Saviour, which way should I look, or what should I do? O that I had sooner turned to God! and sooner cast away my sins, and begun a holy life! But “my soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit doth rejoice in God my Saviour;” that at last his mercy hath abounded, where my sin did abound!

M. It is but little of his goodness which as yet you have tasted of, in comparison of what you

find at last. But that you may yet make your calling and election sure, I must acquaint you what temptations you have yet to overcome, and what dangers to escape; for as yet you have only begun your race and warfare.

P. Your counsel hath hitherto been so good, that I shall gladly hear the rest.

M. The first temptation that you are like to meet with, is the seeming difficulties of understanding and believing God's word, of meditating and praying, of watching against sin, and of doing your duty. And by reason of these difficulties, Satan would make God's service seem wearisome, uncomfortable, and grievous to you, and so turn back your love from God.

P. What course must I take to escape this temptation?

M. When you meet with any difficulty, you must remember, that it is your own backwardness of heart which is the cause, and take occasion to renew your repentance. Resolve to wait patiently on God in the use of all his means: and thus, time, and exercise, and grace will make all plain, and easy, and delightful to you.

Presume not in self-conceit to cavil against what you do not understand. This is the chief thing in which conversion maketh us like little children. Children are conscious of their ignorance, and are teachable, and set not their understanding against their teachers, till they grow towards manhood; and then they grow wise in their own conceits, and begin to think their tutors are mistaken; and they set their reason against that truth which they humbly receive.

The *second* temptation will be—you will be in

danger of being overwhelmed with doubts and fears.

The tempter will strive to make you think that your conversion was not true, because you had no more contrition for sin; or that you have no grace, because you have not such a lively sense of things invisible, as you have of the things that are seen: or he will suggest to you, that now all your thoughts and discourse must be of God, and his word, and holy things; and that all other are idle thoughts and idle words; and that you must tie yourself to longer tasks of meditation and prayer than you have time and strength to accomplish.

P. Sir, you make me wonder to hear you! Can such notions of holiness come from the devil?

M. Did not the devil argue Scripture with Christ in his temptations? And doth he not transform himself into an angel of light to deceive? Whenever the devil will seem religious and righteous, he will be religious and righteous over-much.

P. What does he gain by this? Would he make us more religious?

M. You little know what he is to gain by it: he would destroy all your religion by it. Nothing over-violent is durable. Our souls here are united to our bodies, and must go on that pace which the body can endure. If Satan can tempt you into longer and deeper meditations than your body and mind can bear, you will grow melancholy before you are aware, and thus fall a sacrifice to his devices. By over-doing, you will come to do nothing in the way of your duty; and you will then have none but sad fancies or despairing thoughts in your mind; all that you hear, and read, and see, you will think makes against you; you will be-

lieve nothing that is comfortable in religion. The devil will try to persuade you that you are an hypocrite—that God is your enemy—that Christ is no Saviour for you—that the day of grace is past—that the Spirit is departed—that God hath forsaken you—and that you are undone for ever.

Hereby Satan knows that many of the ignorant and wicked will, by seeing you, be hardened into a love of sin, and will fly from religion, as tending to drive men into desperation.

P. You describe to me so sad a case as almost tempts me to be afraid of religion itself, if it tend to this. But what would you have me do to escape it?

M. Religion itself, as God commandeth it, tendeth not to this; for it is a life of holy faith, and hope, and joy; but there are errors about religion which tend to it. And especially, when any great cross, or disappointment in the world, gives advantage to the tempter to cast you into worldly discontents and cares, and trouble and perplexity of mind; this is the most usual ground of melancholy; and it turns to religious trouble afterwards.

To prevent this, set not your mind too much on any thing in the world; that the losing of it may not be able to reach your heart.

Encourage right apprehensions of the nature of religion; that it consisteth in faith, hope, and love; in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; in the fore-taste of everlasting glory. And comfort yourself and others, with remembering that you shall for ever be with the Lord; for ever engaged in thanksgiving to your bountiful God, and in joyful praises to him. Let these be your thoughts, your speeches, and your exercises.

When you feel any scruples begin to perplex you, open your heart without delay to a judicious minister or friend, before they take root in you, that his advice may settle and compose your mind.

A *third* temptation that will assault you, will be, doubt of your own sincerity.

And here Satan hath very great advantage; because man's heart is deceitful, and because the greatest assurance of sincerity requires much skill, and great diligence, and prudent counsel.

If you still keep in your remembrance your baptismal covenant of grace, and still act agreeably to that covenant, you must not doubt of your sincerity.

Therefore, instead of anxious doubtings, set yourself heartily to your duty; study to please God, and to live fruitfully in good works; resolve more against those sins, which make you question your sincerity. The practice of a godly life, and the increase of divine grace, will be an undeniable evidence; and you will have the witness in yourself, that you are a faithful servant of God.

Hold fast, then, your baptismal covenant, and also the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and Commandments. If any man teach you any thing contrary to these, you must reject it; for your baptismal covenant is the sum and substance of your christianity. And if any call him a heretic, that owneth this Christian covenant, and holds fast what is set forth in the Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Commandments, believe him not, but take him for a slanderer of your brother; except he prove that your brother doth not, indeed, believe as he professed to believe, but shows some impenitent wickedness of life. The same covenant will serve

both for a test by which man's doctrines may be tried; and also who are those with whom you must have communion, and who are heretics whom you must avoid.

The holy Scripture being acknowledged by all for the word of God, you must receive no doctrine which contradicteth it; nor refuse any doctrine which is asserted in it; but try all by this divine and certain rule. And because the doubtful sense of many texts, is the occasion of men's different opinions, you may well take up with that sense which had either of these two marks: that which is so plain and frequently repeated, that, to an impartial and sober man, it is past controversy; and that which all Christians are agreed in as the proper sense, in all the commentaries of their learned men. And if you hold fast all the texts which are thus plain, and of which Christians generally give the same exposition, you will have a great store of saving truths, upon which your faith may securely rest.

Moreover, if you faithfully love and practise these, the very love and practice will help you to such a lively kind of knowledge, as will keep you from every fatal error; and will greatly advance you in doctrinal truth and practical holiness; and God will bless you with more of his illuminating help. Whilst false hypocrites, who have no religion but opinion, and proud self-conceit, and contending zeal, deserve to be forsaken of God, and given up to believe many falsehoods, and to lose the truth which they perfidiously abuse; holy souls have great advantage over worldly, self-deceiving hypocrites, on all occasions of difference and contention.

Learn all that you yet understand not, with an humble, teachable disposition of mind, from the authorized ministers of Christ set over you in his church. Think not that you are grown too wise to need their further instruction. When you grow proud of your own understanding, and think that you can judge of all things at the first hearing, and that all is false which agrees not with your first opinions; and that ministers can add but little to what you know already; then you are nearly perverted: for this self-conceit is the root of a multitude of errors.

The judgment of the generality of able, godly, and impartial ministers, should prevail more with you, than that of any partial sect, whether it be great or small; either such as contend for worldly interest, or such as run into parties by groundless dissention. For the church of Christ hath ever suffered by these two sorts, and therefore they are both to be suspected.

Ungodly, carnal men, will teach you such doctrine as tendeth to their worldly ends.

On the other hand, the injudicious sort of Christians, if once they grow into an over high esteem of their own understanding and godliness, are exceeding apt to fasten with confidence upon their first undigested notions, and publish them as saving truths; when, after a little more experience, they will be ashamed of themselves. They are apt to desire to be made conspicuous for their godliness in the world, and, with this view, separate themselves from ordinary Christians, as below them, and unworthy of their communion.

The generality of authorized divines and godly people, whom you plainly perceive to live in a self-

denying, sober, holy life, not running into proud, self-opinionated sects, but keeping the unity of the church, are they whom you may best trust with the resolution of your doubts, and the conduct of your soul, so far as ministers may be trusted.

It is not so likely, that God should reveal his mind to those injudicious persons who are most disposed to over-rate their own wisdom and godliness, and who have had least time for study, and fewest means of coming to a right understanding, and who show themselves the proudest censurers of others, and least tender of the church's peace and concord; I say, it is not so likely that these are in the right, as the main body of humble, godly, peaceable, studious ministers, who have had longer time and better means to know the truth. And the body of Christians, even the church in general, hath more promises from Christ than any particular *division* of Christians can have.

Pray earnestly to God to preserve you from error. And when conscience and experience tell you, that any opinion or party would lead you to sin, (as, to dishonour your superiors, to favour persecution or idolatry, to encourage schism and divide Christians, and set them against each other, to destroy Christian love, to favour loose and sensual living, to neglect God's ordinances, or the like,) be sure that such opinion so far must needs be false.

Remember that the Christian faith and religion is of God. If you believe the same articles merely upon the word of man, (whether few or many,) it is not properly true faith and religion in you; because it is human only, and not divine.

Therefore the use that you must make of the teachers of the church is, to help you first to know what God hath revealed, and what is his word, and then to believe and practise it.

Yet a certain belief of them in their places, is needful towards the promoting of your belief in God; for he that will believe his teacher in nothing, can learn nothing of him. But human faith is another thing, quite different from divine faith; and is but a subordinate help to it, and no part of it. So far as you learn of and believe your teachers, you are a learner and disciple of theirs; and by them may be taught to know what is the word and will of Christ. But this must be known by its proper evidence, which they must show you; and not upon their bare word alone. To be a teacher is to show you that truth and reason of believing, which they have learnt themselves from the word of God. And so far as you have learned by your teachers, what is the word and will of Christ, and believe and obey it, because it is HIS word; so far you are indeed religious, and a Christian.

Therefore, if any tell you this or that is the word of God, or this is the true meaning of the word of God, this is my counsel, and this is your duty; if they be such as you are obliged to hearken to, as being your authorized teachers, or men of credit in such matters, hear what they can say, as those duly set apart for the work of the ministry, and be willing to learn the truth; but continue merely as a learner, till you know by all their teaching that the thing is true.

If it be false, no teacher or church can make

it true, nor show you the real evidence of truth in it.

Follow these directions, and you will be safe against all the divisions and clamours of contenders, who say, here or there is the church and the truth; your way will be sure and plain before you.

P. You, Sir, have made that case clear to me, which I thought would have utterly confounded me.

M. I must forewarn you of a *fourth* temptation. You will be in danger to mistake the nature of the Christian religion, if you mind only some parts of it, and overlook the rest, and take up with the separate parts alone.

Some are so intent on their own merits, as to have low thoughts of grace and mercy; and some think so highly of the power of Divine Grace, as to disregard inherent holiness, and actual duty. Nothing is more common than to set truth against truth, and duty against duty, when they are such as God hath joined together. But the true nature of religion is nothing else, but faith turning the soul by repentance from the flesh and the world, to the love, and praise, and obedience of God, in a joyful hope of the heavenly glory.

Study, therefore, God's wondrous love in Christ, and the certainty and greatness of the glory in heaven; and delight in constant obedience to God, and in doing all the good that you can in the world; and in this way trust God quietly and gladly with your body and soul.

This is true religion. Ordinances must be observed, for they are essential steps towards these high degrees of holiness. Our minds are never to

be set against them, nor our exclusive care to be spent upon them.

P. I thank you for this warning; for I perceive by this, that a life of true religion is a very noble and pleasant life. But most good people whom I have known, do but ask what they shall do to be saved. The praises of God take up but little room in their devotions; and divine love, and the joys of faith, and hope, and holiness, are but little seen among them.

M. Your next temptation will be, to abate your zeal and diligence by degrees, and to become cold and formal, without the life and spirit of religion. Thus all your spiritual vigour will die away, if you be not careful to prevent it.

P. What, Sir, would you have me to do to prevent it?

M. Let your first and chief labour be to stir up your soul when you find it sluggish.

Read the most lively yet serious books.

Take heed of turning your religion and zeal to speculative opinions and parties, instead of the life and practice of faith, hope, and charity; for a factious, wrangling, contentious spirit is as destructive of true and holy zeal, as a fever is of natural heat and life.

Take heed of growing in love with the world; for as the thoughts of riches and honours grow sweet to you, the thoughts of God and heaven will grow lifeless and unpleasant.

Take heed of sinning wilfully; for all such sin hardens the heart, and forfeits the quickening help of the spirit.

Continue steadfast in the use of all God's ordinances, and the unity of the church. Inconstancy

tends to a total neglect, and a course of lifeless duty tendeth to spiritual death itself.

I shall now conclude with a recommendation of those graces and duties which will be your surest helps against all temptations whatsoever.

You must grow in holy knowledge.

You must come to a full and firm resolution to live a godly life. Resolve rather to die than wilfully sin. An irresolute person encourageth the tempter, and is more than half overcome already.

Be fearful of sinning; and, conscious of your weakness, beware of the multitude of temptations. Be constant in watchfulness, and frequently engaged in secret prayer.

Be sure that your heart and life are devoted to God, and employed in his service; and then the tempter will never find you disposed or at leisure for his evil purposes. An empty, and much more a carnal heart, and an idle life, are ready to entertain any motion to sin.

Look always by faith to Christ and his Spirit as your only strength. And trust not to your own understanding, goodness, or resolutions; for man of himself is very changeable. May the Lord confirm, and strengthen, and preserve you!

Prayer for Grace to overcome Temptation.

(In the Language of the Liturgy.)

O God, who knowest that I am set in the midst of many and great dangers; raise up, I pray thee,

thy power, and with great might succour me, that I may withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with a pure heart and mind follow thee, the only God. Grant to me such strength and protection as may support me in all dangers, and carry me through all temptations. Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon my infirmities, and in all my dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend me. As I lean only on the help of thy heavenly grace, may I be defended by thy mighty power. Keep me both outwardly in my body and inwardly in my soul. Order my unruly wills and affections, and defend me evermore by thy most gracious and ready help; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, I may be kept from all things hurtful, and led to all things profitable to my salvation. O God, the Protector of all those who trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things in heaven and earth; keep me with thy perpetual mercy; that being ready both in body and soul, I may truly and faithfully serve thee, and finally obtain thy gracious promises, and be made a partaker of thy heavenly treasure, through Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen.

DIALOGUE V.

THE CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTED IN A HOLY LIFE;
in a Dialogue between a Minister and his Parishioner.

Minister. WELCOME, neighbour, I should hope that, by this time, you so well understand your own spiritual condition, as to know yourself what further instructions you stand in need of.

Parishioner. Sir, you have already made known to me what is the nature of Christianity and holiness, and what are the temptations which must be resisted. I would now desire you, if I am not too troublesome, to set before me all the duties of a Christian life, that I may see them together, and know how to unite them in my practice.

M. This I will readily and gladly do; and am happy that you give me the opportunity.

Though the salvation of the soul be a matter of inexpressible importance, yet, alas! how many are there who think it not worthy of their serious inquiry; not even of the reading of a good book one hour in a week! For the sake of these careless sinners, as well as for your own use, I have here drawn up for the serious and attentive consideration of all, the following directions.

That you were originally made capable of ho-