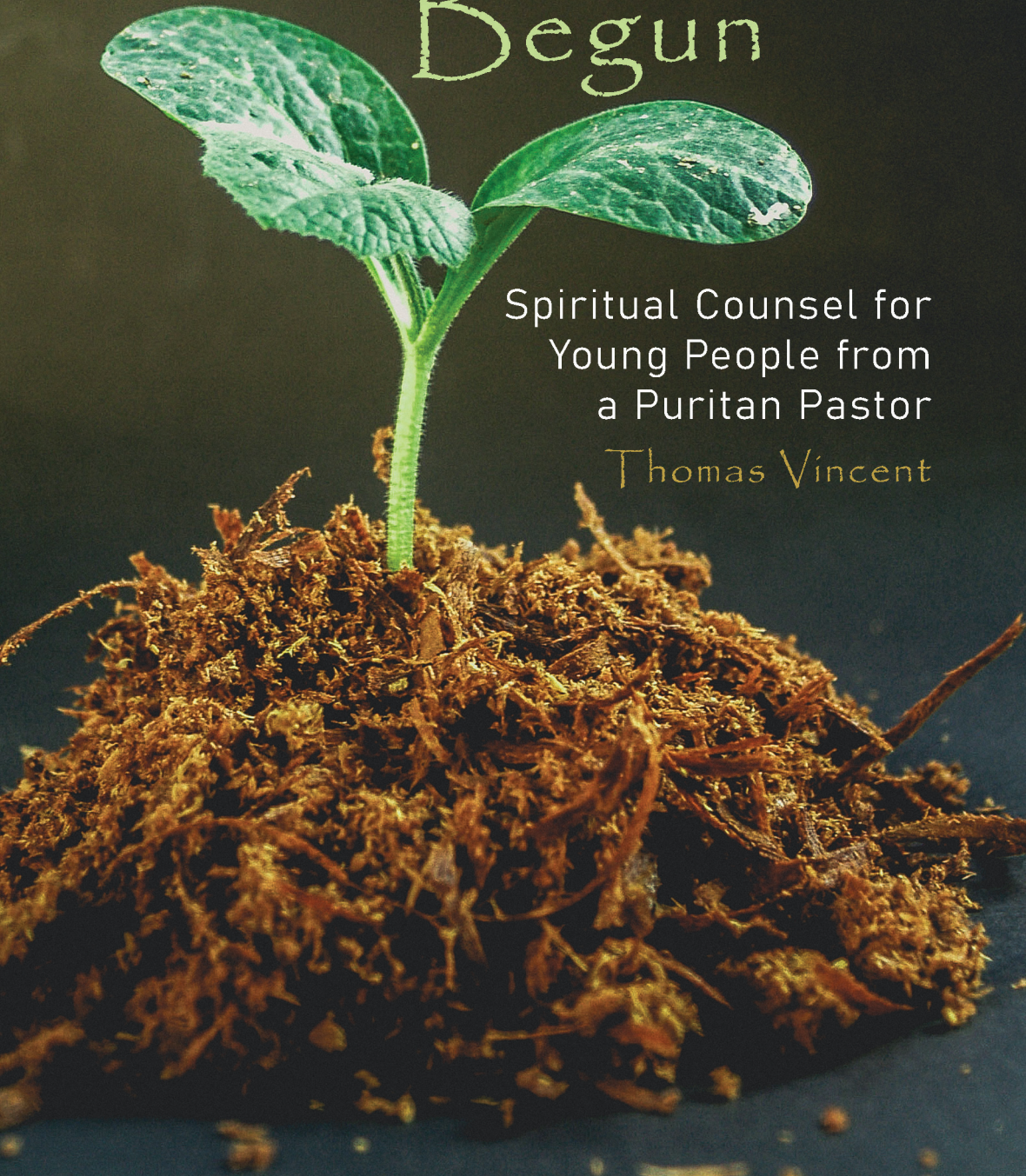


The Good Work Begun

Spiritual Counsel for
Young People from
a Puritan Pastor

Thomas Vincent



THE GOOD WORK
BEGUN

The Good Work Begun

Spiritual Counsel for Young People
from a Puritan Pastor

Thomas Vincent



CountedFaithful

THE GOOD WORK BEGUN

First published as *The Good Work Begun in the Day of Grace
Performed Until the Day of Christ* in 1672

This edition © Counted Faithful, 2019

COUNTED FAITHFUL

2 Drakewood Road
London SW16 5DT

Website: <http://www.countedfaithful.org>

ISBN

Book: 978-1-78872-215-5

ePub: 978-1-78872-216-2

Kindle: 978-1-78872-217-9

The Good Work Begun is a work in the public domain. Some updating of language and formatting has been undertaken to make this work as accessible as possible. Please respect the time and effort invested in preparing this work by not reproducing or transmitting any part of it in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Contents

Introduction	7
1. The Good Work	11
1. <i>The good work of grace itself</i>	11
2. <i>The subject of this good work of grace: the soul</i>	13
3. <i>The Author of this good work: God</i>	17
4. <i>Why the Lord begins this good work in any of the children of men</i>	21
5. <i>Applications</i>	23
2. The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ	33
1. <i>The day of grace in which God begins the good work</i>	33
2. <i>God's performing of the good work which he has begun</i>	34
3. <i>The day of Christ</i>	34
4. <i>The certainty that God will perform the good work until the day of Christ</i>	35
5. <i>Objections to the perseverance of the saints</i>	41
6. <i>Applications</i>	45
Appendix 1 – <i>A cautionary letter sent by an unknown author to the young people in Thomas Vincent's congregation</i>	53
Appendix 2 – <i>Reply to the Author of the Previous Letter</i>	57
Appendix 3 – <i>Cautionary motives and directions to young people professing religion, to keep them from apostasy and backsliding</i>	61

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

(Philippians 1:6)

Introduction

AMONG all the works of men, some of which have been great and illustrious, none are comparable to the works of God; and among all the works of God before us, none are more admirable than the work of God *within* us. You have sometimes seen rare and curious works of art – beautiful pictures, stately palaces and grand buildings. Almost daily more astonishing works of nature are being revealed, the substance of those shadows, the amazing structure of the earth and heavens; but the work of grace, which cannot be seen with the eye, excels every visible work in lustre and curiosity.

David tells us in *Psalms 139:14, 15* that his body was wonderfully made, and all his members curiously wrought and fashioned by the hand of God. His soul was more wonderfully made, and there was more to marvel at in the forming of his spirit, with faculties of such excellent use and operation. But in the new forming of the soul after the image of God, in God's drawing the distinctive features of the new man upon the heart, is the greatest wonder and curiosity. This is the *Good Work* which God begins and will perform. All God's works are good, but this work is excellent; other works are really good, but this is eminently good; in other works God puts forth his power and manifests his wisdom, but in this work he has shown the exceeding greatness of his power, his most admirable wisdom, and, to crown it all, the exceeding riches of his grace and love. Other works shall be demolished – not only earthly bodies, but the heavenly bodies themselves shall melt and be dissolved at last: but this good work of grace shall abide unto the day of Christ, and in the day of Christ, and then be perfected in glory. This the Apostle

The Good Work Begun

expresses his confidence of in the text: “*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*”

This epistle was written to the Philippians when Paul was in prison at Rome for the testimony of the gospel. Nevertheless, the Word of God was not bound, but had free course and more powerful efficacy even there; his bonds tended to the furtherance of the gospel. The body of the Apostle was in bonds, but his heart was not in bonds, other than the bonds of love that bound him to the Philippians. His tongue was not in bonds, for he let them know what praise and thanks he offered to God on their behalf. His pen was not in bonds, for in prison he wrote this excellent epistle to them; and we have reason to bless God for those bonds which were the occasion of a work so beneficial to the Church in all later ages.

After the Apostle’s salutation to the Philippians, he mentions this matter of great joy and comfort to them in this text: “*Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” In these words we have:

1. The Apostle’s confidence concerning the saints at Philippi, and, in them, of all saints unto the end of the world, – “*Being confident of this very thing.*” He does not speak of it as a doubtful thing, something that might or might not be, but as of a thing most sure, of which he had a full confidence and persuasion.

2. Here is the thing of which he is confident, or the matter of his confidence concerning them: “*That he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” Here we have the work of grace set forth, (i) by the quality of it – it is “*a good work,*” (ii) by the subject of it – the soul: not a work outside you, but “*within you,*” (iii) by the Author of it – “*He,*” that is, God, (iv) by the beginning of it – “*He that hath begun a good work in you,*” (v) by the accomplishment of it, and bringing it to perfection – “*will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*”

Hence observe these two doctrines:

Introduction

Doctrine 1: That the good work of grace in the soul is begun by the Lord.

Doctrine 2: That the good work which God begins in the day of grace, he will perform until the day of Jesus Christ.

1

The Good Work

IN handling the good work begun, I shall speak concerning (1.) the good work of grace itself, (2.) the subject of it – which is the soul, (3.) the Author of it – and show that it is the Lord who begins this good work, (4.) why the Lord begins this good work, and then, (5.) make some application.

1. The good work of grace itself

There are many evil works of men, such as are all sins. The work of grace is the good work of God. There are some good works which are wrought *by* us; this is the good work which is wrought *in* us. There are some works of grace, and gracious acts of God towards us, which produce only a relative change, such as God's justification of our persons, his adoption of us and admitting us into his family, but this is a gracious work of God upon us, whereby he effects a real change within us; and although the grace within us is always accompanied with the grace outside us, yet it is really distinct from it. This good work of grace is begun in regeneration, or the new birth, when God effectually calls us by his Word and Spirit, and powerfully turns us from darkness to light, and from the reign of sin into the subjection and obedience of Christ. It is carried on in the work of sanctification by which sin, which in the first work of grace is dethroned and mortally wounded, is more and more mortified, and the spiritual life which has begun is maintained, and the soul is more and more quickened and enabled to live unto righteousness.

The Good Work Begun

In the first work, the seed of grace is planted in the soul by the Spirit, which in the work of sanctification springs up and brings forth the fruit of holiness and obedience. In the first work of grace, all the distinguishing features and members of the new man are formed in the soul, which in sanctification are more and more shaped and fashioned after God's image, and the new man grows up from its infancy more and more towards the stature and strength of a perfect man in Christ. In the first work, all the habits of grace are infused together into the soul, which in the work of sanctification gather strength and show themselves in their lively and vigorous exercise.

We are now to speak of the first work of grace, or the good work as it is begun by the Lord. When the Lord effects a gracious change in the soul, he finds the sinner empty and void of all good, filled with the guilt and smeared with the defilement of sin, and, even though sin grievously wounds his conscience, he finds him spiritually unaware, and though he is in danger of everlasting ruin, he finds him asleep and secure.

Firstly, the Lord meets with him and puts a stop to his course and career of sin, by hedging up his way, as it were, with thorns. By his providence he brings the sinner under the preaching of the Word, and there he shows him his evil work and the transgressions in which he has run to excess and exceedingly provoked his holy eye against him. The Lord in his Word sounds his trumpet of judgment, and awakens him out of his carnal security by the loud thunderings and dreadful lightnings of the law. He convinces the sinner of his guilt and what sin deserves, and the danger which he is in of the eternal damnation and destruction of hell, of which such impenitent and unbelieving sinners as he is are liable. As a result of this, conscience, which before had been lulled to sleep by the devil and deceitful lusts, begins to be startled and takes up its whip to lash, and its sword to prick and to wound the sinner, so that in distress he cries out, "*O what shall I do to be saved?*"

God at first sends his Spirit (in order to prepare the soul for this gracious change) to be a spirit of bondage to awaken the sinner to fear (*Romans 8:15*). The Spirit does, as it were, bring a warrant from heaven, and like a sergeant claps the sinner on the back, and arrests him for all the insults and indignities which he has thrown at the King

The Good Work

of heaven, for all the treasons and rebellions which he has practised. The sinner, having nothing to plead, is unable to make his escape, for where could he fly from God's Spirit? This spirit of bondage lays him up in prison, as it were, puts chains and shackles upon his feet, and then passes the sentence of the law upon him that he must die! It lets him know that he is cursed (*Galatians 3:10*), is condemned already (*John 3:18*), and that the execution is not far off.

Thus the sinner is brought into great distress and perplexity of mind. He looks about him for help, but all succour fails him. He struggles and would gladly break the bonds which are upon him, but he finds himself the more entangled. He endeavours to divert his grief, and throw away his troubles, but he is the more perplexed and wounded. Then he seeks after something to appease God's anger and to quiet the clamours of his conscience. So he flies to duties and to ordinances; he prays and hears, and reads, and turns from his former ungodly company and practices, and frequents the company of the saints and servants of God, joining with them in all religious observances and exercises. But still he finds (if God works on him effectually) that none of these can remove the guilt of one sin, and that his righteousness is imperfect, which results from even the strictest performance of any duties. Therefore he looks upon himself as worthless and helpless in himself, and perceives that it does not lie in the power of any creature to help him.

But learning of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is mighty and able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God by him (*Hebrews 7:25*), being made acquainted with the perfect righteousness of Christ, and the full satisfaction which by his death he has given to God's justice for man's sin, and having a free offer made of this to him, and a gracious invitation to come to Christ that he might have pardon and life by him, being powerfully drawn by the Spirit, he is inclined and enabled to come to him and lay hold on him, by which he is joined to Christ and receives life from him. Thus the good work of grace is begun, the nature of which will appear in the second section.

2. The subject of this good work of grace: the soul

The good work begun by the Lord is in your souls – and it is the whole soul that is the subject of this grace which the Lord works.

The Good Work Begun

I. In the good work of grace the *understanding* is enlightened and the spirit of the mind is renewed (*Ephesians 4:23*). The understandings of graceless persons are darkened (*Ephesians 4:18*). They cannot know the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned (*1 Corinthians 2:14*). There is a black night upon their spirits; a darkness worse than an Egyptian night overspreads the face of their souls. There is a veil of ignorance and unbelief over their eyes, which keeps the light of the knowledge of God from them. Hence it is that they do not apprehend the beauty and excellency which is in God and Christ, and the ways of holiness.

But where God begins the good work of grace in any, he opens their eyes (*Acts 26:18*). He illuminates their understandings (*Hebrews 10:32*). He causes the darkness to pass away and the true light to shine into them (*1 John 2:8*), by which light he reveals to them the odious nature of sin, his own infinite excellencies and perfections, and the excellency of the ways of holiness, which lead to life and happiness, beyond the ways of sin, which only lead to death and ruin.

They had some knowledge of these things before by the teachings of men, but it was a bare, speculative, notional knowledge which they had in their heads; but now they are taught by the Spirit, they attain a spiritual, practical, experimental and heart-affecting knowledge of these things. Now they perceive a marvellous excellency in those things which before seemed foolishness to them (*1 Corinthians 2:14*). They have a new eye, being anointed with the spiritual eye-salve, and all things now appear completely differently. Before, sin, with its paint and bait, appeared beautiful and desirable; and Christ, with his cross and yoke, seemed an enemy rather than a friend. They could not discern his form or comeliness, and therefore they undervalued and neglected him. But now they discover the hook holding the bait, and the ugliness beneath the paint of sin. It now appears most dangerous and odious to them, and they discover the loveliness of Christ's face and the ease of his yoke. He appears to them now as most precious and desirable.

Now they behold wonderful things in the law which they never grasped before. In that mirror they have a view given to them of the monstrous nature of sin, of the pollution which it has brought upon

The Good Work

their souls. Now they have a prospect of hell and the dreadful miseries which are the consequence and fruit of sin.

They also behold wonderful and glorious things in the mirror of the gospel. There they discover the great and wonderful salvation which Christ has purchased for them, of the riches and freeness of God's love to them, of that glorious inheritance in heaven which the Lord has promised and prepared for them. They see things now altogether differently than they ever did before, so that they wonder at their own former blindness and foolishness, and at other men's present folly and madness, that they should set their hearts upon the toys and trifles of the world, that they should wallow like swine in the mire of sin, and labour on as slaves, contentedly and securely in Satan's chains, towards hell. In the meantime, they neglect God, and Christ, and their salvation, trampling underfoot those inestimable riches and treasures which are offered so freely to them in the gospel.

II. In the good work of grace, the *will* is rectified and put in order. The will is the great spring-wheel, as it were, of the soul which, while it is out of course, all the other inferior faculties, like so many little wheels depending upon it, must fail or work incorrectly. But once the will is rectified, then the whole soul is brought into working order. The will is the Queen-Regent which bears great sway, and in graceless people is exceedingly corrupt and depraved, and employs all the powers that are under her for the fulfilling and satisfaction of her base and filthy lusts. The thoughts, the imagination, the memory, the inferior affections of the soul, the senses and members of the body, are at the beck of the will to be employed in its service and as the instruments of sin. When the will is changed, the work of grace is effected, and not before. When this fort-royal is taken, then Christ enters and takes possession.

In the work of grace there is a change in the will in regard to its inclination and willingness to obey. Those who are the subjects of grace have new inclinations, for they like now what before they disliked, not only by a bare approbation of their understandings, but also by an inclination of their wills in it. They dislike and have an aversion to what before they liked and delighted themselves in, not only because of the checks and upbraidings of their consciences,

The Good Work Begun

but through an aversion of their wills to it. As the world appears to their understanding to be vain and empty, sin to be most odious and ugly, Christ to be most beautiful and lovely, the grace of God here and the enjoyment of him hereafter to be their chief felicity; so the inclinations of their wills are accordingly drawn towards these objects.

Their wills dislike the world for their portion and chief good, and therefore renounce it upon that account. They dislike sin not only because of the punishment threatened as a result of it, but also because of the innate filthiness which is in it. Their wills like Christ not only as a Saviour to deliver them from hell, but also to deliver them from their sin. They like his blood to purify their hearts as well as to pacify God's anger and their own consciences. They like his person and beauty as well as his portion and benefits. They like him not only with his crown, but also with his cross – with poverty, disgrace, and shame here, as well as with treasures and glory in the next world. They like God's favour beyond the favour of men or life itself. And according to their inclination, so is their goal or design, namely the glory of God here, and the enjoyment of God for ever. This is what chiefly moves them, and is the design which they are carrying on in the world. Therefore their wills choose suitable means, even such as the Word reveals and directs for the attaining of this end; accordingly also are the purposes and resolutions of their wills suitable to their goal and choice for avoiding hindrances and making use of furtherances.

III. In the work of grace the *imagination* is renewed, though not in whole, yet in part. Much of the frothiness and vanity of it is corrected by this. It is more ready to receive impressions of good; it is more useful to the sanctified mind, and more readily subservient to the sanctified will than it was before.

IV. In the good work of grace the *conscience* is also renewed. It is awakened at first to prepare the soul for this work, and it is afterwards kept awake and tender so as to check and keep from sin. "How can I do this wickedness and sin against God? How can I spill again the blood of my Saviour, or grieve and drive away my Comforter?"

The Good Work

V. In the good work of grace, the *memory* is renewed, though not strengthened beyond its natural capacity, in keeping and recollecting things committed to it. Yet in the work of grace it is in some measure sanctified and cleansed from that mud and filth of the world, and the vanity which like a sieve it retained before, and is now made chiefly a treasury of heavenly things.

VI. In the good work of grace, the *affections* are renewed, the love and hatred, the desire and flight, the grief and delight, the hope and fear, and the anger. All the liking affections follow the inclination of the will, and are drawn towards God and Christ, and holiness here and happiness hereafter. The disliking affections are drawn towards that which is offensive to God and destructive to the soul. Thus we have dealt briefly concerning the subject of the good work of grace, and the several faculties renewed and changed in this gracious work.

3. The Author of this good work: God

Negatively, grace does not grow in the garden of nature, there being no seed of it to be found there. It is neither a natural power, such as that of the understanding, will, conscience, memory, or affections, which are to be found in all the children of Adam by nature; neither is it innate, such as original righteousness was in Adam before his fall; neither is it a habit acquired by the multiplicity of acts, of which there are some dispositions in nature, such as the habits of arts and sciences, and even some moral virtues.

Grace is a pure stream which cannot spring forth from the polluted fountain of nature. *Job 14:4*: “*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?*” You never saw figs grow upon thorns, or grapes upon thistles. The souls of all the fallen children of men, are wholly corrupt and depraved with original sin, so it is impossible that this good work should be effected by the power of nature. Some, by the strength of natural power, cultivated by education and learning, may attain much knowledge in the mysteries of nature, and by studying the Scriptures they may attain a notional knowledge of divine mysteries; but the excellency of these mysteries is hidden from them. They still remain without the spiritual discernment of the things of the Spirit without the teaching of the Spirit (*1 Corinthians 2:14*).

The Good Work Begun

Natural men may, through observance and diligence, accomplish much as to many moral virtues, and hereby shine with some kind of lustre in the darker parts of the world; but by no natural power or industry can they attain to any truly sanctifying and saving grace. The stream cannot be raised up to a greater height than the spring lies from which it arises. And that which is natural cannot by any natural power be elevated to that which is supernatural.

Neither is it from any innate power in the Word and ordinances to effect this good work of grace in the soul of any. It is true that the Word is an instrument, and the ordinances are means of grace; but they are *only* instruments and means and have no virtue and efficacy in themselves except as they receive it immediately from God, the efficient cause of this work. They are but channels, not the fountain of grace. The Word is a sword, but God's hand must draw it forth and strike with it that it may wound. There was no virtue in the waters of Bethesda to heal (*John 5*) unless the angel troubled them; and there is no virtue in ordinances to change and sanctify the soul unless the Spirit moves in them and works by them.

The Word in itself is dead; it is the Spirit that quickens it, and quickens by it. All the arguments which ministers may draw out of the Word in preaching, though pressed with real earnestness and affection, cannot possibly produce this gracious change in people unless God takes the Word and seals it upon the heart. We might just as easily with our breath tear hard rocks to pieces and bend great bars of iron, as by our preaching break the stony hearts and bend the iron sinews in the necks of the impenitent. We might just as easily lift a mountain with one finger and toss it up to heaven, or, with a whisper raise those who are dead in their graves, as lift a carnal heart towards God and raise those who are spiritually dead, unless the Lord accompanies the Word which we preach with the Holy Spirit from heaven (*1 Peter 1:12*).

If we bring the light before a carnal man, a hard-hearted sinner, open it in his face and tell him as convincingly as possible of his sin, his guilt, the curse of the law, the wrath of God, the damnation of hell, and the dreadful torments he is hastening towards in his sinful courses, yet he is unconscious and secure, and not moved at all unless with anger against the minister who reproveth and forewarns him of his danger. And, notwithstanding all that can be said, he goes

The Good Work

on resolutely in this way, which will certainly – and may suddenly – bring him to hell. Or, if he trembles a little, like Felix, if some slavish fear of punishment arises in him for the present through the impression of arguments upon his natural conscience, yet however he hears sin aggravated as it reflects dishonour upon God and defiles his own soul, he is not moved to the least true, godly, evangelical mourning and sorrow for it.

Let us set God forth before such a sinner in all his glorious excellencies and perfections – in his infinite greatness, power, holiness, wisdom, goodness, truth, faithfulness, mercy, and loving-kindness, – yet we cannot persuade him to fear God filially, to desire him truly, to love him entirely, or to choose him for his chief good here and his portion eternally. Let us show clearly the Lord Jesus Christ in his beauty and transcendent loveliness, in his mercy and incomparable grace and love; let us speak to him convincingly of the great need which he has of Christ to be his Saviour because he is a sinner, and in such danger because of sin; let us call upon him as earnestly as possible, appeal to him with great feeling to leave his sin and accept Christ so freely tendered unto him; not he! He holds fast to his sin; he shuts his ear like the deaf adder who will not hear the voice of the most accomplished and wise charmer. And when he harbours base lusts in his heart, which will destroy him, he shuts the door against Jesus Christ, even though with him he might have pardon and salvation, grace and glory.

Let us explain to him as clearly as possible the grounds of faith; let us direct him, invite him, and persuade him to believe with the greatest possible scriptural encouragements, and yet as easily may we persuade him to lift up the earth in his arms as to put forth the least true act of faith. Let us commend to him the ways of God with the highest praises, and call him into those ways with the most powerful motives of peace, satisfaction, sweetness, advantage here, and happiness to eternity; and yet nothing will prevail with him to make one step into that path.

Surely, then, there is no inherent virtue in the Word, or any arguments, however persuasive, to effect this good work of grace. Indeed, we must urge and press arguments upon sinners to dissuade them from sin and draw them to God and this holy path, because God works upon rational creatures in a rational way; yet all arguments

The Good Work Begun

are in themselves insufficient to produce this work, as we find by the different effects which the very same arguments make on those upon whom they are urged. Some are moved, repent, and turn to God; others are obdurate, obstinate, and continue in their impenitence and ways of disobedience, whatever is said against those ways. Indeed, some who seem more unlikely to be spiritually affected, who were more defiled and hardened before, when also they have resisted and withstood stronger arguments, have afterwards yielded and been overcome, and have fallen down before the force which has accompanied weaker arguments. This difference in the operation of the Word plainly shows that this work of grace is not from the Word, however preached and pressed, but from the power of God's Spirit. All that has been said negatively prepares for and proves also the positive.

Positively, God alone is the Author of the good work of grace. It is God who begins the work, and who performs it. In this work we are born again (*John 3:3*), and we are said to be both begotten of God, – *James 1:18*: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth;” and to be born of God – *John 1:13*: “Which are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;” and *1 John 4:7*: “Every one that loveth is born of God.” We can no more beget ourselves anew than we could beget ourselves when we were born; it is a supernatural work, and therefore can be effected by none but God, who is almighty; who, by an immediate and real influence upon the soul, effects a spiritual change by which all the faculties are changed, not in regard of their essence, but in regard of their qualifications. In this work lions are turned into lambs, wolves into sheep, stones into flesh, even into children of Abraham. What I mean here is that the fierce and ravenous disposition is changed into a mild and gentle temper; the stony obduracy is removed, and the heart, which was as hard as flint before, is made soft and pliable to the will and law of God. And who can do this but the God of nature, who first formed the spirit within a man, and who alone can newly form and newly mould it after his own image?

This good work is called “a new creation” in *Ephesians 2:10*: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” *Ephesians 4:24*: “Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” And therefore, such as have this work

The Good Work

done in them are called new creatures, *2 Corinthians 5:17*: “*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*” And then it follows in the next verse: “*All things are of God.*” All these new things are his more immediate work. It was God alone who created all things at first and it is God alone who can create all things anew.

This work of grace is called a resurrection, and in this way sinners are quickened out of their spiritual death, *Ephesians 2:1*. It is God who gives natural life, and he alone can give spiritual life. He raised Christ from the dead on the third day, and he will raise up all that are dead at the last day; and he alone can raise up a soul when it is dead in sin and quicken it by his Spirit, which requires the same power as was put forth in Christ’s resurrection (compare *Ephesians 1:19-20* with *Ephesians 2:5*). God indeed makes use of the Word in quickening and changing the soul, but the Word effects this work only instrumentally – God works it efficiently. As there went forth a power with Christ’s word when he called and raised Lazarus from the dead, *John 11:42-43*, so the power of God’s Spirit goes forth with the Word of his grace to quicken dead souls and effect a gracious change within them.

4. Why the Lord begins this good work in any of the children of men

The reason, as to the motive, is only God’s free grace and love. The reason, as to the design and end, is partly that God might be glorified by them upon earth, and partly that they might be prepared for glory with him for ever in heaven.

The motive which induces God to begin this good work in any of the children of men is only his free grace and love. It is a gracious work of God not only with regard to the grace which it effects, but also with regard to the grace from which it proceeds. It is according to the good pleasure of God’s will that he chooses us (*Ephesians 1:5*), and it is according to the good pleasure of his will that he changes us (*James 1:18*).

Natural agents, in producing effects, act necessarily. God is a voluntary agent, and in this work he acts freely. *Ephesians 2:4-5*: “*God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.*”

The Good Work Begun

Romans 9:15: "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." If God hides the mysteries of salvation from the wise and prudent, allowing them to remain in a dark and unconverted state, and reveals these mysteries unto babes; if he chooses and calls the foolish, mean, and most despised of people, and puts his image and likeness upon them, we must say that nothing but free grace could move him to do this. And then we must, with our Saviour, acknowledge, *"Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight"* (*Matthew 11:26*). And not only when the most unlikely people, – the ignorant or notoriously wicked, – are graciously changed must we cry out "Grace! Grace!" but also, whoever they are, however morally qualified before conversion, there is not the least merit in any of their works, nothing to move or incline God to it, no previous disposition in the nature of any that might lead to this gracious change. And therefore it is only of free grace that those who have escaped the more gross pollutions which are in this world through lust are washed by the Spirit in the laver of regeneration from the inward pollutions of their hearts, from which none are free. *Titus 3:4, 5: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."* And *2 Timothy 1:9: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace."*

The design and end why God begins the good work of grace in any of the children of men is:

I. That by it they might be fitted for his service, and glorify his name upon the earth. All graceless people are not only children of wrath, but children of disobedience. They are children of darkness and of the devil, for they are his servants; they serve the devil and every kind of lust, and their whole life is a continual offence and provocation of God, a continued course of rebellion against him and his laws. The Lord therefore brings some of the children of men out of a state of nature into a state of grace, that he might have some servants in the world, some to bear his name and stand up for his honour and interest, and oppose the sins of the times and

The Good Work

places in which they live; that he might have some service from them. *Hebrews 12:28*: “*Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably.*” Without a work of grace upon the heart, and a sanctified principle within, no services are acceptable unto God, for “*they that are in the flesh cannot please God*” (*Romans 8:8*).

II. That by it they might be fitted for glory with God for ever in heaven. God gives grace here to prepare for glory hereafter. Only the pure in heart are fit and have the promise of seeing God (*Matthew 5:8*). Without a new heart and life, there will be no admission into the new Jerusalem (*Revelation 21:27*). God is glorious in holiness, clothed with majesty, all brightness, perfect purity, the high and Holy One of Israel who inhabits eternity, without the least spot, and with whom dwells no iniquity. The heavens are not pure in his sight, and he has charged his angels with folly. The pure seraphim proclaim his holiness and veil their faces because of its splendour. And this God who is so infinitely pure and holy himself, infinitely hates and detests sin. There is an infinite opposition between the holy nature of God and the unholy nature of man; and therefore they cannot live together with eternal delight in heaven unless the nature of man is changed by the renewing grace of God. God will not permit unsanctified people to approach so near to his glorious presence. He will not receive such defiled creatures into the dearest and closest embraces of his infinite and eternal love. And while they are unrenewed, heaven (which is a place of holiness whose company and employments are all holy) would be so unsuitable to their natures that they could not find sweetness and delight there, because none can delight in anything unless it has a suitability to their nature. Therefore the Lord changes the nature of such persons here in a work of grace whom he intends for eternal glory in the other world.

5. Applications

I. Test yourselves whether this good work of grace has begun in you. You have seen many works of men before you; see whether this work of God is wrought in you. You have *read* of the work of grace, you have *heard* of the work of grace, and you have *seen the effects* of the work of grace in others; now search whether you can find the marks of this work within yourself.

The Good Work Begun

If the good work has begun in you, God has put within you a sense of your lost estate while in a state of nature. God has opened your eyes to perceive the guilt of your sin and has stopped your mouths as to any plea or excuse. He has awakened your conscience to a sense of your danger, and that of everlasting ruin, while under the guilt of any unpardoned sin. The law has told you that “*the soul that sinneth, it shall shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4). Conscience has told you that you *have* sinned, and the Spirit has made the conclusion that therefore you shall die. The law has told you, “*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them*” (Galatians 3:10). Conscience has told you that you have neither continued nor done those things which are written in the law, but have broken it in some points by profaneness, and in other points by uncleanness, or by drunkenness, or by unrighteousness, and in every point by some act or another of disobedience. And the Spirit then has made the application that therefore you are cursed.

The gospel has told you that “*except ye repent, ye shall perish*” (Luke 13:3). Conscience has told you that you have not repented, and the Spirit has inferred from this that you shall perish. The gospel has told you that “*he that believeth not is condemned already, and the wrath of God abideth on him*” (John 3:18, 36). Conscience has told you that you have not believed, and the Spirit has applied it: therefore you are condemned, and the wrath of God abides on you. The gospel has told you that Christ will come “*in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel,*” and that he will “*punish them with everlasting destruction*” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Conscience has told you that you have not obeyed the gospel, and God, by his Spirit, has drawn the conclusion that therefore Christ will come in flaming fire to take vengeance upon you, and to everlastingly destroy you in hell for your disobedience.

Thus, when the Lord begins this good work, he convinces the sinner of his sin and his liability to the stroke of his vengeance, and brings him to a sense of his lost state so that he cries out, “O wretched man that I am! I have sinned, and woe unto me. I must die, and that eternally! I must perish, and that everlastingly! The course I take will bring me to hell before long. I have been treasuring up sin, and God has been treasuring up wrath for me. I have been pursuing iniquity, and God is pursuing me with his

The Good Work

vengeance. I have been taking pleasure in sin. I have been merry, out for pleasure, and secure, and have put the evil day far from me; but pain and horror abide for me, and the evil day is drawing near and hastens greatly – the day of wrath and vengeance, the day of accounts, when I must be judged and condemned and punished in flames of everlasting fire for my sins. And who can stand in that day? Who can endure God’s fierce anger? Who can dwell with devouring fire? Woe unto me that I was ever born!” Has God given you such a sense as this of your lost state?

If the good work of grace has begun in you, God has brought you to earnestly inquire what to do to get out of this state. Thus the Jews, who had stained their hands in the blood of Christ, afterwards were “*pricked in their hearts, and cried out, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*” (*Acts 2:37*). Thus the jailor, after he had scourged the apostles, and thrust them into the inner prison, and put their feet into the stocks, is struck with trembling by the earthquake and cries out, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” (*Acts 16:30*).

When God gives a sense of their lost estate to sinners, in order to bring about a gracious change, he does not allow them to remain there, but he stirs them up to seek after a remedy and a way for recovery out of that estate, and for the prevention of their future misery. Some indeed lose their convictions and cast off their troubles, and either shut their ears against the clamours of their accusing conscience, or in some way or another stop the mouth of conscience so that they may not be troubled by it. But God will not permit this in those whom he will bring home effectually to himself. He follows them with a light in one hand to show them their sins, and with a sword in the other to take vengeance upon them. He meets them as the angel met Balaam: wherever they turn, he lets them know that if they will venture to go on in that way, they will be slain. Then they begin to think to themselves and make inquiry of others as to how they may escape; and if they could find help in any creature they would go no further; if they could find any righteousness of their own to present to God, they would pursue that. But God convinces them that they can bring nothing to him which can find any acceptance with him, and this puts them at a great loss, especially those who are unacquainted with the gospel and the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. But in spite of this, they are more effectually prepared

The Good Work Begun

for a ready closure with Jesus Christ when he is made known and freely offered unto them. Have you ever had such serious concern for sin and made such earnest inquiry after the way of getting out of your lost state?

If God has begun the good work in you, he has brought you to a grief and hatred of sin; and in working this, God reveals not only the mischief and misery which sin will bring upon the sinner, but also his love and tender mercy in his Son, and his readiness to forgive and save. And this most kindly melts and soothes the heart when the sinner perceives that God, the offended party, is ready to be reconciled, and has been at great cost, even the expense of his Son's blood, to make provision for the sinner's salvation. By this he is brought to the most bitter grief for sin, and to the greatest loathing and detestation of sin, beyond all other things in the world. Now he cries out more about his sin than his punishment; and he did not before entertain sin with more readiness than he now rejects it with abhorrence. He desires to be saved from sin more than to be saved from hell.

If God has begun the good work in you, he has wrought in you hungering desires after Jesus Christ. When sin becomes most odious to the sinner, then Christ becomes most precious; when sin is bitter, then Christ is sweet; when sin is burdensome, and the burden intolerable, then Christ is desirable, who alone can remove this burden. It is the sense of sickness which compels the diseased person to send for the physician, and the sense of the sickness of sin draws forth desires after Christ, the great Physician of souls. Then, "None but Christ, none but Christ!" is the breath of their desire. "O that Christ would come to me! O that Christ would undertake for me! O that I could have a sight of him! O that I could meet with him! O that I had an interest in him! Lord, give me an interest in thy Son! Thou hast given him for sinners. I am a sinner; give him unto me! No one has more need of him. O do not deny him to me! Deny me anything, but do not deny Christ to me! Give me Christ and I have enough! Give me Christ and I have all! Give me Christ or else I die and perish eternally!" Have you had such breathings of desire after Jesus Christ, and for him to sanctify you as well as to save you? to heal you as well as to reconcile you? Then be sure the work is begun.

If God has begun the good work in you, he has wrought faith in you to lay hold of Christ. God holds forth his bleeding Son to the

The Good Work

broken and bleeding-hearted sinner, and by his Spirit he draws him to himself. By his almighty power he draws him against the opposition of Satan and the flesh, enabling him to quit all other holds and to lay hold of Christ. He is taken off his own foundation and builds all his hopes upon this Rock. He renounces his own righteousness and accepts the perfect righteousness which in Christ is provided for him and offered to him. By this alone he looks for remission of sin and acceptance with the Father. If he cannot immediately arrive at a certainty of his salvation, yet he ventures himself upon Christ and resolves that, if he perishes, he will perish endeavouring at least to trust in him. Have you experienced such a work of faith as this?

If God has begun the good work in you, then he brought your hearts to love himself. When the sinner has attained union with Christ by faith, this faith shows itself in acts of most sincere and supreme love and affection to God. Now God is chosen as their chief Good, and the highest place in their heart is given to him. The believer has love for other things, but God is loved in all of them. God is loved above them all. He loves God for his Son, and he loves him for who he is himself. He loves him for his loveliness, and he loves him for his love. He loves his image also wherever he sees it. He loves not only his goodness and mercy, but also his holiness and purity; and not only that which is in his person, but also that which is written in his law, and that which is engraven, though more imperfectly, upon his children. Have you such a love to God?

If God has begun the good work in you, then he has brought your heart to a contempt for the world. The world appears to the believer to be a windy vanity in separation from God, and a vain, empty nothing in comparison to God. All earthly things in themselves are to him like a feather without weight, like a shadow without substance, like a breast without milk, like a cloud without rain, like a vapour which appears for a little while and soon vanishes away; and therefore he will not set his eyes and heart upon such things which are not what they seem to be, and are taking wing so soon to be gone, and cease to be what they are. His eyes are upon a better and more enduring substance in comparison with which he esteems the world as a toy. Is the world brought down in this way in your esteem?

And, lastly, if God has begun the good work in you, then he has brought you into a self-resignation and self-dedication unto him.

The Good Work Begun

Believers look upon themselves as no longer their own, having made themselves over to God, and devoted themselves to his service. Other lords have had dominion over them. Sin has reigned and the devil has tyrannised them; but now they are made free from sin and delivered from the power of Satan, and have yielded themselves to God, to give ready obedience to whatever he reveals to be his will and command.

Examine yourselves in these things, and you may know by this the way of God's working, whether the good work has been begun in you.

II. Other applications might be made of this point, but I shall only add an exhortation to all who are without this good work, especially to you who are young, that now, at the beginning of your life, you would endeavour that this good work of grace may be begun in you.

I am glad to see so many of your faces together here on earth. I would rejoice even more to see all your faces in heaven. I am glad to see you together in this house. I would rejoice even more to see you all in God's family. God has blessed my ministry in the conversion of some among you, and the good work of grace has begun in you by a most unworthy and most unlikely instrument. O that my ministry might be further blessed in the conversion of the rest that are still unconverted! O that I might be an instrument to begin the good work of grace in the heart of every graceless young man and young woman in this place! God, by his providence, has brought you to hear. O that by his Spirit he would work and persuade you to repent and believe!

You are now under the dews of God's Word. O that you might be under the influences of his grace; that while the seed of the Word is being sown in your ears, the seed of grace might be cast into your hearts! O that God would speak to you, that while his minister is speaking to you audibly, that God would speak to you inwardly and inescapably, saying, "Here is grace for you, young man or woman; here is repentance for you, sinner; and here is faith for you, unbeliever. Here is light and eyes for you who are blind; here is life and quickening for you who are dead in trespasses and sins." O that you might hear God's thundering voice to awaken you who are asleep in sin, and then his still and sweeter voice to allure you to his Son!

The Good Work

Some of you, though you are but young men and women, are yet old sinners. You have strong bodies, but you have stronger lusts. Some of you are not only apprentices unto men, but you are apprentices to the devil and have been bound to him ever since you were born. You have served him, some of you, for two or three apprenticeships already.¹ Some of the older ones here have served the devil and their own lusts for seven apprenticeships! Is it not time to be made free? Can you be well pleased with this service, which is only the most wretched slavery? Can you like the devil as your master? Can you love those bonds which enslave your souls, your most noble and excellent part, and by which the devil is leading you to hell? The devil rules over and works in all of you who are children of disobedience. Is it not better to have Christ to rule over you, and God work in you by his Spirit? for Christ's service is perfect freedom, and God's work is the good work of grace.

Who knows but this may be the time and place where some captive souls may be made free and rescued by Christ out of the snares of Satan! And "*if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed*" (*John 8:36*). Who knows but while I am speaking to you, God may be working in you; and if God will work, who can prevent him? Satan cannot stop him; sin cannot stop him; the world cannot stop him. God may now create the fruit of the lips: "Grace! Grace!" God can make the most secure sinner to tremble and the proudest sinner to stoop. He can break the hardest rock and bow the iron sinew. He can melt and soften the most obdurate heart. O that he would put forth his almighty arm and lay hold of *your* hearts, and, overturning the strongholds of his enemies within you, that he would bring you into captivity and obedience to his Son!

Young ones, look up to God for a gracious change now. Some of you long to change your employment or social standing; look up to God to change your *nature*. Some of you are looking out for new houses; O that you would look up to God for *new hearts!* There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" Rather say, "Lord, Thou hast shown us what is good; work in us this good work of grace."

1. An apprenticeship would have been of seven years' duration. Vincent's reference here shows that he was addressing mainly teenagers, between 14 and 21, but had some in his hearing who were approaching 50.

The Good Work Begun

First, consider the *necessity* of it:

a. Without this good work of grace, *you have no good in you*. You have darkness instead of light, deformity instead of beauty, filthiness instead of purity, love of the world instead of love to God, and the fire of lust instead of the fire of zeal for God's glory.

b. Without this good work of grace, *no good can be done by you*. You can do nothing but sin without a sanctified principle of grace. Without life there can be no vital operations, and without grace there can be no gracious actions. If there is no good in the root, there can be no good in the fruit; and if there is no good in the heart, there can be no good in the life. Those that are in the flesh cannot please God (*Romans 8:8*).

c. Without this good work of grace, *no good belongs to you*. There are many high and excellent privileges, many sweet and precious promises that belong to those who are saved: – election, adoption, remission of sins, salvation, and an audience with God in prayer. Additionally, “*all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (*Romans 8:28*). But if you are without the good work of grace, you cannot lay claim to any gospel privilege, or any gospel promise; instead of being the children of God, you are the children of the devil; instead of the pardon of sin, your guilt still remains; instead of an audience with God in prayer, your prayers are an abomination; instead of all things working together for your good, all things work together for your hurt.

d. Without this good work of grace, *there is no good laid up for you*. God has *laid out* much for his people, but he has *laid up* more. *Psalms 31:19*: “*Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!*” *1 Corinthians 2:9*: “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*” God has set forth these things by treasures, joys, crowns, an exceeding and eternal weight of glory; yet when all is said, these things exceed all comparison and comprehension. But without the good work, none of these things are prepared and laid up for you. Treasures are indeed laid up for you,

The Good Work

but they are treasures of wrath; a portion is prepared, but it is fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest will be this portion. There will be no admission for you into heaven without grace, and then I need not tell you that you must take up your lodging for ever among devils in the unquenchable flames of hell.

Second, consider the *excellency* of this work. It is an excellent work which requires so excellent a worker to effect it; and that is God, who works it by the immediate influence of his Spirit. It is an excellent work which so ennobles the spirit of man, which so beautifies the soul, which is the renewing of God's lost image, which is the engraving of God's Spirit. It is an excellent work which furnishes the heart and makes it fit to be a habitation for God by his Spirit, which brings the creature into fellowship with the Father and the Son. It is an excellent work which is heaven begun, glory in the bud, happiness in the first-fruit, the inheritance in the earnest-penny, and which qualifies for, as well as is the beginning of, eternal life.

Third, consider that this good work of grace is *attainable* by you, whoever you are, however ignorant and unlearned you may be; in station, though poor and without land or money; though the greatest and vilest of sinners, though you have no righteousness or merit unless it is of death and hell, yet, since grace is free and God gives it freely without respect of persons, or anything in persons, any of you are capable of it and it is attainable by you.

Fourth, consider that *it is the most seasonable time* for you to get grace while you are still young, and *now* God is most ready to give it; you will be most ready to receive it *now*, before your conscience becomes more seared, your hearts more hardened, and your lusts more strengthened; before you are more entangled in the world, more defiled with sin, and more captivated by the devil. Few who refuse the offers of grace when they are young accept it when they are old. *Now* is the accepted time; the day of life may be at an end or the day of grace may be at an end before you are aware. Delay no longer. Listen and respond to the present call. Take a view of your sins in the mirror which God holds before you. Look upwards to the frowns of God upon you; look inwards to the wounds of

The Good Work Begun

conscience within you; look forward to death and judgment which are hastening towards you; and look downward to the punishment of hell which is being prepared for you even now, unless you repent and turn to the Lord.

Labour for a sense of your danger, a feeling of sin's power, and a loathing of sin's defilement. Then look to Christ, who alone can save you from misery and your iniquity; lay hold on him. In your endeavour, God may work and help you to repent and believe. And once this good work is begun in you, you would not be without it for ten thousand worlds. Be sure then that you do not perish or miss out on everlasting happiness, because he who has begun the good work will perform it until the day of Christ, which leads us to the second doctrine.

2

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

IN handling the extent to which this good work is performed by God, I shall: (1.) speak concerning the day of grace in which God begins the good work; (2.) speak concerning God's performing of this good work which he begins; (3.) speak concerning the day of Christ until which God will perform the good work; (4.) prove that God will perform the good work until the day of Christ; (5.) answer some objections; and (6.) make some applications.

1. The day of grace in which God begins the good work

By the day of grace we are to understand any time in this life in which the Lord makes offers of grace, in which he calls sinners to repentance and invites them to his Son so that they might obtain remission and salvation by him. This day of grace is any time in this life, and this life only; for there is no day of grace in another life. There is a day of glory after this life for those who have received grace, but no day of grace for sinners; there is a day of wrath after this life for sinners, but no day of grace. The day of grace for sinners is only in this life, while they have the means of grace, which is called "*the accepted time*" and "*the day of salvation*" (2 Corinthians 6:2). In this day of grace the Lord begins the good work in all those who belong to the election of grace. He not only offers grace, but bestows it; in their hearing the word of grace, they attain the good work of grace.

The Good Work Begun

While God calls them externally by the preaching of the Word, he calls them effectually, and works a gracious change in them by the operation of his Spirit. And so the good work is begun, of which I have spoken before in the first chapter.

2. God's performing of the good work which he has begun

The word in the original signifies “to finish or bring to perfection.” It includes God’s carrying on the good work of grace so that it shall never quite fail, nor shall those who have it totally fall from it.

3. The day of Christ

The day of Christ, until which God will perform the good work of grace which he has begun, is sometimes in Scripture taken for the day of his bodily presence with his disciples here on earth, which is past. And though he anticipates that his disciples will, after his departure, desire one of those days of his bodily presence to comfort them under the afflictions which they must endure for his sake, yet no such day would be seen by them. *Luke 17:22*: “*And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it.*” But the day of Christ mentioned in *Phlippians 1:6* is the day which is to come, not that which is past; it is the day of the second appearance of Christ in his glory, not the day of his first appearance in a state of humiliation. It is the last day, when the Lord Jesus will come down from heaven to judge the whole world. God will perform the good work which he has begun in the subjects of his grace until this day of Christ’s appearance; not implying that at that moment their grace would fail, but then it will arrive at its full perfection and bring them safely into the arms of their Saviour and into the eternal embrace of his love.

It is through God’s performance of this good work begun in his people that they will be blameless in the day of Christ, and that they will be qualified to be received into the habitations of everlasting blessedness. *1 Corinthians 1:8*: “*Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” *1 Thessalonians 5:23*: “*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly;*

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

*4. The certainty that God will perform the good work
until the day of Christ*

The text establishes chiefly that God will perform the good work which he has begun *until the day of Christ*; that he will never allow grace, once begun, to fail until it arrives at perfection. The truly converted person shall persevere unto the end, and shall never finally nor totally fall away.

Before I prove the point, I shall say a few introductory things for a better understanding of it:

I. Concerning the good work which God will perform and not suffer quite to fail: I am speaking of the work itself and not the preparatory works leading to it, such as conviction, contrition, some kind of trouble for sin and the like, which many may have and totally lose so as never to gain them any more. I am speaking of the good work of grace in the *truth* of it, not of the counterfeit work which too many hypocrites have and from which they may totally fall. I am speaking of the *special work of grace*, not of the common gifts and illuminations and spiritual tastes which may be given by the Spirit to some who are unsound, from which they may totally apostatise into the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit so as never to be renewed again unto repentance.

II. Concerning God's performing of the good work: I do not say that those who have received grace can themselves perform it, but rather that if they should be left to themselves, they would fall away both totally and finally. But God has undertaken to perform it, and to help them from falling away; and he will do it. I do not say that God will perform this good work in any who neglect the means for their establishment and perseverance, or in any licentious course which they may take, but he will perform it in those who make diligent use of the means appointed by him, and refrain from sin in which, if they should indulge themselves, they would be cut off from his favour and bring unavoidable and eternal death upon

The Good Work Begun

themselves. *Romans 8:13*: “*If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.*” This was spoken by the Apostle to the believing Romans.

III. Concerning the failing of the work: I do not deny that the work of grace begun may fail in regard of the vigorous exercise of it; such acts may be suspended at some times. Nor that the habits of grace may not fail in regard of some degrees of strength. Those in whom the good work of grace has begun may be under declinings and decays of grace (of which I shall speak more when I come to the caution), but the habits of grace shall never wholly fail. The life remains in the root when the fruit falls off and only a few leaves remain.

* * *

Having said these things, I come now to prove that God will perform the good work of grace which he has begun, or that true grace shall never quite fail, nor true saints ever totally fall from grace. And this will appear from God’s election and calling of them, and from God’s covenant and promise to them.

I. From *God’s election and calling* of such as are recipients of grace, it is clear that he will perform the good work which he has begun in them so that they shall never totally fall. God has elected and chosen all such as are saved from before the foundation of the world unto eternal salvation by an absolute, infallible, and immutable decree. He has chosen them to grace here, and glory hereafter; by grace to fit them for glory, and by holiness in this world to fit them for happiness in the other world. Therefore they shall never totally or finally fall from grace, which is absolutely necessary to bring them to glory.

The perseverance of the saints, the recipients of grace, may be proved in this way from election. If there is an absolute and immutable decree of election by which a particular number of men and woman are chosen unto salvation; if all those who are particularly elected shall infallibly and most certainly attain that salvation to which they are chosen; if none can attain salvation without grace, and perseverance in grace, but are brought to it by grace alone; if all the saints, those who have the work of grace begun in them, are elected, or are in the number of those who are chosen to salvation, and, by consequence, shall certainly attain salvation, and

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

that by perseverance in grace; then it must undeniably follow that the saints, those saved by grace, shall certainly persevere, and never fall totally from grace. Each one of these things *is* true, as I shall show, and therefore the conclusion that the saints shall never totally fall from grace is also certain.

a. There *is* an absolute eternal and immutable decree of election by which a particular number of men and women are chosen unto salvation. This is evident from Scripture, which speaks of this decree as being from before the foundation of the world – *Ephesians 1:4*: “*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,*” and of God’s purpose of election before the particular persons chosen are born, without respect to their works, but only to his own will – *Romans 9:11-13*: “*For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth ... It was said, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*”

In addition to this express Scripture, it stands to reason that God’s decree of election should be absolute and immutable, not depending on the mutable will of man, or any foreseen works to move him to it, because God foresees nothing as future but what he has decreed, and nothing that comes to pass in time could move God’s will before time. His will is the cause of whatever is future. Ultimately, nothing future can be the cause of God’s decree, for that would make something temporal the cause of that which is eternal, which is absurd. God knows from eternity all the possible things that never come to pass, but he knows no future things but as he wills that they should come to pass; so that nothing can rationally be imagined which could bring one of them out of the number of possible things into the number of certain future things but the will and decree of God. Therefore God’s decree of election must be absolute, certain, and immutable.

b. Hence it follows that all those who are particularly elected *shall* infallibly and most certainly attain that salvation which they are chosen unto, otherwise God’s decree would not be certain. And it would argue a weakness in God if he should from eternity purpose and resolve to do a thing which he never actually did. But this cannot be ascribed to God, who is infinite in power and powerfully “*worketh*

The Good Work Begun

all things after to the counsel of his own will" (*Ephesians 1:11*). God can as soon cease to be God as not bring about that which he has eternally purposed, because he would cease to be unchangeable, which is his essential property. Therefore, as sure as God is God, all the elect shall be saved.

c. None *can* attain salvation without grace and perseverance in grace who are not brought to it *by* grace. *2 Thessalonians 2:13*: "*But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*" Without faith and sanctification, there is no possibility of attaining salvation. God has appointed sanctification to be the means without which salvation, which is the end, cannot be attained. And not only the grace of sanctification is necessary to salvation, but also perseverance in this grace to the end. *Matthew 24:13*: "*He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*" *Revelation 2:10*: "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*"

d. All the saints, those who have received this grace and have had the good work begun in them, are elect and in the number of those particular persons who are chosen unto salvation. This is evident because the grace begun in them is the fruit of election. *Acts 13:48*: "*As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*" The grace of faith is the fruit of ordination or election unto eternal life. Similarly *Ephesians 1:4*: "*He hath chosen us ... that we should be holy.*" Therefore, if any are holy, it is because they are chosen or elected; for whom God has chosen to the end of this good work, – which is salvation and eternal happiness, – he has also chosen the means, – which is sanctification and holiness. In the same way, whom he has chosen to the means, he has chosen to the end.

Hence, then, it is strongly and undeniably necessary that true believers – being chosen to salvation, which they shall certainly attain to, all by the means of grace and perseverance in them – shall persevere in grace to the end, and never totally and finally fall from it.

I shall here add one Scripture which joins election, grace, and glory together, by which will plainly appear the perseverance of the saints. *Romans 8:30*: "*Whom he did predestinate, them he also called:*

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” Here is the golden chain of man’s salvation in its four great links: the first is predestination or election; the second is effectual calling; the third is justification; and the fourth is glorification. These God has joined together, and none can separate them. Some have attempted to do it, but it has never been done except in the fond imagination of some foolish men.

God has here coupled and linked predestination and calling, then calling and justification, then justification and glorification; and they so hang together that they cannot be divided. Now if true grace should quite fail, and the good work which God has begun could come to nothing, then one link of this chain would be broken off, and that is effectual calling, which is none other than the good work of grace begun. I say, effectual calling, in that case, would be broken off from God’s election, and election would be uncertain. Then God’s decree would be immutable, the impossibility of which I have already proved.

Moreover, effectual calling, if true grace could fail, would be broken off from justification, unless God were to give those who were called a pardon and then withdraw it afterwards. Be sure it would be broken off from glorification, for those who fall from grace will fall short of heaven. But the links are strong and cannot be broken; therefore true grace shall never quite fail.

And here I shall join one or two arguments from effectual calling itself to prove that true believers shall never totally and finally fall.

i.) Those whom God has effectually called, he has called to glory. *1 Thessalonians 2:12:* “*That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.*” And as to those he effectually calls to grace, he gives grace, so to those he effectually calls to glory, he will give glory. He has given them the beginnings of it, and he will bring what he has begun to perfection.

ii.) Moreover, God’s gifts of grace and his effectual calling of those that are saved is without repentance. *Romans 11:29:* “*The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.*” But if true believers could totally fall from grace, God’s gifts and calling would not be without repentance; therefore they cannot totally fall.

The Good Work Begun

II. The second argument to prove that true believers shall never fall from the good work begun in them may be drawn from *God's covenant and promises* which he has made unto them.

a. Such as are taken into an everlasting covenant shall never totally fall from grace. But all truly believers *are* taken into an everlasting covenant, therefore they shall never totally fall from grace. That those who are saved are taken into covenant is evident because the grace of the covenant is wrought in them. That this covenant is everlasting is evident from *Isaiah 55:3*: “*I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*” And from *Jeremiah 32:40*: “*I will make an everlasting covenant with them.*” That such as are taken into an everlasting covenant shall never totally fall from grace is evident because their total fall from grace would turn them out of the covenant, because it would turn them out of God's favour. And there is no promise of the covenant that belongs to total apostates – many threatenings, but no promises – and so the covenant would not be everlasting to them, neither would the mercies of it be sure mercies.

b. Those to whom God has made sure promises of everlasting life and happiness shall never totally fall from grace. God *has* made sure promises of everlasting life and happiness to all who are truly saved; therefore none who are truly saved shall totally fall from grace. That God has made sure promises of everlasting life and happiness unto those who are true believers is evident in the promises which he has made to faith – *John 3:16*: “*Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*” *Acts 16:31*: “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*” – and in the promises he has made to love – *1 Corinthians 2:9*: “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*” *James 1:12*: “*He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*”

All such as are truly saved have these graces of faith and love, and therefore the promises of eternal life and happiness are made to them. That those to whom these promises are made shall not totally fall from grace is evident because, as has already been shown, if they should totally fall from grace they would fall short of heaven; therefore they shall not totally fall from grace.

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

Objection. These promises of everlasting life are made only to those who persevere in grace to the end.

Answer. They are made to all true believers without exception, and so carry in them an evident proof of their perseverance. God has, in addition, promised perseverance to those who have received his grace, which is a third argument under this heading.

c. Those to whom God has promised perseverance shall never totally fall from grace. But God *has* promised perseverance to all those who are truly saved; therefore they shall never totally fall from grace. That those to whom God has promised perseverance shall never totally fall from grace, I suppose none will deny; though while some say, “God has promised life and happiness upon the condition of perseverance,” yet they cannot assign any condition upon which God promises perseverance unless they make perseverance to be the condition of perseverance. And so that God will enable his people to persevere on the condition that they do persevere, and that he will keep them from falling on the condition that they keep themselves from falling, is very absurd.

That God has promised perseverance to all those who are saved is evident in the covenant. *Ezekiel 36:27*: “*And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.*” This includes a promise not only of enabling his people to *begin* to keep his statutes, but also to *continue* to keep them, and persevere unto the end. More plain is *Jeremiah 32:40*: “*I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*” God keeps his people from falling by his power through faith. *1 Peter 1:5*: “*Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.*” And he has promised to keep their faith, and fulfil that work in them with power. This is included in Paul’s prayer for the believing Thessalonians in *2 Thessalonians 1:11*, that God would “*fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.*” Hence, then, it is clearly evident that true believers shall never totally fall from grace.

5. Objections to the perseverance of the saints

I shall now answer some objections against the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which may seem to prove that it is possible for the truly converted to fall from the grace begun in them.

The Good Work Begun

Objection 1. Experience gives sufficient evidence of some saints who have fallen totally, though they have recovered again and not fallen finally. And the Scriptures witness the same when they tell us of Peter's denial of his Master and David's adultery and murder. How could such sins be consistent with a state of grace? especially the last instance of David, who was in a low state for a long time before he was restored.

Answer 1. True saints may fall into sin, but they cannot fall from grace. They may fall foully, but they cannot fall totally; they may fall so as to break their bones, but they cannot fall so as to break their necks; they may sin themselves out of the sense of God's favour, but they shall never sin away his favour; they may sin so as to break their peace, but they shall never sin so as to provoke God to break his covenant; by their falls their graces may exceedingly decay, but they shall never be quite lost.

Answer 2. As to the example of Peter, it is evident from Scripture that though he fell into sin, – a great sin, – yet he did not fall from grace. For our Saviour told him in *Luke 22:32*: “*I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.*” Be sure that Christ's prayer was heard. And if Peter's faith did not quite fail, at least as to the habit of it, though it was interrupted as to the exercise of it, be sure the work of grace in him did not quite fail.

Answer 3. The same may be said of David. Though by his falls he lost the *joys* of God's salvation, yet he did not fall from a *state* of salvation; though the fruit which he brought forth before fell, yet the seed of grace still remained in him. The mercies of David were sure mercies, and, although God was displeased with him, yet he promised that he would not utterly take away his loving-kindness from him (*Psalms 89:33*). And if he did not quite lose God's loving-kindness, surely he did not quite lose his own grace.

Objection 2. But some eminent saints have fallen totally and finally too. Great pillars in the Church have not only trembled in shaking times, but tumbled. And some stars of heaven have fallen to the earth and never recovered their station again. The Scriptures tell us of Demas, who turned away from the ways of God, being allured by the present world; of Hymenaeus and Alexander, who made shipwreck of the faith and put away a good conscience; of the turning

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

away of Phygellus and Hermogenes; of some who have even been enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come. Yet these, after all, have fallen quite away into the sin against the Holy Spirit, so that it has been impossible to renew them again to repentance. (*Hebrews 6:4-6*).

Answer 1. None who ever had the good work of grace begun in them in truth ever fell like this, for the reasons which have already been given out of Scripture.

Answer 2. Therefore, all those who have totally and finally fallen never really did fall, but only seemed to, never really having had true faith. Whatever pillars have tumbled were never built upon Christ the sure foundation; whatever stars have fallen were but comets, not real stars which never fall. However the lamp of some hypocrites may seem to shine, – sometimes as brightly as others for a while, – yet they are without the oil of true grace in the vessel of their hearts; and it is no wonder then if their lamps go out. Those who totally and finally fall are merely hypocrites. It is but from counterfeit or common grace that they fall, which is plain from *1 John 2:19*, where John speaks of the departure and apostasy of some professors: “*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*”

These hypocrites who departed from the faith *seemed* to be true saints and disciples of Christ; and if they had been so indeed, no doubt, indeed, most certainly, they would have continued and persevered. But by their apostasy they gave a manifest proof of their hypocrisy. Therefore, when the Apostle spoke of the apostasy of Hymenaeus, who had not only fallen himself, but also overthrew the faith of others, he tells Timothy, “*Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his*” (*2 Timothy 2:19*). Where God lays a foundation of true grace in the hearts of any, it is certain and cannot be overthrown; where God puts the seal of his Spirit upon any, it cannot be broken. Those whom God, by his seal, marks and owns as his, he will never disown, and they shall never quite fall away.

Answer 3. As to that faith which may be made shipwreck of, and overthrown, it is not the grace of faith, but the profession of faith

The Good Work Begun

and the doctrine of faith which, in a storm of persecution, may be cast away and renounced by some. By strong delusions and believing lies they may be overthrown in others.

Answer 4. As to that good conscience which may be put away, it is not a truly good and sanctified conscience, but a moral and comparatively good conscience, such as Paul professed he had while he was a Pharisee before his conversion. This latter may be put away, but not the former.

Answer 5. As to those enlightenings and tastes which some may quite lose and fall away from, into the unpardonable sin, they are but common gifts of the Spirit, not special sanctifying grace.

Objection 3. Ezekiel 18:24: "When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity ... he shall die."

Answer. Either the prophet is speaking of legal righteousness rather than evangelical, or some temporal untimely death rather than eternal; or, as I rather think, that he is speaking only by way of supposition, of something which shall never come to pass. An example of this would be *Romans 8:13: "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."* And yet he tells them that there was no condemnation to them, and that nothing could separate them from the love of Christ; so that they would neither live after the flesh nor die, though it was true that *if* they lived after the flesh they *would* die. So *Galatians 1:8: "If an angel from heaven preach another gospel, let him be accursed."* It does not from this follow that an angel from heaven would or could preach another gospel, and so would be accursed (though an angel from hell might do it). So when it says that if the righteous turns from his righteousness, he shall die, it does not follow that he will turn from his righteousness and then die. But the Lord makes use of threatenings and cautions, as well as promises and other encouragements, to keep the righteous from turning from his righteousness, and these things are necessary for his establishment.

Objection 4. This doctrine opens a door to licentiousness, for when any have true grace, they may think to themselves, "Let me do what I will, I shall never perish. I am now out of all danger of eternal death and wrath." And so they will be prone to indulge themselves in sin and looser conduct. Whereas the danger of falling

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

away would be a greater bridle and restraint upon them to keep them from sin, and a greater spur to quicken them to watchfulness and constancy in holy duties.

Answer 1. God threatens the saints themselves with eternal death and wrath if they turn from his ways unto a vicious conversation; and there is no doubt that they would perish if they should do it (*Romans 8:13*).

Answer 2. The saints know that sin, if they presume to commit it, will at least break their peace, rob them of their comfort, and make havoc of their grace; therefore they fear to sin.

Answer 3. The promises of perseverance secure believers not only from falling into hell, but also from falling into a course of sin; and by these promises they are strengthened and enabled to stand when others, for lack of the help of them, fall.

Answer 4. With those who grow licentious upon presumption of their perseverance, it is a great symptom of their hypocrisy; and such *are* likely to fall quite away.

Answer 5. Those who are truly saved are more straightforward, and have more love to their heavenly Father, than to presume to sin against him, and to fly in his face because he has promised he will not disinherit them.

Answer 6. As sin is opposed to grace, so grace is opposed to sin; and the more encouragement grace has, the more vigorous will it be in its opposition to sin. Experience tells us that those believers who have an assurance of God's love and perseverance are so far from using it as an excuse for licentiousness that, of all others, they prove to be the most strict in their Christian walk.

6. Applications

I. Establish yourselves in the belief of this doctrine, that God will perform and perfect the good work of grace which he has begun, that true believers shall persevere to the end and never either totally or finally fall.

Beware of entertaining that error which is contrary to this great truth, which has such a clear and sure foundation in the Scriptures. Those who hold that the saints may fall away, deny what is clear in the text, that God will perform the good work begun until the day of Christ. For how does God perform the work if the work ceases

The Good Work Begun

and his people fall from grace? Such persons, in effect, say that God's decrees are uncertain, that his love is changeable, that his covenant may be broken, that his word is unsure, and his promises deceitful, that his Son's death might be in vain, that his Son's prayers and intercession might be ineffectual, that Christ's members might be torn from his body and thrown into hell, that Christ's sheep might be lost so as never to be found again, that those whom Christ has loved and espoused, may be divorced, hated, and at length found among the damned; that the Holy Spirit might be quite expelled from his habitation and the devil get possession of his place. (For lack of room in these few pages, I was forced in the doctrinal part to leave out the arguments I had prepared to prove the perseverance of the saints drawn from these later considerations.) Take heed of such unscriptural, uncomfortable teachings. Those who hold them are great deniers of and enemies to the doctrine of God's free and distinguishing grace, and of the powerful working of God's Spirit, and are therefore great enemies to themselves and their own salvation.

Beware, therefore, of the leaven of this doctrine, which spreads itself in too many places. Never believe that one who is a child of God today may be a child of the devil tomorrow, that an heir of heaven today may be an heir of hell tomorrow. Hold fast and persevere in this truth, that God will carry on the good work which he has begun, until he has brought it to perfection, that true saints shall never totally and finally fall, but shall hold out and persevere to the end. Believe firmly that all true believers, being received into the arms of God's mercy, are kept by the hand of his power, and that his faithfulness, as well as their faith, is their shield; indeed, that his faithfulness is the shield of their faith. Believe that none can pluck those who have received grace out of God's hand, and let none pluck this truth out of your mind. Let none persuade you to the contrary; not the devil, nor any of the children of darkness, as long as the Father of lights has so clearly revealed it in his Word.

II. The work of grace being such a good work and so abiding, I think that all of you should enquire carefully whether this good work has begun in you. Look and see whether you have any evidence to show of this good work. The wicked can show you the works of the flesh; can you show the works of the Spirit? In *Galatians 5:19-21*, the

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

Apostle enumerates the works of the flesh: “*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of which I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*” Therefore, such as do these things are without the good work of grace.

Are the works of the Spirit manifest in you? – Works such as repentance, godly sorrow for sin, filial fear of God, hungering desires after Christ, faith, love, humility, meekness, self-denial, temperance, sincerity, righteousness, zeal for God’s glory, and heavenly-mindedness? Have you found the beginnings of the good work in your effectual calling and regeneration? And is the good work carrying you towards perfection in your sanctification? Do you find sin more and more mortified, the world more and more crucified, grace more and more strengthened? Can you show any evidences of the indwelling of the Spirit? Have you the teachings and quickenings of the Spirit? Are you led by the Spirit out of the way of sin, into the paths of holiness and new obedience? Are you brought near by the Spirit of God, and communion with him and his ordinances? These are clear evidences of the good work. Nothing is more worthy of your inquiry than this: whether the good work of grace is wrought in you by the Spirit.

III. Here you have a powerful motive to bring to life your endeavours after this good work of grace, if now you are without it. Nothing is really more desirable than grace, which is so necessary, so excellent in itself, and in addition so lasting. If you can attain true grace, you will get a jewel of the greatest worth and use, which will never be taken away from you. What are all other things which it is possible for anyone to gain in the world, in comparison with the gain of true grace? Will these things abide? Can they prevent eternal misery? Suppose you should get the best friends, most wise and wealthy, most cordial and faithful to you; the best husbands or wives, most loving, sweet, and delightful; children full of sparkling wit and beauty, and most hopeful? Suppose you should get wealth in abundance, silver, gold, jewels, houses, goods, lands, and a large inheritance for your posterity? Suppose you were lifted up to the highest seat of worldly honour, advanced to the degree of nobility, or even kingly dignity,

The Good Work Begun

and with all these, access to all sensual pleasures and a cup filled to the brim with whatever delights any creature could yield for you to drink from every day. Yet the least drop of true grace, even if accompanied with worldly poverty, disgrace, and affliction, is incomparably beyond all this in excellency; for apart from the fact that these things are not in the best interests of the soul, which is of higher and larger capacity than to be filled up with them, neither are they lasting – if you had them, you could not keep them. You would find more bitterness in the loss of them than you ever found sweetness in the enjoyment of them.

The kindness and love of friends may die; your friends themselves may die; and be sure you will die. Your nearest relations may suddenly be snatched out of your bosoms; your wealth may fly away swiftly like an eagle towards heaven; your honours may vanish away quickly like smoke in the air. You may lose everything while you live; be sure you must leave all when you die. And think what a miserable condition you will be in at death if you have gained for yourselves, for all your days, only a portion in *this* life; for when your days are spent, your portion will be spent or left behind, and wholly lost to you for ever. And alas! what must your soul do then? What must it live on when it is separated from your body? Where will your soul take itself? Alas! horror and woe, the regions of darkness, the company of devils, the treasures of God's wrath, and the most dreadful torments of hell must be the portion of both your souls and bodies at the resurrection if you live and die without this work of grace upon you.

But if you can attain true grace, it will advance you to the dignity of sons and daughters of God; it will join you in marriage to Christ, and bring you into the embrace of his love; it will repair God's image in you, and restore you in some measure to man's primitive glory; it will rescue you out of the devil's chains and deliver you from the wretched slavery of sin; it will bring you under the beams of the light of God's countenance, and fill you with the sweet peace of conscience and sometimes such soul-ravishing joy as words cannot utter. It will enrich your souls with the jewel of the greatest price here, and it will entitle you to the treasures of glory, the undefiled, never-fading inheritance of heaven hereafter.

Besides the other excellencies of grace, this is not the least: true grace can never be quite lost. Everything outside you may be lost,

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

but grace within you can never be quite lost. Whatever you have accomplished may be taken from you, but your grace cannot be lost. That which God has done in you will abide with you. Your estate may fail, and your friends may fail, but your grace will never fail. Your memory, judgement, and other gifts of the mind may fail, and your bodily strength may fail, but the grace in your soul will never quite fail. When flesh and heart fail, your faith shall not quite fail, and God will not fail.

And if your grace cannot be lost, be sure your souls are safe; they cannot be lost. Your happiness is safe; that cannot be touched. If you can get true grace, you shall never fall. Indeed, you may fall into affliction, but you shall not fall into sin. If you are not preserved from the evil worker, you shall be preserved from the evil work. If you fall into some acts of sin, you shall not fall into a course of sin. If you fall down, you shall not fall off. If you fall back, you shall not fall away. If you fall into the pit, you shall not fall into the bottomless pit. If your bodies fall into the grave, your souls shall not fall into hell. Devils may as soon be received into heaven as you, if saved, can be cast into hell. If you get true grace, you cannot quite lose it. Therefore, you cannot lose glory. You shall just as certainly have it as if you already had possession of it. God will as soon turn the angels out of heaven, or turn his own dear Son out of heaven, or leave that habitation himself as shut you out of heaven at last, if you have attained true grace. Who, then, would be without grace? O then, prize grace; desire grace; seek grace; be ready to receive grace; and diligently improve all the means of grace for the attaining of this good work of grace within you.

IV. O what a wealth of the sweetest consolation is this to all who are true believers! I think your hearts should be filled with comfort and leap for joy within you when you hear and are assured by the Word that the good work which God has begun in you in this day of grace he will perform until the day of Christ. What has been spoken by way of motive to sinners to incite them to get grace, may be applied to you who are saved by way of comfort. None in the world have reason to take comfort but you, and you have the most reason. I know that many unsaved people who are still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity appear to have happy and successful lives, whatever

The Good Work Begun

their guilt and slavery, whatever their danger of eternal misery is, though they are already condemned and may be suddenly executed, and their ruin is likely to be inevitable because of their security.

On the contrary, I know that many who are truly saved are full of fears and troubles, and walk up and down with a drooping countenance and an even sadder heart, as if they were the persons who were prepared for destruction; as if they were miserable and should be miserable for ever. I do not blame the concern of the believers, lest they should be mistaken; but if upon a strict and impartial inquiry you can find evidences of the true work begun in you, although it is not yet brought to any great perfection, here you have a well and a fountain opened (though some have endeavoured in vain to shut it) of the greatest comfort and encouragement: God, who has begun the good work in you, will perform it, and will carry it on to perfection and *carry you on by his power through faith unto salvation* (1 Peter 1:5).

Some of you complain of affliction; but if you have grace you may well bear it, and even rejoice in it, because God is carrying on the good work of grace in you *by* it. Others complain of temptation, but if you have grace, though you may be shaken, you shall not be quite overcome. And if the tempter does not presently depart from you, yet God has promised that his grace shall be sufficient for you. Some complain of desertion, but if you have grace, though God hides his face, he will not remove his love. Remember that there is a bright side of the cloud of which you now only see the dark side; before long the shadows of this black night will be chased away by the bright beams of the light of God's countenance in the morning of his disclosure of both himself and his love to you. Others complain of the strength of their corruptions, but if you have grace, it will weaken them by degrees, and in the end will get a perfect victory over them. Some complain of the weakness of their graces, but you may be assured that your graces, weak as they are, shall never quite fail. God has engaged to carry on his own work in you which he has begun. Others complain that they have no evidences of any true grace, and that they are afraid they shall never hold out, that they shall fall away and become fearful apostates; but your graces may be true in spite of your doubts, and you may stand fast in spite of your fears. And let me tell you that hypocrites who are likely to

The Good Work Performed Until the Day of Christ

prove apostates are usually very self-confident. I fear those who are without such doubts and fears about themselves more than you.

Happy are you that ever you were born if you are indeed new-born. Happy are you in life. However lowly and miserable you may be esteemed by the world, none are so high born as those who are new-born; none are so beautiful as those who have God's image; none are so adorned as those who have the robes of Christ's righteousness; none are so enriched as those who have the riches of grace; none have such company as those who have fellowship with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ; none have such attendance as those who are attended by angels; none have such work as those who are employed in God's service; none have such liberty as those who are freed from sin and Satan; none have such peace as those who have peace of conscience; none have such joy as those who have the joy of the Holy Spirit; none have such safety as those who are secured against total apostasy and eternal misery. And this is the happiness of all who are saved in life. You will also be happy at death. If your grace does not free you from the stroke of death, it will free you from the sting of death. If it does not free you from the first death, it will free you from the second death. Those who do not like your life will desire your death. Balaam's wish is to be found in the most ungracious wretch: "*Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!*" (*Numbers 23:10*).

But your happiness at the end of your lives is beyond the apprehension of the wicked; none can express with what ravishing comforts and joys some believers have departed from this life to their Father's house.

To conclude, with this work of grace you will be happy to eternity. If you are gracious, you will be glorious; if you are holy here, you will be happy hereafter. If God has begun the good work of grace, he will perform it until the day of Christ. You shall not lose your grace, and therefore you cannot miss glory. Grace is glory begun, and you will be transformed more and more into the image of God, from glory to glory, until you arrive unto perfection of glory. Before long the Lord Jesus will appear, and then you will appear with him in glory; then you will be presented before him blameless and without spot; then you will lift up your heads with joy and your hearts will be filled with delight when you are raised up out of your graves and caught up into

The Good Work Begun

the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and there are welcomed into his presence with most ravishing looks and expressions of love, and he gives you full possession of his kingdom. Then you will better know the excellency of this grace which you have now received, when the fruit of it is brought forth, when the bud shall open in the flower, when the dawn has come to the day, when the promise has come to the performance, when faith is turned into vision and hope into fruition, and all graces have arrived to perfection. O the joys!

You alone are happy who have this good work begun, which the Lord will perform until the day of Christ. O then, admire God's free grace in electing and calling you. Rejoice in him and be very thankful, humble, and watchful, and walk worthy of him who has called you to his kingdom and glory.

There is one more application left, which is one of caution – especially to young professors – to take heed of apostasy and backsliding, which, without great care and watchfulness, you may fall into, notwithstanding this doctrine. Therefore I have appended a letter for your caution, in which you have a sad instance of a grievous backslider. Be warned by his falls.

Appendix 1

A cautionary letter sent by an unknown author to the young people in Thomas Vincent's congregation

Dear Friends,

Hearing of your Christian meetings, it came into my heart to write the following lines to you, which I hope will not discourage you, but rather caution you. Possibly you will be very keen to know who wrote this letter, but I desire to be excused from giving my name. Be assured that, however you may resent it, my intention is for your good.

It pleased God in my younger years to work a real change in my heart, which was so visible to those around me that it could not be hidden from their notice, since I was a very wicked youth before. This sudden and great alteration filled the godly with joy, but the wicked made it a matter of laughter and derision. It pleased the Lord mightily to carry on this work over a period of time; my league with sin was quite broken off; my heart was (I think) united to the Lord Jesus Christ, and I was in love with him, his Word, and his ordinances. Indeed, all the ways of holiness were my delight. I found such sweetness in the ways of God that I was amazed that any could take delight in following any course of sin. I was, like Peter, confident that all the men on earth and all the devils in hell could not draw me into a course of sin again. I was diligent in the performance of secret duties, in which I spent much time, as much as I could spare from my employer's business, and then had great purposes and resolution that, if the Lord spared me until I could

The Good Work Begun

command my own time, I would spend much more than I had already spent in religious duties.

Briefly, the hardest of duties and the heaviest burdens seemed light to me then. The Lord had given me great conquests over my corruptions, so that it was as though I was in heaven while on earth. But, alas! my dear friends, this did not last more than a year and a half or thereabouts, for, being ignorant of Satan's temptations and my own heart's deceitfulness and baseness, I never dreamt that my experience might change. But here I am hindered for a time in writing by a flood of tears and sorrow, to think how strangely my condition is altered, so that I can but just call to mind the days of old and the years of the right hand of the Most High.

Now, having given you a short account of my most joyful times, of my halcyon days, which were twenty years ago (yet I hope will always be present with you, – God grant that you may not sin them away and taste of my miseries), I shall tell you, in a few lines, of my sad and wretched times since, together with the occasion of my troubles.

When the Lord had dealt thus graciously with me the teaching of the Quakers was becoming established, and I was often talking with them, and began reading to defend myself against them, and also was very eager to know all opinions, which stole so fast upon me that it swallowed up most of the time that I should have spent reading more profitable things, or in meditation, heart-examination, and prayer.

I was then over-confident in my own abilities, very proud of my gifts, and prone to undervalue all who had not the same. There is no doubt that pride was the chief sin, for which the Lord left me so as to commit so many evils. Little by little my communion with God subsided. I fell into some smaller sins, and duties were first slightly performed and then totally neglected for a considerable time. O how like a beast I laid down at night and then got up without seeking the Lord! I suppose the whole earth's riches would not formerly have made me miss one praying time, but now I might be numbered among the heathen, and those that do not call upon God.

After this, I deserted (as much as I could) all good company; sin now came in by whole troops, and any frothy persons were my companions. I then exceeded due bounds in eating, drinking and sleeping. I fell to gaming, stealing, lying, was full of unchaste desires, and was hardly restrained from committing the sin of uncleanness.

Appendix 1

Conscience was hardly active, all its tenderness being gone. If I were to give a catalogue of the sins I was left to commit, it would strain your charity to think I ever had grace.

I was many times under dreadful apprehensions of what would be the issue of my wicked life and apostasy. The Lord then followed me with one scourge after another. I was hedged up so that I was forced to submit to the Lord and have been under great humblings. But strong temptation, when the Lord's mercies have been removed, has overcome me again on several occasions. And now I can set my seal to that truth in *Proverbs 14:14*: "*The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.*" Very sad is that man or woman's state whom the Lord punishes by allowing sin to rule over them. And how can I expect that such a wretch as I should be the instrument to do you the least good, except that I think the Lord can, by his great wisdom, do good by evil instruments; therefore it may be of some use to some of you.

For, I imagined, when I heard of your forwardness, that I foresaw, as it were, one ready to decline in his fervour, another fainting and growing weary of God's ways: one is ready to venture upon sin, another beginning to set up in the world and is swallowed up with business, cares of family, fear of poverty, breakings out into passions when their affairs do not have the desired success, becoming discontented, and then growing remiss in private and family devotions; first neglecting one duty, until, at last, religion is almost laid aside. Then they fall into loose and drinking company, and even neglect their general and particular callings.

O beware, my dear young friends, for the Lord's sake and for your own sakes. The least that can come of such things is great dishonour to God and great trouble to yourselves, such as you may never be relieved of while you live. You will be pierced through with many sorrows. If there is no peace to the wicked, surely then the godly must not have peace in wickedness. You will still be questioning and fearing (as I do this day) whether the work was true, and these sins could really be like the spots of God's children.

Then, I pray you, accept a few words of advice and do not slight them, though commonly known.

1. Beware of pride at all times, whether bodily or spiritual, or pride regarding gifts and graces. O labour much (if ever you will be a

The Good Work Begun

persevering Christian) against this sin! I know the devil will be very busy puffing you up with inflated ideas of your own accomplishments. Be not content with gifts; labour chiefly to grow in grace, and in particular the grace of humility (*Isaiah 57:15*).

2. Beware of disputings. If you are addicted to them, I truly think the devil will furnish you with arguments and new ideas, with the aim of eating out the power of godliness.

3. Beware of coveting many books. Books are good helps if rightly used. Study well those truths that are preached weekly.

4. Fear every inclination to neglect a known duty or to commit a known sin. Do not grieve the blessed Comforter.

5. Beware of taking the utmost liberty you might take, if you were sure your hearts would crave no more in eating, drinking, sleeping, clothing, or recreations.

6. Make great conscience to discharge relative duties to parents, employers, and the like. Those who wrong employers of their time are as real thieves as those who steal goods or money. Read over the promises and covenants you made with your employers when you were first employed by them.

7. Take heed what company you associate with. Be cautious about going into the company of the opposite sex if you are alone; set a watch upon your heart and eyes.

8. Avoid all unmerciful severity to your bodies by too frequent or overlong fasting, or the like; for the devil is very subtle with young people here. Doubtless he draws them into it, with the purpose of tiring them out and to make God's ways burdensome to them.

9. Beware of scornful thoughts towards those who are without much of the world's goods; have bowels of pity and love towards them.

10. Be careful to praise God for mercy. This duty I was much lacking in, though I was loaded with mercies.

11. Beware of self-confidence; lean only on Christ.

12. Do not go to a tavern or alehouse except with great fear and watchfulness. *Do not go at all* but upon necessary occasions. Beware of idleness; beware of tale-bearing.

I have finished, and only desire your prayers for me that the Lord would heal my broken bones, and that he will prevent you all from falling into sin (*Matthew 18:19-20*).

Appendix 2

A Reply to the Author of the Previous Letter

Sir,

I believe you will be surprised to see your letter (written and sent so privately to my dear young people) coming into public view without your knowledge. I hope you will take it as a sufficient excuse for me, who has taken this liberty, that, not knowing who you are or where you live, nor having any way to come to you or send something to you, I was not in a position to ask your permission, as I would have done, with the return of many thanks for your helpful caution and the advice which you have given to our young believers.

I suppose that these lines will come into your hands without the notice of any, which you are anxious to avoid; they are accompanied with my prayers for your perfect recovery, and, as you desire, that God would heal your broken bones, restore to you the joy of his salvation, and establish you for the future with his free Spirit. You have, I fear, been a rock of offence – not like our Saviour, but like Peter when he fell – unto those who have been acquainted with your profession and with your fall. If by the publishing of your case you prove a rock above water to keep some young ones from shipwreck, I hope you will not be offended with this publication. The flood of tears you speak of in remembering your foolish backsliding and departure from God, together with the honest design of your letter, give me grounds to hope the best concerning your state.

I am reluctant to rake into those wounds which seem to be bleeding, and to answer kind and seasonable admonitions with sharp

The Good Work Begun

reproofs. Your free and ingenuous confessions evidently demonstrate that you have a faithful Reprover in your own bosom, and if you can make such acknowledgments unto men for their caution, I do not doubt that you have often made these acknowledgments to God in order to your own remission. I would gladly have read a line or two in your paper of your recovery, but by the broken bones you complain of at the end you seem still to be down, – I will not say in regard of sin (I hope you have been long ago awakened from your gross neglect of God and duty, and have broken off your loose company and conversation), – but in regard of sorrow and a disconsolate spirit. It may be that you are still without that liveliness and vigour which you had at first.

Truly, I do not wonder at your broken bones, after you have ventured upon such breaches of God's laws. Neither do I wonder at God's frowns after such provocations, and that God should hide himself from you when you have run away from him. If God withdraws his Spirit from you for a long time, in regard of its witnessing, comforting, and quickening operation, I am not surprised, when you have not only grieved, but quenched and driven away the Spirit by your great backslidings. Yet one Scripture I would recommend to you for your encouragement and consolation, which possibly you have not taken such notice of, and that is *Hosea 11:7-9*: "*My people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man.*"

Your sin has not only been backsliding (which is a high insult and indignity offered to God, casting a great slur upon him and his ways, as if upon trial of him and the creature, the ways of holiness and the ways of sin, the latter were the better and more suitable: this has been the language of your conduct), but you have been *bent to backsliding*. The devil has hampered and held you in his snares when you have fallen, and, when you have endeavoured to rise, he has pulled you down again by his cords. Your heart has been bent to revolt from God, which you intimate in your letter. It is likely that you have often been called to return to the Most High by his messengers and

Appendix 2

ministers, but still you have persisted in dishonouring God instead of exalting him. This has been your attitude towards God, as it was the attitude of Israel of old.

But see the attitude of God towards such backsliders. What is it? Is it fury, indignation, and vengeance? What does God say to such a people? Is it, “How shall I not give thee up to ruin? How shall I not deliver thee to destruction? How shall I not consume thee with the fire of mine anger, as I consumed Admah and Zeboim, with Sodom and Gomorrah of old, by fire and brimstone from heaven?”

Read and tremble! Consider and wonder! God’s language is quite contrary to this: “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? and set thee as Zeboim?” One would have thought that God’s heart and hand too would have been turned against Ephraim, – backsliding and provoking Ephraim, – and that his anger would not only have been kindled against Ephraim, but blown up by such provocations into such a flame as would have proved unquenchable! But wonder and weep that you have provoked such a gracious God who is so ready to be reconciled.

God’s heart is turned within him towards Ephraim, and his repentings are kindled together. He promises that he will not execute the fierceness of his anger in the destruction of Ephraim. And the reason for all this is not any motive from Ephraim, but all from himself: “*For I am God, and not man.*” What man would have borne what God has borne? Who would have been so insulted and not avenged himself if it lay in the power of his hand to do so? But God has not only forborne to punish, but he is also ready to forgive; and all because he is God, and not man. His mercies are infinitely beyond the mercies of men. Our deepest feelings are marble in comparison with God’s most tender compassions. He blots out transgressions for his name’s sake; and he has promised to heal backslidings (*Hosea 14:4*). Read especially *Jeremiah 3*, and be encouraged to return to, and for the future to follow, the Lord fully. Take the counsel which Christ gave to the backsliding church of Ephesus after she had left her first love. *Revelation 2:4-5*: “*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works,*” and the counsel which he gave to the languishing church of Sardis in *Revelation 3:2*: “*Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.*”

The Good Work Begun

Had I time and room, and were more exactly acquainted with the present state of your soul, I would further attempt to give you some suitable advice out of the Word of God by way of a return for your great care and kindness toward our young people. In the meantime, let these few acknowledgments be accepted from a real well-wisher to your soul.

Thomas Vincent

Appendix 3

Cautionary motives and directions to young people professing religion, to keep them from apostasy and backsliding

YOU have heard that the good work which God has begun in the day of grace he will perform until the day of Christ. Yet, lest any should abuse this doctrine, and turn the grace of God into wantonness; lest any should, by presuming that the good work has begun in them, and from this concluding that they shall never fall away, presume also to indulge themselves in sin, and so take occasion to give way to licentiousness; therefore I shall add a serious caution to all, especially to young professors.

In *1 Corinthians 10*, at the beginning of the chapter, the Apostle spreads before the Corinthians some examples from Scripture of the falls of the children of Israel in the wilderness – their falling into sin and falling into mischief and ruin as a result. In *verse 11* he tells them that all those things happened to them for examples, and were written for our admonition. And therefore he gives a caution to them in *verse 12*: “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*”

In a similar manner I have spread before you a letter directed to you from one who, when he was a young apprentice, as many of you are, was wrought upon, as you have been. He tells you what his attainments and enjoyments were, so that he then was a high and forward professor of faith; but nevertheless he acknowledges that in a short time he declined, fell into sin, and became a fearful backslider. And as he has written it, so I have published it for your admonition

The Good Work Begun

that I might give you the Apostle's caution: "*Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*"

Motives to Keep from Apostasy and Backsliding

1. Some have and may fall, and apostatise from the ways of God, who have made a high profession of religion, attained great illumination, gifts, and tastes of spiritual things. These may have been thought by others, and themselves too, to have stood as certainly as any. Therefore, all who think they stand, especially you who are young professors, should take heed, lest you fall. The Apostle tells Timothy (*2 Timothy 4:10*) that Demas had forsaken him, having loved this present world. And before that (*1 Timothy 1:19-20*) he tells of Hymenaeus and Alexander, who had put away a good conscience and made shipwreck of the faith, and who had learned to blaspheme. The Apostle Peter in *2 Peter 2:20-22* speaks of some who had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, who now were entangled again and overcome, and that this was according to the old proverb: "*The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire*" (*Proverbs 26:11; 2 Peter 2:22*). Our Saviour tells us in his explanation of the Parable of the Sower (*Matthew 13:20-21*) that he who received the Word in stony places is he who hears the Word and receives it with joy; yet not having any root in himself, he only endures for a while, for when tribulation arises because of the Word, by and by he is offended. Indeed, such as have true grace can never totally fall, as has been proved, but many may have that which is like true grace, and may fall totally from it. They may lose that which they seem to have.

2. Apostasy is an extremely God-provoking sin. *Hebrews 10:38*: "*If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*" This drawing back is not to be understood of the backslidings of God's children, but of the apostasy of hypocrites, such a drawing back as is unto perdition (*verse 39*). God's soul has no pleasure in them, that is, he is highly displeased with them. Apostates, in effect, say that upon trial they have found the devil to be a better master than Christ, and the ways of sin and wickedness, though they lead to death and hell, to be more suitable to them than the ways of God and holiness, though they lead to life and glory.

Appendix 3

3. Beside the sin of apostasy itself, which is so heinous, those who are guilty of it usually grow worse than they were before, in all kinds of licentious conduct. *Matthew 12:43-45*: “*When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, and returneth again, he taketh seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*” Apostates are the firstborn children of the devil, and the lusts of their father they will do. He dwells in them, and rules over them, and they are ready at his bidding for any wickedness. Besides uncleanness, debauchery, mischief, villainy, oaths, and blasphemy, such persons usually have the most desperate enmity against God and godliness, and of all others prove the greatest persecutors of the saints.

Indeed, apostates are upon the threshold of the sin against the Holy Spirit, and many of them do step over into it, and then there is no returning for them and renewing them to repentance. There is no sacrifice for their sin, no remission attainable by them, so that their damnation is certain and the fiery indignation, which shall devour them, unavoidable.

I do not say that all apostates fall into the unforgivable sin; yet I had almost said that all apostates fall so as never to rise again in the event and issue; if their sins are not unpardonable, they prove almost always unpardoned. *Jude 12* compares some to trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, and plucked up by the roots. Such are apostates, whose apparent fruit withering, and whose apparent life being lost, are twice dead; they are therefore plucked up by the roots, that they can never receive life again. I do not remember ever reading or hearing of an apostate who has been converted.

4. And therefore apostasy almost always ends in perdition. *Hebrews 10:39*: “*We are not of them who draw back unto perdition.*” Such bring upon themselves swift destruction. Their judgment does not linger, and neither does their damnation slumber (*2 Peter 2:1, 3*). God quickly awakens them to the vengeance which he has appointed for them. They also bring upon themselves most dreadful destruction: besides the torture of the body, which such must undergo in the flames of hell, they will surpass others in the anguish and horror of their minds. None will have such furious reflections and horrible lashes of conscience as apostates, when they perceive what happiness

The Good Work Begun

they fell from, when they fell from the ways of holiness, and what misery they fell into, when they fell into sin. Beware, then, you that profess religion now in your younger years, that you do not prove to be apostates when you are older, and thereby verify that profane proverb, "*Young saints, and old devils,*" and so bring upon yourselves such aggravated guilt, and draw down such an insupportable weight of wrath as will sink you so low in hell.

5. If you have the good work of grace begun in you, and if God has engaged to perform it and keep you so that you shall never fall away, yet it is by motives considered and means made use of, that he does it. If you should live in neglect of them, you cannot expect to be kept by God from total apostasy. And if you presume upon God keeping you in the neglect of the means which he has appointed for your establishment, it is a great symptom of your hypocrisy, and the unsoundness of the grace which you seem to have.

6. Though God will not allow you totally to fall from grace if the good work is truly begun in you, yet, without great care, you may fall into great decay of grace; your graces may languish and so be ready to die (*Revelation 3:2*). You may grow cold and exhibit so little spiritual concern that there shall appear little or no evidence of spiritual life in you, either to yourselves or to others. You may, instead of the sweet meltings for sin which you have, grow spiritually unaware and contract a great dullness and hardness of heart; instead of yieldedness and readiness in spiritual duties, you may contract a listlessness and indisposition; instead of your humility and self-loathing, you may grow very proud and self-conceited; instead of your meek and gentle temper, you may grow peevish and passionate; instead of your uprightness of heart, and your single eye to God's glory, you may spoil most of your duties with hypocrisy; instead of self-denial and temperance, you may indulge yourself and grow licentious in a great measure. You may lose much of your contentment and patience, and the fear of God which you now have. Your hungering desire after Christ may be diminished; your present strong faith may become feeble; your flames of love may be quenched; the flame quite gone, and only some coals or sparks remain unperceivable under the ashes; your hopes of heaven

Appendix 3

may be lost, as to the liveliness and delightful working of them. Therefore, beware lest you fall.

7. If you do not fall totally from grace, yet, without care, you may fall foully into sin. You have read in Scripture of some gross sins with which some saints have been overtaken: Noah's drunkenness, Lot's incest, David's adultery and murder, Job's and Jeremiah's cursing their birthday, Jonah's passionate speeches to God for sparing Nineveh, Peter's denial of his Master, and so on. And if you do not look well to yourselves, you also (though you have true grace) may fall into some foul sins to the dishonour of God and your profession, to the wounding of Christ and your conscience, to the grieving of the Spirit and God's people, to the eclipsing of the light of God's countenance, to the interrupting of all conscious communion with God, to the darkening of your evidence for heaven, to the losing of all spiritual joy and peace, to provoking God to scourge you severely in your bodies, estates, names and friends, and to deliver you to Satan and the tyrannising power of lust.

You may fall so as to be filled not only with fears, but with horrors; and not only to faint through doubt of your spiritual condition, but also to sink through an almost utter despair of mercy. You may sin so as not only to lose God's smiles, but also to gain his frowns, and, having lost all evidences for heaven, you may be brought even to the brink of hell in your own apprehension. Sad and doleful is the condition of some backsliding children of God through their falls, which should be a warning to others to beware of similar falls and their consequences.

8. Though you are truly saved, yet you are in danger of falling, and in great danger without great watchfulness; partly through the temptations of *Satan*, that implacable, busy, watchful, invisible, false, deceitful enemy who sometimes will furiously assault and, like a roaring lion, fall upon you to make a prey of you and devour you; but most commonly he will use cunning insinuations with you, suitable to your natural dispositions and inclinations. By his secret snares he will endeavour to entangle you before you are aware. You are partly in danger of falling because of the *world*, which sometimes will smile upon you to allure you, and at other times will frown upon you to

The Good Work Begun

frighten you. Sometimes it will promise its good things to draw you, and at other times it will threaten its evil things to drive you into sin. But the chief danger by which you might be brought to fall is from yourselves, from *your own deceitful hearts* and the remainder of unmortified, corrupt flesh within you. By this you may be betrayed, and the flesh, joining with the devil and the world, may hurry you into the commission of such sins which you now think you would not commit for all the world's riches, and if all the imperial diadems of the earth were thrown down at your feet.

9. You may be kept from falling if you look well to your standing. Whatever your danger is, God can keep you, and hold up your goings in his paths so that your footsteps do not slip. *Jude 24*: “*To him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.*” Indeed, he has promised to keep you, and has engaged his faithfulness to do it in your applying yourselves to him, making use of the means which he has appointed for your upholding and establishment. *2 Thessalonians 3:3*: “*But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.*”

And I shall add that it is easier (besides the honour brought by this to God, and the inexpressible benefit and comfort to yourselves) to stand, and not to fall, than to arise and get up when you are fallen. It is no easy thing to recover out of a backsliding state. Those who backslide greatly, do not usually or easily or soon recover themselves. And many never recover themselves fully as long as they live. As they lose some measures of grace here, so they are likely to miss those degrees of glory which otherwise they would have attained.

Directions to Keep from Apostasy and Backsliding

1. Look to it that the good work is indeed begun in your hearts, that you have grace of the right kind. If you should prove (notwithstanding all your profession) unsound in the main points, rotten at the core, false-hearted hypocrites, you are in great danger of total apostasy, against which you have no promise from God for your security. The profession of hypocrites is built upon a sandy foundation, which the wind of affliction and storms of persecution will overturn. It is only true grace that is of an establishing nature. *Hebrews 13:9*: “*It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.*” Only the truly

Appendix 3

converted are built upon the Rock of Ages where they are safe; and however they may be shaken by troubles and temptations, yet they shall never be utterly cast down and quite overturned.

2. Be very humble. *Proverbs 16:18*: “*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*” Tall cedars are overthrown by the wind when humble and low shrubs are hardly touched by its blasts. And when God resists the proud and allows them to be thrown down, he gives grace to the lowly and strengthens them to stand.

3. Do not stand in your own strength. None have fallen more foully than the presumptuous self-confident; labour for a fear and jealousy of yourselves. *Romans 11:20*: “*Be not high-minded, but fear.*” Let your confidence and strength be in the Lord. *2 Timothy 2:1*: “*Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*” Have recourse to him for grace to help in every need and under every assault and temptation which you have to sin. Christ is able to succour; it is his office to give aid, and he is ready to do so. He pities you when you are tempted and is touched with the feeling of your infirmities (*Hebrews 4:15*); he has invited you to come unto him (*verse 16*), and has promised that he will bruise Satan under your feet shortly (*Romans 16:20*). In the meantime, his grace shall be sufficient for you (*2 Corinthians 12:9*).

4. Study and apply the promises of perseverance and preservation from sin: that God will confirm you to the end (*1 Corinthians 1:8*); that he will hold you in his hand, from which none shall pluck you (*John 10:29*); that he will keep you from departing from him (*Jeremiah 32:40*); that he will preserve you from every evil work, and that unto his heavenly kingdom (*2 Timothy 4:18*). The whole Scripture is useful in this way. David hid God’s Word in his heart as a preservative against sin (*Psalms 119:11*).

But the promises are more especially useful, being of such a cleansing and establishing virtue, especially those already referred to, and similar promises in which God has obliged and engaged himself to establish his people from falls. Therefore, be conversant with the Word, and receive it not only in the light of it, but also in the love of it, and in this way you will be kept from falling into either damnable error or scandalous sin.

The Good Work Begun

5. Avoid vain janglings, and a desire to dispute with those who are of contrary opinions. Beware how you have any discussion with those whose teachings are compromised, or at least of wrangling disputes with them; for, in addition to the hazard to you, especially while you are young and inexperienced, of being seduced by them, you will be in danger of declining in the vigour of your spirits and the fervour of your love to God. The author of the cautionary letter told you of his sad experience, how his fall began upon his engaging in disputes with the Quakers. Acquaint yourselves well with the principles of religion which you have in your catechisms, and see how they are proved by the Scriptures. Hold fast *those* truths, and turn away from anything that endeavours to steal them away and rob you of them.

6. Be watchful for sensuality and indulging the flesh. In your youth, you may be most prone to this; temptations may be pressing and inclinations strong, but you must exercise yourselves in self-denial and keep a hard hand over your rebellious flesh. You must, if need be, keep under your body; be sure to bring your sensual appetites and desires into subjection to your reason, regulated by the Word. If those desires are unrestrained and gain the mastery, think what precipices of sin you are likely to fall into.

7. Beware of worldly-mindedness, so that you are not swallowed up with worldly business and encumbered with the affairs of this life. I am sure this will cause a great decay in the power of godliness. If the world, by reason of your callings, has most of your time, make sure that it does not have it all; reserve some time every day for religious exercises, and let *them* have most of your hearts. Beware of inordinate cares, fears, and griefs about worldly things on one side, and inordinate love, desires, and delights on the other side. Endeavour to get the world crucified to you, and your hearts crucified to it. Make use of the cross of Christ to achieve this, and think much of the transcendent glory and happiness of the other world, which will disgrace the world in your esteem.

8. Stand continually upon your watch. Beware of sin when it first begins; do not so much as entertain sin in your minds with any pleasing, delightful thoughts; refrain from secret sins, otherwise your feet

Appendix 3

will slip before you are aware. Be watchful for of the least degree of apostasy; observe your hearts when they begin to go off from God, and endeavour with all speed to recover and rise again when you feel yourselves beginning to fall.

9. Labour after further growth in grace every day. Give all diligence to make some additions daily to your graces; and by this you will both make your calling and election sure, and if you do these things you shall never fall (*2 Peter 1:10*). While grace is growing, it cannot be declining; and therefore you cannot fall.

10. Prize and improve the means of grace: the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and all strengthening ordinances. Look to God's institution of them as the means of establishment, and seek after God's presence in them. Wait for the breathings of his Spirit, and cherish the Spirit's influences both of grace and of comfort, which are of great efficacy to keep you from falling.

11. Make the most fruitful, experienced, established, zealous, and warm-hearted Christians your most intimate companions. Forsake not only the company of the loose and profane, but also of such as have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof, as is the Apostle's advice in *2 Timothy 3:5*: "*From such turn away.*" Associate yourselves as much as you can with those who fear the Lord. Labour to advance by their company. Great encouragement and help may be attained through the converse of lively Christians.

12. Set God always before your eyes as David did. He goes on to tell us that because God was at his right hand, he should not be moved (*Psalms 16:8*). Temptations to sin will little move you when you actually look to and consider God's eye upon you. You will easily answer and repel temptations. "*How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (*Genesis 39:9*).

13. Labour for a strong and fervent love to God. Many waters cannot quench the fire of this love. While your hearts are mounting upwards in this flame to God, you are not in such danger of falling down and listening to temptations which would draw you into sin.

The Good Work Begun

Labour to dwell in the love of God and the love of one another. By this you will dwell in God and God in you (*1 John 4:16*). And while you dwell in God, you cannot fall from him.

14. Be much in secret converse with God in meditation, contemplation, short as well as secret prayers. Get on your knees often when you are alone, and there bewail sin and pray for the mortification of your besetting sins. Secret duties seriously, diligently, and constantly performed are both an evidence of sincerity, and a great preservative against apostasy.

15. Lastly, and chiefly, labour for much of the grace of faith and put it into daily exercise. *2 Corinthians 1:24*: “*By faith ye stand.*” If you would resist the devil, you must be steadfast in faith. (*1 Peter 5:8-9*). If you would quench his fiery darts, you must take and hold up the shield of faith. (*Ephesians 6:16*). If you would be kept by the power of God, it must be through faith unto salvation. (*1 Peter 1:5*). Such as draw back unto perdition, do so through unbelief. Such as hold out, it is through faith to the saving of their souls. (*Hebrews 10:39*).

I shall conclude with two Scriptures. *1 Corinthians 16:13*: “*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.*” And *1 Corinthians 15:58*: “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*”

The Good Work Begun

Spiritual Counsel for Young People from
a Puritan Pastor

Books by Puritans are often regarded as inaccessible because of the depth of their theological thought, but these men also had a pastoral and evangelistic heart. This is very apparent in *The Good Work Begun*, where Thomas Vincent speaks directly to teenagers in his congregation regarding the state of their souls. Based on *Philippians 1:6*, he draws out the nature of the work of grace in a soul, and then shows that this work, once begun by the Lord, makes an eternal difference to the soul.

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

(Philippians 1:6)

First published in 1672, the language in this new edition has been updated, and it has been re-formatted for a new generation of readers.



CountedFaithful

www.countedfaithful.org

ISBN 978-1-78872-215-5



9 781788 722155