

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE

WITNESSING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,

IN REGARD TO THE

DIVINE ADOPTION OF TRUE BELIEVERS.

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PRINCESS-ANNE, MD.

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TO THE MEMBERS
OF
The Presbyterian Churches,

AT
Princess-Anne and Salisbury, Md.;

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE IS DEDICATED,

With feelings of sincere affection, and with ardent prayer

For their present Grace and future Glory;

By their Friend and Pastor,

THE AUTHOR.

A DISCOURSE, &c.



ROMANS VIII. 16. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

THIS passage shows, that it is the privilege of those who are truly pious to be assured of their belonging to the household of faith. They may obtain this assurance by means of a testimony, which the Holy Spirit bears, and which their own spirits or souls receive, with the consciousness of its truth, that is necessary to the production of the pleasing result. It is not to be supposed, however, that the testimony of the Spirit, in this way, is constantly enjoyed, with *equal* clearness and comfort. This is not the case. Sometimes, it is as explicit and convincing, as any proof that could be presented to the human mind, respecting visible or temporal things. And sometimes, it is only sufficient to sustain *such a hope* of immortality, as prevents distressing anxiety on the subject of acceptance with God. This hope cannot be bright or lively. But the Spirit's witness is never so utterly withdrawn, even in the worst seasons of darkness and declension, as to induce *absolute despair*. Job could say, "though he slay me, yet will I trust him." The *psalmist* could say, under severe chastisements, "I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand." And the apostle *Paul* could say, that however "cast down" and "perplexed" he occasionally felt, he was "not in despair."

It may, then, be inferred, that, although real Christians may have their *assurance* of salvation diminished and intermitted; yet they are still favored with a measure of what may be considered the witness of the Spirit. They are *never entirely* "forsaken" in this respect.* It is also to be believed, that they

*This is the doctrine of our *Confession of Faith*. See chap. 18. Sec. 4.—"They are supported from *utter despair*." There have indeed been instances of persons seemingly pious, being *in despair* to all appearance. But we think it may be said of such instances, either that the individuals were not truly religious, or that they were not so really in despair as may have been supposed.

have, at least *once*, had this evidence clearly and affectingly furnished to their minds and to their hearts. This may have been done, in one case, directly after conversion to God; and, in another case, under the endurance of sore trials for Christ's sake; and, in another case, in the midst of active efforts for the glorification of God. There are also cases, in which the evidence alluded to is comfortably possessed almost uniformly during life, after the first exercise of faith in the Redeemer. The person, therefore, who has never, for a moment, experienced the Spirit's witness or testimony, in such a measure as to cause him to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory—as to lead him to call God *his Father* with heart-felt affection—and as to make him sensible of the infinite preciousness of Jesus Christ; such a person cannot properly conclude, that he is pious. He may, it is true, be ready to assert, that he is free from feelings of despair. But he should reflect, that this may be owing to the want of depth and pungency in his convictions. He is not led to consider himself *lost*, because he sees not his danger. He is of the number of those, who speak “peace where there is no peace.”—The view before presented, is, we apprehend, correct. Every one, who has been renewed in the disposition of his mind, has, at least *once*,—probably often—had the testimony of the Holy Ghost borne to his soul, in a satisfactory manner, that he is interested in the divine favor and entitled to the celestial inheritance. If this were not so, many passages of Holy Writ would appear to be without meaning; and it would also be difficult to vindicate some of the attributes of God. For, though we may discover various reasons, why the influences of the Spirit should not be *always* so abundantly imparted to the believer, as to produce a full or a transporting assurance of salvation; yet it would be both reasonable and scriptural to expect, that each individual, who has been translated out of darkness into marvellous light, should be, at some period, assured of such a translation, and possess, at some hour, all the evidence, which might be needful to his entire satisfaction on this very important and deeply interesting point. The inspired declarations, about the grace and tenderness and loving kindness of God towards believers, evince, that a testimony might be expected, either shortly after a change of heart is experienced, or at a subsequent time, which would produce assurance of reconciliation with him, who had been offended. And however greatly this assurance may be afterwards weakened at

times; yet every degree of the evidence, whence it results, is, in no case, entirely taken away—So much of it always remains as is requisite to prevent the deep and heavy gloom of despair from settling upon the mind. There may be despondency; there may be doubts; there may be frequent misgivings; but still, we doubt not, that there is at least a *dim* ray of hope left, in the case of every real servant of God, which excludes what may be properly considered despairing feelings in regard to ultimate salvation. This dim ray shoots forth from something in the state of his mind, or in his character, which, on scriptural grounds, indicates piety.

Much misapprehension exists on the subject of the *witnessing of the Spirit*. Perhaps no matter in practical religion is less distinctly understood by many, who profess to be Christians. And, on account of its peculiar nature, it must ever be a source of delusion, where proper views of it are not taken. May it not be, therefore, expected, brethren, that your attention will be closely given to the remarks, that may be, at present, offered, on the way in which the Spirit of God affords convincing proof of an interest in the divine favor to the understanding and heart of one, who has been renewed.

It is very requisite, that every thing, which is not represented in the Scriptures, as being *essentially* connected with this subject, should be carefully separated from it in the belief respecting it, which we hold. Now, the Scriptures do not say, that it is *essential* to the proper enjoyment of the Spirit's witness, that a light should be seen by the bodily eye, or that a voice should be heard by the bodily ear, or that the Saviour should present himself visibly to one's view, or that a particular passage of Revelation should be suddenly and powerfully brought to mind. Things of this kind may occur. It is *possible*. But their occurrence is not *probable*; nor does a single declaration of the sacred volume make it *necessary* in order to our having evidence of adoption, as the children of God, laid before us. It is acknowledged that in *miraculous* cases, something of this sort has uniformly existed. This appears from the infallible statements of God's word. But, who is not aware, that such cases are extra-ordinary in their nature? They lie out of the usual course of things; being specially designed to arrest the attention, in a particular way, and to disclose strikingly the operation of the finger of God. The aid of miracles was indispensably needed in the introduction of revealed re-

ligion among men. This religion too was plainly a matter of *general* interest and of unspeakable moment. The divine glory and human happiness were concerned in its success. There was an urgent call for wonderful displays to be made of the presence and power and grace of God—displays, which might affect the outward senses and carry conviction to the understanding. But, at present, any thing of this kind does not seem to be demanded: A regular system, so to speak, of means has been established for the conversion, sanctification, and salvation of man. We do not find, that of these means an audible voice from heaven, or a visible light from heaven, form any part. And although one or both of them, and other marvellous incidents might be used, in bringing an individual to God; yet, no such thing is made *necessary*, according to the Holy Scriptures, and we think it fanatical to look for any such thing, or to rely upon it, as at all conclusive in our favor. We must depend upon something more safe and more indubitable. The man, who would expect an interference with the course of nature on his behalf; who would expect the motion of the earth to be stopped—the seasons to be reversed—the rivers to be rolled back towards their fountains; would be justly deemed a deranged man. Now, there is an *ordinary course* pursued in the kingdom of grace, as well as in the kingdom of nature. The history of the church proves this. Nor is it more wise to expect what might be strictly called *miracles* in the one, than in the other. We conclude, therefore, that the *witnessing of the Spirit* may be possessed, in that degree, which is requisite for assurance of hope, for consolation in life, and for triumph in death, without any remarkable manifestation being ever once made to any of the external senses.

It should be also observed, here, that they who speak of the *direct* testimony of God's Spirit use language, which cannot be justified. We readily agree, that the Holy Spirit, in enlightening the mind, renewing the will, and purifying the affections, comes into actual connection or contact with them, by his agency. His operations in these ways, are, in many respects at least, *direct*. But we deny, that he thus bears his testimony. And to be persuaded of this, you have only to reflect, that no man can know, that his exercises, at any time, are holy until he compares them with the Word of God, to see how they will stand that unerring test, and until he has had some time to ascertain, that the fruits of holiness result from them. It is mani-

fest from Sacred Writ, that there are *false* exercises, which have a very cheering and softening effect upon the heart. Might not these, then, be often mistaken for *true* and genuine exercises, according to the view of the Spirit's direct testimony? How can the distinction be made in a moment? By what rule can one instantaneously determine, that he is blessed with the presence and impressions of the Holy Ghost? Must he not carefully examine his feelings, and consider well the effects produced, and decide accordingly? Is not this, indeed, the only way of securely arriving at a decision, which may be just and rational?

It might be thought, that although the remarks now offered may apply in the case of those, who are for the first time exercised in religion; yet they can have no application to the experienced Christian, who may have often scrutinized his emotions and feelings, and may be, therefore, able to tell *at once* whether the Holy Spirit is with his heart or not. But, even in regard to such a one the testimony is *indirectly* borne. It is afforded through the medium of the graces, which he possesses, and which are, from time to time, in exercise. He has to make use of the rules and marks of the Word of God, before he can conclude, that what he experiences results from the agency of the Divine Spirit. He may, it is true, have those rules and marks so familiarized to his mind, that he may not be so long in determining the point, as one of less acquaintance with matters of this kind, would be. But he has still to determine, in precisely the same way. How often too will he have to confess, that much that may have looked pure, at first view, and that he may have been ready to take for the results of the operations of the Spirit, has proved on being tested, in a scriptural way, to be very impure, and to have resulted from a very different source from the one alleged. This is a part of every pious man's experience. And it tends to confirm very decidedly the doctrine which we hold on this subject.

There is nothing, my brethren, connected with the *witnessing of the Spirit*, which is not, as to the matter of it, found in the Bible. He goes not beyond its limits for the *substance* of his testimony in this case. And, in exact agreement with this remark, is the declaration of *Peter* in regard to the Saviour's having been transfigured on the mountain. He says, that himself and the others, who were present on that occasion, were, "eye witnesses of Christ's majesty," and that they "heard the

voice which came to him from the excellent glory;" but he immediately adds, "we have also a *more sure* word of prophecy," or instruction, meaning the Scriptures, "whereunto ye do well, that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." Here we find the Sacred Oracles placed above the glorious manifestation to which reference was made. They are declared to be "*more sure*" than any sound or brightness;—having been penned by men who were "moved by the Holy Ghost." We are not, therefore, to imagine, that there will be any thing in the *witnessing of the Spirit*, which is not distinctly laid down in the Scriptures, as necessarily conjoined with it. The expectation of a *direct* witness, or of plainly miraculous events taking place,—is visionary. No one should expect the like, because no promise has been made nor any intimation given, that they shall exist. They cannot then be deemed at all *essential* to an assurance "that we are the children of God." Indeed as the presumption is *against* their occurrence, they should be regarded with suspicion, when they may seem to take place; and should be ascribed rather to an excited fancy or to the weakness and disorder of the nervous system, than to any thing else.

It is now proper, that the view, which we hold on this subject, should be expressed and illustrated. Our belief is, that *the witnessing of the Spirit* is conveyed *through means of the various Christian graces and exercises, and of a deportment becoming the gospel*. Of all these the Holy Spirit is the author; and when he shines upon them, and causes them to appear with some degree of clearness, they are then seen to be characteristic of the believer, and to be the fruits of the Spirit's saving influences, and thus the mind becomes assured of the divine adoption.

Some of the graces and exercises of piety may be here adverted to, to show, that it is only from these, accompanied by the performance of good works, that the testimony of the Spirit, in our favor, can be reasonably expected to proceed.

Faith may be mentioned under this view. Its exercise is demanded before one can be accepted of God. For we are expressly told, that "without faith it is impossible to please him"—that "the work of God" or that which he requires us to perform, "is to *believe* on him whom he hath sent"—and that "whosoever *believeth* on the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life." It is then, manifest that *faith* is of

the utmost importance in regard to salvation. And we are further informed, that it must be a faith, which is the substance of things hoped for—which is the evidence of invisible realities—which works by love—which purifies the heart—which obtains a victory over the world. It must be a faith which interests the soul in Christ, as to his various offices of prophet—priest, and king; and which leads one to exercise *trust* in his infinite merits. Such is the *grace* of faith, that is required. Now, he, upon whom it is conferred, is enabled to see, particularly when his faith is strong, that he has this mark of piety. He is sensible, that, from a conviction of his own sinfulness and vileness, he has endeavored to go to the Saviour; whom he has seen set forth in the gospel as all-sufficient, and as willing to save to the uttermost, and as determined to cast out none that come to him. He feels also that his faith is so lively as to bring the matters of eternity, invested with the solemnity which belongs to them, near to himself—that it fixes on the Redeemer alone for all the blessings he needs—that it tends to increase the measure of holiness—and that it promotes his spirituality. He is in a good degree, *conscious* of these things; knowing that they are so. He can call Jesus Christ the “chief among ten thousands,” and can say that he is “precious” to him, and is ready to “count all things but loss for the excellence of the knowledge of him.” He desires to wear his yoke—to bear his burden—to glory in his cross—to resemble him, as much as possible—to live to the honor of his name.

We would inquire, now, if a testimony must not of necessity arise, in one’s favor, from this exercise of *faith* or dependance on Jesus Christ? It appears obvious, that it must. But faith is produced by the Holy Spirit; for he is denominated “the Spirit of faith.” All the evidence, therefore, resulting from faith, comes originally from the Spirit; springing from a Christian grace, which he forms and cherishes in the heart—And, consequently, it may be properly styled the *witnessing of the Spirit*, communicated through the exercise of a living faith in the only Mediator. This is abundantly evident.

It might be remarked, moreover, before this topic is left, that a man’s *faith* or *belief*, as it respects *the doctrines of religion merely*, should be also taken into view, in relation to this subject. An unrenewed man is not disposed to receive, with readiness, every thing, which the Revelation from Heaven has disclosed. There are some points in it, both doctrinal and practi-

cal, which he rejects. They do not coincide with his philosophical opinions—with his prejudices, or with his inclinations; and he is, therefore, induced to give them no place in the system of his faith. Even if he should have to grant, that the Word of God really contains them, his opposition is so great as to lead him to disbelieve the Word of God or certain portions of it, rather than admit the truth of the things to which he takes exception. In no instance, we think, does the belief of a man in the natural state, correspond fully with the contents of the Scriptures. It is allowed, that he may go far in his belief; but there is always an error or a deficiency, more or less. And, it is wilful; because he has no desire to embrace any thing which is disagreeable to his mind—which is not relished by his heart—He, of course, likes it not. But, in the case of the renewed man, this is not so. It is, for the most part, entirely otherwise. He is sincerely desirous of knowing and of believing the simple truth, as God has put it down on the pages of his Book. He would reject no particle of it; being persuaded, that it is all important. Perhaps, indeed, his belief may not be, in some respects, so full and so consistent, as it should be. But this results from a want of light, as to those respects. He errs ignorantly, in what he does. We see not, how he could err wilfully on this subject. For as he is pious, he desires to believe aright—He highly appreciates the truth; cherishing no enmity against it, but believing it to the utmost extent of his apprehensions, and evermore beseeching God to open his eyes farther “to behold wondrous things out of his law,” and to guide him, by his Spirit, into a knowledge of all the doctrines and precepts, which have been revealed, and which, as he readily admits, it becomes him to know. It is surely thus with the pious man. He can assent to all, that has been just stated. And, in consequence, the Holy Spirit testifies to him, from his fondness for divine truth, and his cordial reception of it, even though it condemn him in a certain way; that he is an heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ.

These observations may suffice on the subject of *faith*, in *the witnessing of the Spirit*; both in relation to a belief in what the Bible contains, and to a reliance on the merits of the Saviour.

Repentance may be mentioned, for a similar purpose of illustration, in this case. We are required, in the gospel, to *repent*. Many passages of Scripture, which need not be given at

length, are as explicit on this point, as language could make them. And, here likewise, as in regard to *faith*, we are informed of the nature or kind of repentance, that it is requisite we should experience. It must be a repentance, which leads us to loathe and abhor ourselves—which excites our hatred against all sin—which induces us to shun the very appearance of evil which renders our hearts broken and our spirits contrite—and which is truly a “godly sorrow.” In this way, my brethren, is *repentance unto life* characterized in the Scriptures. And it is a fruit of the Spirit’s operation; for we are told that the “Spirit of grace” must be poured out upon one, ere he will mourn and be in bitterness on account of his transgressions. The favorable evidence, therefore, arising from the believer’s penitence must be considered as afforded by the Holy Spirit. It comes from *him*; but is presented to the mind, through the grace of repentance, which is wrought, by his agency, in the heart. Now, when a man repents, the exercise cannot lie concealed from him. He must be, in some measure conscious, of it. Could his heart be broken, in consideration of his sinfulness, and he be utterly ignorant of it? Could his spirit experience contrition without his knowledge? Could he abhor himself, and be aware of no self-abhorrence? Could he hate all sin, as such, and not know, whether he loved it or hated it? Could he mourn over his iniquities, as being offensive to God, and be contrary to his holiness, and not be sensible of his doing so?

These things could not occur. Let all that is necessary be admitted, as to the danger of mistake, and the deceitfulness of the heart; still they could not occur. It is manifest, then, that the exercise of true repentance is one very abundant source of the *witnessing of the Spirit*; and an infallible method of its being borne satisfactorily to the soul.

Love to God and to man may be mentioned to illustrate our view. This is a grace of much interest and much importance. It is declared to be greater than *faith* or *hope*; because it will continue, when they, in all probability, shall have ceased to exist. There will be the utmost need for its exercise, throughout eternity.

To love God is to love his *character* and his *attributes*, as the Scriptures describe them. They are infinitely excellent; and therefore worthy of the affectionate admiration of all intelligent creatures. But they, who are fallen, love them not. “The carnal” or unconverted “mind is enmity against God.” It hates

him; because he is so just—so holy—so powerful—so glorious as he is. It would dethrone him; or, at least, it would take away from him many of his perfections, setting limits to his presence and limits to his knowledge, and making him much like a heathen deity, that is supposed either not to perceive the commission of sin, or to connive at it.—But all this is as contrary to the feelings of the devoted Christian in regard to God, as darkness is contrary to light. He *loves* his Creator. He would not have his character changed. He would not have any of his attributes limited or removed. His affections are placed on each one of them. And this has resulted too from the operation of the Holy Spirit. We are informed that “the love of God”—not only *his* love of us; but also *our* love of him—“is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.” It is he, that diffuses through the moral and rational nature of man that affectionate feeling towards God, which is called the *love* of him—When, therefore, a person is ready to say of God, “whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth, that I desire besides thee,” or in comparison with thee—when he is satisfied that God is the object of his supreme delight—when he finds that his soul rests in *him*, as his portion—when he seeks to commune with him every day—O when he has these views and feelings, he may be assured that he *loves* God. And thus again the Spirit, who caused him to love him, and who draws out his affections towards him “bears witness with his spirit,” that he is an heir of immortal glory.

In regard to the *love of man*, it may be remarked, that the believer exercises it, in a *complacent* manner, towards those who seem to be “partakers of the like precious faith” with himself. He loves his brethren in Christ, for the sake of the resemblance, which he sees in them to the object, whom he loves supremely. It is the image they bear—the views and emotions they have—the prospects before them; which chiefly actuate him in giving them an elevated place in his affectionate regards. And, towards all men, friends or foes, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, bond or free, he entertains a *love of benevolence*. He prays for them—he does them good as he can—he endeavors to advance their welfare—and he desires that they may be saved from the coming wrath. But, in order to his doing all this, the Holy Spirit must be present with him. His influences must rest upon the heart. Thus, then, does the Spirit testify to him, through his *complacent* love to saints, because

they are saints, and through his *benevolent* love to all men, in humble imitation of God himself; that he is a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Humility may be mentioned, in reference to the *witnessing of the Holy Spirit*. Of this men are naturally devoid. They are, while unregenerated, entire strangers to every feeling of the kind. But, without it, piety cannot exist. Like all other graces, it may be possessed in various degrees. Some measure of it is, however, the necessary consequence of a change of heart. The man, who has been effectually convinced of sin—of righteousness and of judgment, has been made, in a degree, truly meek and lowly, and desirous of cherishing such views as may render him still more so; because he has seen, that he is so unworthy, in a moral sense, as to make every high thought and lofty imagination utterly unbecoming in his case. He would be “clothed with humility” according to the divine injunction; and wear it constantly around him as a garment. He would desire it, on account of its suiting his character; and on account of its making him like the Saviour, who “humbled himself,” and like the angels, who veil their faces in Heaven, and like “the four and twenty elders,” who fall down before the throne. He would be humble, in view of the inferiority of his nature, when compared with the divine nature; and also in view of his sins. Nor is it merely those sins, that are disgraceful in the eyes of men, which humble him: it is those likewise that men know nothing of, and that many men would not consider *sins* at all, if they did know them. O how frequently is he sunk, under a sense of them, to the dust before God! He feels himself to be truly less than the least of the divine mercies, and entirely undeserving of the smallest manifestation of compassion. This is a part of pious exercise of mind. It proceeds from the Spirit of God. And, therefore, it indicates *his* presence, wherever it is possessed, and it forms a means of his testimony’s being brought to the soul.

Joy in the Holy Ghost may be mentioned, in connection with our subject. This is a scriptural phrase. We also find “joy” specified as one of the fruits of the *Spirit*. It is a holy and spiritual joy; and it may be experienced, amidst the sorest outward calamities. Its object is *God*, as a reconciled Father through Jesus Christ. And hence we read of *joying and rejoicing in God*. The views of him, which are taken by the mind, are clear and animating, and the evidence arising from

the different graces, that are possessed, is distinct, as to the individual's interest in Christ and title to heaven; and, therefore, *joy* springs up in the heart—"a joy unspeakable and full of glory;"—through which, being experienced on the scriptural grounds referred to, the Holy Spirit affords his testimony to the conscience. The favored man is satisfied, from examining the state and emotions of his soul, that the *joy* he feels is not carnal—is not delusive—is not hypocritical; but is spiritual—is substantial—is holy. And then "the Spirit," in the highest manner to be known on earth, "beareth witness with his spirit," that he is a friend and a servant of God.

It would be easy to mention many other particulars of this kind; as, a feeling of adoption, leading one to say, Abba, Father, with filial confidence and tenderness—a good hope, through grace, of a glorious immortality—delight in communing with God—zeal for the honor of the Most High—pleasure in the performance of the duties of devotion—pious and evangelical resolutions to serve the Lord—keeping the heart with diligence—referring every thing to the divine disposal—being desirous of putting away all idols, that God alone may be exalted, and other similar things, by means of which the *witnessing of the Spirit* may be enjoyed. But, to enlarge upon the exercises just enumerated, would occupy much time; and, in our apprehension, it is not strictly necessary, as enough has been already said, for the purpose of illustration.

It was also stated, that the *deportment*, where it is such as the gospel demands, if taken in conjunction with the Christian graces, and with the exercises of the heart, is an important medium of the Spirit's testimony. The rule of Christ is, "by their fruits, ye shall know them." This is so perfectly reasonable, that it is commonly appealed to, on the subject, as a satisfactory criterion. The ordinary works or doings of a man, decide his general character. According to them, is he judged by every one. And, if proper allowance be made for certain peculiar circumstances, that may exist; the decision, thus formed, will be correct. Now, it is the part of a renewed man to "delight in the law of God." He sees the holiness and justice and goodness of each precept. He is convinced, that there is no unnecessary strictness; but that every requisition is such as it should be. If then, he should discover, on examining his *deportment*, that it is conformed to the divine law; or, that he earnestly desires to have it so conformed,—is there not much

evidence furnished, that he is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are assured, that it is "through the Spirit, the deeds of the body are to be mortified"—that, "the sons of God are led," or directed, "by his Spirit"—that "if we walk in the Spirit," or act under his control, "we shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." Such passages prove, that a *holy deportment* is attributable to the operation of the Spirit of God. When, therefore, such a deportment is maintained, it becomes a means by which the testimony of the Holy Spirit may be presented. This part of his testimony, too, must be superadded to *that*, which may be otherwise presented; that ground of satisfactory assurance may be given to the mind. To exhibit the truth of this remark, let us suppose, that one were to imagine, that he relies on Christ for salvation, and yet show none of the effects ascribed in the Scriptures, to such a reliance, in the outward life; is not his mistake manifest from this deficiency? Or, let us suppose, that he were to consider himself a penitent, and still live in sin—that he were to profess to love God, and yet not glorify him; to love his fellow-man, and yet not seek to promote his benefit—that he were, in short, to allege, that he experienced various pious emotions, without acting accordingly, as opportunity might offer: who would hesitate to say, that his professions and exercises were not genuine? Is it not plain, from the Sacred Oracles, and from the nature of things, that the man is wrong?—It appears, then, that the *deportment* should never be left out of view, on the subject of the *Spirit's witnessing*. A special respect should be had to *it*, as indicative of the inward state; or, of the principles and feelings, which exist within, which usually actuate a person in his ways, and which enstamp a moral character upon his doings.

The doctrine, that we hold on the subject, we have attempted to discuss, has now been laid, with brevity, before you. You perceive, that the *witnessing of the Spirit*, in our view, is to be collected from various exercises, emotions and actions; all of which must be according to what is demanded in Holy Writ, and produced by the invisible, though powerful operation of that Agent, who renews and sanctifies the heart. It is not, indeed, to be asserted, that no other exercises or emotions can ever be, at any time, felt, and that no other actions can ever be, at any time, performed, except those referred to; for this would amount to absolute perfection, which is not required, that the favorable testimony of the blessed Spirit may be

borne. But the exercises and emotions should be prevalently such as have been described; and the works should be as a regular thing, good. There ought also to be a constant *desire* entertained, that every thought, word and action may be always agreeable to the standard of Divine Revelation. Where this is the case, (and it is the common case of true believers) there is ample evidence of adoption into the family of God furnished, and it ought to be received.*

A few general remarks, arising from the discussion, may be here offered, on our subject.

1. It is erroneous to say, that the *witnessing of the Spirit* consists in sudden impressions—in audible voices or in visible manifestations. These things should not be expected. They belong not, indispensably or essentially, to the testimony of which we speak. It may be fully afforded without them. And, on the other hand, they may be fancied to exist, where *it* is never enjoyed. No person should, therefore, be backward to entertain assurance of salvation, *merely* because he may not have experienced something of this kind. If he have pious exercises, which are matters of consciousness; and if his deportment be holy, he has abundant reason to be assured of his acceptance with God. He will also, we doubt not, be sometimes—perhaps frequently—sensible of this; notwithstanding his impressions about the necessity of being the subject of some such things, as have been noticed. Almost before he is aware, he will occasionally find, a firm and joyous assurance possessing his mind, and affecting his heart. The Spirit, silently, yet convincingly, shows him that he is a joint-heir with Christ, his adorable Head, to an incorruptible—undefiled and unfading inheritance.

That we may be entirely understood on this point we would

*The only proper way of deciding the *time* of regeneration is by attending to the *fruits*, and ascertaining *when* they began to exist. Entire satisfaction, as to the *time*, may be thus obtained. But no person should, at once, pronounce a *change*, of which he may be conscious, a true conversion to God—That matter remains to be subsequently ascertained. Should devout exercise of heart, and an exemplary life be found to result from the *change* that has been felt; it may then be safe and right to consider the *hour* of the change, as the *hour* of translation from darkness to light.

say, that we do not question, that God could speak to us audibly—that he could show us a brightness—or, that he could disclose wonderful things to us;—nor do we question, that the influences of the Spirit, in a literal manner, rest upon and pervade the soul;—nor do we question, that, under trying or peculiar circumstances, in regard to which nothing very definite may be found in the Scriptures, a special manifestation might be made;—nor do we question, that some, who are destitute of the means of grace and of the Bible itself, may have instruction, in divine things, miraculously imparted to them;—nor, finally, do we question, that, on the bed of death, divine consolations may be sweetly and copiously poured into the heart, that the views may be rendered unusually bright, and that the feelings may be made altogether triumphant. We admit these things. But they have nothing to do with the *ordinary witnessing of the Spirit* in the case of believers. It is yielded entirely through means of what the Spirit has graciously done in the heart, and of the purification of the outward life, which his influences have tended to effect. He shows his work to the mind, and leads the mind to compare this with the Scriptures; and thus he gives his witness.

2. The *firmness* of the ground of the Spirit's testimony, is evident from the view of the subject now presented. This ground is not a matter, which may be only an optical illusion; or an idle vagary of the fancy; or a presumptuous notion of the mind. Nothing like any of these things forms the ground of the testimony. It is something more firm and lasting. It is *scriptural graces and exercises*, and a *scriptural deportment*; having all resulted from the presence and working of the Spirit, and being all used by him, in *witnessing* with the souls of his people, that they are the subjects of his grace. There will be no great danger of mistake respecting them, if proper care be taken in self-examination. The *exercises* are such as one may be *conscious* of, as much as of any other exercises of the mind, in proportion to their vividness; and the correct and pious deeds of the life, are as observable, as deeds of a different cast. These things must be obvious. And it may be inferred from them, that true Christians are not in possession of *assurance* of the favor of God and of eternal life, so frequently and so fully, as they might and should be. They will perhaps be ready to admit, with humility, that they experience, to a degree, the emotions and feelings, which the Scriptures represent

as essential to vital godliness, and that they constantly endeavor to have their deportment ordered aright; but seem not to be aware, that the *whole ground* of assurance exists in their case. They should, therefore, humbly conclude and say, that their "calling and election is *sure*."—On the other hand, it may be inferred, that many, who express great confidence as to their state, in the divine sight—who assert, that they have been marvellously visited, by the Holy Spirit; are ignorant of genuine piety. An experienced saint may see this, at the time, from their *very manner of speaking*, and a few days—weeks or years at most, may fully disclose it. A person may walk joyfully, for a while, "in the light of sparks of his own kindling." He may be one of those, in regard to whom "Satan," as we are told, "is transformed into an angel of light." It has often appeared to me, that the apostle here alludes to some *visible manifestation* made by the evil one, for the purpose of deception.

3. The *witnessing of the Spirit* will always be more or less satisfactory, according to the strength or weakness of the Christian graces, especially of the *faith*; according to the distinctness or indistinctness of the religious exercises; and according to the conformity or disconformity of the external walk to the preceptive will of God. This might be expected. And *experience* proves its truth. Every pious man knows, that when his faith is strong, and his other graces and emotions lively, and his walk and conversation holy; he has *much peace*. He can even say, with Paul, "I know whom I have believed." But, when his faith is *weak*, or when the beauty of his deportment is marred by any irregularity; he feels his peace is greatly diminished. And, it may be, that, at times, he has no more of the *witnessing of the Spirit* left, than what is barely sufficient to prevent *despair*. O then how requisite is it, that the graces of the Spirit should be cultivated—that the godly emotions of the heart should be cherished—and that the *outward man* should be regulated by the divine law. Will not every child of God, who hears me, take all the measures and use all the means, which the Scriptures warrant, for having each source of the *Spirit's witnessing* as to himself, more and more augmented. Remember, that you need daily as much consolation as a comfortable assurance can yield you; and that, in the near prospect of dissolution, as well as in the actual conflict with the King of Terrors, you will require the strongest testimony, in your favor,

which can be gathered from the most perfect work of the Spirit, in your heart and your life. Let no one, therefore, be indolent or neglectful.

And, now, what shall I say to those of you, who have not *the witnessing of the Spirit*, and in whose case, no scriptural ground for it exists? What shall I say to you? Is it not desirable, think you, to experience that "peace, which passeth all understanding?" When you are, at any time, cast down from worldly considerations, and when life itself seems almost burdensome; have you not often a longing for more, than this earthly ball can afford you? Do you not feel, that you stand in need of *solid bliss*? Are you not convinced, that, without it, there must be an aching void, in your bosoms, for evermore? Come, then, and seek after those graces and exercises, and pursue that line of conduct; whence may result a cheering assurance, that you are born from above, and destined for the heavenly Canaan. Look to God in prayer—look to Christ in faith—look to the Spirit in earnest desire for his presence, for his work, and for his *witnessing*. O! my friends! attend to all these things without further procrastination; because *time* is rapidly passing away, and *eternity*, in awful majesty, is drawing near. Life is utterly uncertain; but death is as certain as the decree of the Almighty can make it. AMEN.