

# To a Person burdened with inward and outward troubles

William Law

Worthy Sir,

My heart embraces you, with all the tenderness and affection of Christian love; and I earnestly beg of God, to make me a messenger of His peace to your soul.

You seem to apprehend that the account you have given of yourself might surprise me; but I am neither surprised, nor offended at it; I neither condemn, nor lament your condition, but shall endeavor to show you, how it may be made a blessing and great happiness to you. I shall not enter into a consideration of the different kinds of trouble you have told me about. I think it better to lay before you the one true ground and root, from which all the evil and disorders of human life have sprung. This will make it easy for you to see, what that is, which must, and only can be the full remedy and relief for all of them.

The scripture has assured us, that God made man in His own image and likeness; a sufficient proof, that man, in his first state, as he came forth from God, must have been absolutely free from all vanity, want, or distress of any kind, from anything either within, or without him. It would be quite absurd and blasphemous, to suppose, that a creature beginning to exist in the image and likeness of God, should have vanity of life, or vexation of spirit: a Godlike perfection of nature, and a painful, distressed nature, stand in the utmost contrariety to one another.

Again, the scripture has assured us, that man that is born of a woman, has but a short time to live, and is full of misery: therefore man now is not that creature that he was by his creation. The first divine and Godlike nature of Adam, which was to have been immortally holy in union with God, is lost; and instead of it, a poor mortal of earthly flesh and blood, born like a wild donkey's colt, of a short

life, and full of misery, and is through a vain pilgrimage, to end in dust and ashes. Therefore, let every evil, whether inward, or outward, only teach you this truth, that man has infallibly lost his first divine life in God; and that no possible comfort, or deliverance is to be expected, but only in this one thing, that though man had lost his God, yet God is become man, that man may be again alive in God, as at the first. For all the misery and distress of human nature, whether of body or mind, is wholly owing to this one cause, that God is not in man, nor man in God, as the state of his nature requires: it is, because man has lost that first life of God in his soul, in and for which he was created. He lost this light, and spirit, and life of God, by turning his will, imagination, and desire, into a tasting and sensibility of the good and evil of this earthly bestial world.

Now here are two things raised up in man, instead of the life of God: first, self, or selfishness, brought forth by his choosing to have a wisdom of his own, contrary to the will and instruction of his creator. Secondly, an earthly, bestial, mortal life and body, brought forth by his eating that food, which was poison to his paradisiacal nature. Both these must therefore be removed; that is, a man must first totally die to self, and all earthly desires, views, and intentions, before he can be again in God, as his nature and first creation requires.

But now if this is a certain and immutable truth, that man, so long as he is a selfish, earthly-minded creature, must be deprived of his true life, the life of God, the spirit of heaven in his soul; then how is the face of things changed! For then, what life is so much to be dreaded, as the life of worldly ease and prosperity? What a misery, what a curse, is there in everything that gratifies and nourishes our self-love, self-esteem, and self-seeking? On the other hand, what happiness is there in all inward and outward troubles, when they force us to feel and know the hell that is hidden within us, and the vanity of everything without us, when they turn all our self-love into self-abhorrence and force us

to call upon God to save us from ourselves, to give us a new life, new light, and new spirit in Christ Jesus.

"Oh thank you for the famine," the poor prodigal might well have said, "which, by reducing me to the necessity of asking to eat husks with the swine, brought me to myself, and caused my return to my first happiness in my father's house."

Now, I will suppose your distressed state to be as you represent it; inwardly, darkness, heaviness, and confusion of thoughts and passions; outwardly, ill treatment from friends, relations, and all the world; unable to strike up the least spark of light, comfort, or happiness, by any thought or reasoning of your own.

Oh happy famine, which leaves you not so much as the husk of one human comfort to feed upon! For this is the time and place for all that is good and life and salvation to happen to you, which happened to the prodigal son. Your way is as short, and your success as certain as his was: you have no more to do than he had; you need not call out for books, or methods of devotion; for, in your present state, much reading, and borrowed prayers, are not your best method: all that you are to offer to God, all that is to help you to find Him to be your Savior and Redeemer, is best taught to you by the distressed state of your heart.

Only let your present and past distress make you feel and acknowledge this twofold great truth: first, that in and of yourself, you are nothing but darkness, vanity, and misery; secondly, that of yourself, you can no more help yourself to light, comfort, and happiness, than you can create an angel. People at all times can seem to assent to these two truths; but then it is an assent that has no depth or reality, and so is of little or no use to them: but your condition has opened your heart for a deep and full conviction of these truths. Now give way, to this conviction, and hold these two truths, in the same degree of certainty as you know two and two is four, and then you are with the prodigal,

come to yourself, and more than HALF YOUR WORK IS DONE!

Being now in full possession of these two truths, feeling them in the same degree of certainty, as you feel your own existence, you are, under this sensibility, to give up yourself absolutely and entirely to God in Christ Jesus, as into the hands of infinite love; firmly believing this great infallible truth, that God has no will towards you, but that of infinite love, and an infinite desire to make you a partaker of His divine nature; and that it is as absolutely impossible for the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to refuse all that good and life and salvation which you want, as it is for you to take it by your own power.

Oh drink deep of this cup! For the precious water of eternal life is in it. Turn to God with this faith; cast yourself into this abyss of love; and then you will be in that same state the prodigal son was in, when he said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called Your son'"; and all will be fulfilled in you, which was fulfilled in him.

Make this, therefore, the twofold exercise of your heart: now, bowing yourself down before God, in the deepest sense and acknowledgement of your own nothingness and vileness; then, looking up to God in faith and love, consider Him as always extending the arms of His mercy towards you, and full of an infinite desire to dwell in you, as He dwells in angels in heaven. Content yourself with this inward and simple exercise of your heart, for a while; and seek, or look for nothing in any book, but that which nourishes and strengthens this state of your heart.

"Come to Me," says the holy Jesus, "all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." Here is more for you to lie upon, more light for your mind, more unction for your heart, than in volumes of human instruction. Pick up the words of the holy Jesus, and beg of Him to be the light and life of your soul: love the sound of His name; for Jesus

is the love, the sweetness, the compassionate, the goodness, of the deity itself; which became man, so that men might have power to become the sons of God. Love, pity and wish well to every soul in the world; dwell in love, and then you dwell in God; learn to hate nothing but the evil that stirs in your *own* heart.

Teach your heart this prayer, till your heart continually says, though not with outward words: "Oh holy Jesus: meek lamb of God! Bread that came down from heaven! Light and life of all holy souls! Help me to a true and living faith in You. Oh do open yourself within me, with all your holy nature, spirit, tempers, and inclinations, that I may be born again of You, a new creature, quickened and revived, led and governed, by Your Holy Spirit."

Prayer so practiced, becomes the life of the soul, and the true food of eternity. Keep in this state of application to God; and then you will infallibly find it to be the true way of rising out of the vanity of time, into the riches of eternity.

Do not expect, or look for the same degrees of sensible fervor. The matter does not lie there. Nature will have its share; but the ups and downs of that are to be overlooked. While your will, or spirit is good, and set right, the changes of creaturely fervor do not lessen your union with God. It is the abyss of the heart, an unfathomable depth of eternity within us, as much above sensible fervor, as heaven is above the earth; it is this that works our way to God, and unites with heaven. This abyss of the heart, is the divine nature and power within us, which never calls upon God in vain; but whether helped or deserted by bodily fervor, penetrates through all outward nature, as easily and effectually as our thoughts can leave our bodies, and reach into the regions of eternity.

The poverty of our fallen nature, the depraved workings of flesh and blood, the corrupt tempers of our polluted birth in this world, do us no hurt, so long as the spirit of prayer works contrary to them, and longs for the first birth of the

light and spirit of heaven. All our natural evil ceases to be our own evil, as soon as our will, or spirit turns from it; it then changes its nature, loses all its poison and death, and only becomes our holy cross, on which we happily die from self and this world into the kingdom of heaven.

Would you be done with error, scruple, and delusion? Consider the deity to be the greatest love, the greatest meekness, the greatest sweetness, the eternal unchangeable will to be a good and blessing to every creature; and that all the misery, darkness, and death of fallen angels and fallen men, consist in their having lost their likeness to this divine nature. Consider yourself, and all the fallen world, as having nothing to seek or wish for, but by the spirit of prayer to draw into the life of your soul, rays and sparks of this divine, meek, loving, tender nature of God. Consider the holy Jesus as the gift of God to your soul, in spite of every inward or outward enemy. These three infallible truths, heartily embraced, and made the nourishment of your soul, shorten and secure the way to heaven, and leave no room for error, scruple or delusion

Expect no life, light, strength, or comfort, but from the Spirit of God, dwelling and manifesting His own goodness in your soul. **The best of men, and the best of books, can only do you good, so far as they turn you from themselves, and every human thing, to seek, and have, and receive every kind of good from God alone;** not a distant, or an absent God, but a God living, moving, and always working in the spirit and heart of your soul.

They never find God, who seek for Him by reasoning and speculation; for since God is the highest spirit, and the highest life, nothing but a like spirit, and a like life, can unite with Him, find or feel, or know anything of Him. Hence it is, that faith, and hope, and love, turned towards God, are the only possible, and infallible means of obtaining a true and living knowledge of Him. And the reason is plain, it is by this holy attitude, which is the working of spirit and life within us, we seek the God of life where He is, we call upon Him with His own voice, we draw

near to Him by His own Spirit; for nothing can breathe forth faith, and love, and hope to God, but that Spirit and life which is of God, and which therefore through flesh and blood thus presses towards Him, and readily unites with Him.

There is not a more infallible truth in the world than this, that neither reasoning nor learning can ever introduce a spark of heaven into our souls: and since this is so, you have nothing to seek, nor anything to fear, from reason. Life and death are the things in question: they are neither of them the growth of reasoning or learning, but each of them is a state of the soul, and only thus differ, death is the want, and life the enjoyment of its highest good. Reason, therefore, and learning, have no power here; but only by their vain activity to keep the soul insensible of that life and death, one of which is always taking the ascendancy in it, according as the will and desire of the heart worked. Add reason to a vegetable, and you add nothing to its life or death. Its life and fruitfulness lies in the soundness of its root, the goodness of the soil, and the riches it derives from air and light. Heaven and hell grow thus in the soul of every man: his heart is his root; if that is turned from all evil, it is then like the plant in a good soil; when it hungers and thirsts after the divine life, it then infallibly draws the light and Spirit of God into it, which are infinitely more ready and willing to live and fructify in the soul, than light and air is to enter into the plant, that hungers after them. For the soul has its breath, and being, and life, for no other end, but that God may manifest the riches and powers of His own life in it.

Thus hunger is all, and in all worlds, everything lives in it, and by it; nothing else eats, or partakes of life; and everything eats according to its own hunger. Everything hungers after its own mother, that is, everything has a natural magnetic tendency to partake of that from which it had its being, and can only find its rest in that from whence it came. Dead as well as living things bear witness to this truth: the stones fall to the earth, the sparks fly

upwards, for this only reason, because everything must tend towards that from which it came.

Were not angels and the souls of men breathed forth from God, as so many real offspring<sup>↑</sup>s of the divine nature, it would be as impossible for them to have any desire of God, as for stones to go upwards, and the flame downwards. Thus you may see, and feel, that the spirit of prayer not only proves that you came from God, but is your certain way of returning to Him.

When, therefore, it is the one ruling, never ceasing desire of our hearts, that God may be the beginning and end, the reason and motive, the rule and measure, of our doing, or not doing, from morning to night; then everywhere, whether speaking or silent, whether inwardly or outwardly employed, we are equally offered up to the Eternal Spirit, have our life in Him and from Him, and are united to Him, by that spirit of prayer, which is the comfort, the support, the strength and security of the soul, traveling by the help of God, through the vanity of time into the riches of eternity. For this spirit of prayer, let us willingly give up all that we inherit from our fallen father, to be all hunger and thirst after God; and to have no thought or care, but how to be wholly His devoted instruments; everywhere, and in everything, His adoring, joyful, and thankful servants. Have your eyes shut, and ears stopped to everything, that is not a step in that ladder that reaches from earth to heaven.

Reading is good, hearing is good, conversation and meditation are good; but then they are only good at times and occasions, and in a certain degree; and must be used and governed, with such caution, as we eat and drink, and refresh ourselves, or they will bring forth in us the fruits of overindulgence. But the spirit of prayer is for all times, and all occasions; it is a lamp that is to always be burning, a light to be ever shining; everything calls for it, everything is to be done in it, and governed by it; because it is, and means, and wills nothing else, but the whole, of the soul, not doing this or that, but wholly, incessantly given up to God, to be where, and what, and how He pleases.

This state of absolute resignation, naked faith, and pure love of God, is the highest perfection, and most purified life of those, who are born again from above, and who through the divine power become sons of God: and it is neither more nor less, than what our blessed Redeemer has called, and qualified us to long and aspire after, in these words: "Your kingdom come; Your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven." It is to be sought for in the *simplicity* of a little child, without being captivated with any mysterious depths or heights of speculation; without nature, grace, or creature, but so far as it brings us nearer to God, forces us to forget and renounce everything for Him; to do everything in Him, with Him, and for Him; and to give every breathing, moving, stirring, intention, and desire of our heart, soul, spirit, and life to Him.

Let every creature have your love. Love with its fruits of meekness, patience, and humility, is all that we can wish for to ourselves, and our fellow creatures; for this is to live in God, united to Him, both for time and eternity.

To desire to communicate good to every creature, in as big a degree as we can, and as it is capable of receiving from us, is a divine disposition; for thus God stands unchangeably disposed towards the whole of creation: but let me add my request, as you value the peace which God has brought forth by His Holy Spirit in you, as you desire to be continually taught by an unction from above, that you would on no account enter into any dispute with anyone about the truths of salvation; but give them every help, but that of debating with them; for no man has fitness for the light of the gospel, till he finds an hunger and thirst, and want of something better, than that which he has and is by nature. Yet we ought not to check our inclinations to help others in every way we can. Only do what you do, as a work of God; and then, whatever may be the event, you will have reason to be content with the success that God gives it. "He that has ears to hear, let him hear"; may be enough for you, as well as it was for our blessed Lord.

The next thing that belongs to us, and which is also Godlike, is a true unfeigned patience, and meekness, showing every kind of good will and tender affection towards those that turn a deaf ear to us; looking upon it to be as contrary to God's method, and the good state of our own hearts, to dispute with anyone in contentious words, as to fight with him for the truths of salvation.

"Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," says our blessed Lord. He called no one else, because no one else has ears to hear, or a heart to receive the truths of redemption.

Every man is an ineffective disputer, till such time as something has disturbed his state, and awakened in him a sensibility of his own evil and miserable nature. We are all afraid, both of inward and outward distress; and yet, till distress comes, our life is but a dream, and we have no awakened sensibility of our own true state.

We are apt to consider intellect and abilities, as the proper qualifications for the reception of divine truths; and wonder that a man of a fine understanding should not immediately embrace just and solid doctrines: but the matter is quite otherwise. Had man kept possession of his first rich and glorious state, there would not have been any foundation for the gospel redemption; and the doctrine of the cross, would have appeared quite unreasonable to be pressed upon him: and therefore says our Lord, "To the poor the gospel is preached." It is solely to them, and no one else: that is, to poor fallen man, that has lost all the true natural riches and greatness of his first divine life; to him is the gospel preached. But if a man knows and feels nothing of this poverty of his nature, he is not that person to whom the gospel belongs: it has no more suitableness to his state, than it had to the un-fallen man: and then the greater his intellect and abilities are, the better he will be qualified to show the folly of every doctrine of that salvation, of which he has no need.

Such a man, though he may be of an humane, ingenuous, generous and frank nature, of lively intellect and have much candor, is nevertheless entirely ignorant of the depth of the heart of man, and the necessities of human nature. As yet (though he knows it not) he is only at play and pastime, pleasing himself with supposed deep inquiries after strict truth, while he is only entertaining himself with lively, and wandering images of this and that, just as they happen to occur in his mind. Could but he see himself in the state of the poor distressed prodigal son, and find that he, himself is the very person there recorded, he would then, but not till then, see the fitness and need of that redemption, which is offered him by the mercy of God in CHRIST JESUS. But such a one, is rich; he is sound; light is in his own power, goodness is in his own possession: he feels no distress or darkness; but has a crucible of reason and judgment, that on every occasion separates gold from dross: and, therefore, he must be left to himself, to his own sweet bliss, till something more than argument and disputation awakens him out of these golden dreams.

Let us beware also of the religious Pharisee, who raves against spiritual religion, because it touches the very heart string of all systematical divinity, and shakes the very foundation of every BABEL in every country; for not a system of divinity, since systems were in being, whether popish or Protestant, deserves a better name.

All preachers of the true spiritual mystery of the gospel, of a birth, light and life from above, in and by JESUS CHRIST (which are the mystic writers of every age) were, and will be, treated by the reigning fashionable orthodoxy, as enemies to the outward gospel, and its services, just as the prophets of God (who were the mystic preachers of the Jewish dispensation) were by the then reigning orthodoxy, condemned and despised, for calling people to a spiritual meaning of the dead letter, to a holiness infinitely greater than that of their outward sacrifices, types, and ceremonies.

Whoever he is that has any situation of his own to defend, be it that of a celebrated preacher, a champion for received orthodoxy, a head, a leader, or follower of any sect, or party; or that seems, both in his own eyes, and in the eyes of others, to have made himself significant in any kind of religious distinction; every such person, sooner or later, will find, that he has much of that very same to give up, which hindered the zealous, and eminently religious Pharisees from being converted to CHRIST, in the spirit of a little child.

Nor does it help the matter, that such an one abounds with piety and excellency; for Paul was governed by a spirit of great piety, great excellency, and zeal for God. He says of himself, that when he was persecuting the disciples of Christ, he "lived in all good conscience, as touching the Law blameless, and according to the straightest sect of the Jewish religion": for the Pharisees, though many of them had all that hypocrisy and rottenness which Christ laid to their charge, yet as a sect, they were an order of confessed and resplendent sanctity; and yet the more earnest and upright they were in this kind of zeal for goodness, the more earnestly they opposed and condemned the heavenly mystery of a new life from CHRIST, as appears from St. Paul.

This sect of the Pharisees did not cease with the Jewish church; it only lost its old name; it is still in being, and springs now in the same manner from the gospel, as it did then from the Law: it has the same place, lives the same life, does the same work, minds the same things, has the same goodness at heart, has the same religious honor, and claims to piety, in the Christian, as it had in the Jewish church; and as much mistakes the depths of the mystery of the gospel, as the Pharisees mistook the mystery signified by the letter of the Law and the prophets.

It would be easy to show in several instances, how the leaven of that sect works amongst us, just as it did amongst them. "Have any of the rulers believed on Him?" was the orthodox question of the ancient Pharisees. Now

we Christians readily and willingly condemn the weakness and folly of that question; and yet who does not see, that, for the most part, both priest and people, in every Christian country, live and govern themselves by the folly and weakness of the very same spirit which put forth that question: for when God, as He has always done from the beginning of the world, raises up private and illiterate persons, full of light and wisdom from above, so as to be able to discover all the workings of the mystery of iniquity, and to open the ground, and truth, and absolute necessity of such an inward spirit and life of CHRIST revealed in us, as time, carnal wisdom, and worldly policy have departed from; when all this is done, by the weakest instruments of God, in such a simplicity and fullness of demonstration, as may be justly deemed a miracle; do not clergy and laity get rid of it all, though ever so unanswerable, merely by the strength of the Pharisees' good old question, saying with them, "Have any of the rulers believed and taught these things? Has the church in council or convocation? Has Calvin, Luther, Zwinglius, or any of our renowned system-makers, ever taught or asserted these matters? "

But hear what our blessed Lord said, of the place, the power, and origin of truth: He refers us not to the current doctrines of the times, or to the systems of men, but to his own name, His own nature, His own divinity hidden in us: "My sheep," says He, "hear My voice." Here the whole matter is decisively determined, both where truth is, and who they are that can have any knowledge of it.

HEAVENLY truth is nowhere spoken but by the voice of CHRIST, nor heard but by the power of CHRIST living in the hearer. As he is the eternal WORD of GOD, that speaks forth all the wisdom, and wonders of GOD; so He alone is the Word, that speaks forth all the life, wisdom, and goodness, that is, or can be in any creature; it can have nothing but what it has in Him and from Him: this is the one unchangeable boundary of truth, goodness, and every perfection of men on earth, or angels in heaven.

Literary learning, from the beginning to the end of time, will have no more of heavenly wisdom, nor any less of worldly foolishness in it, at one time than at another; its nature is one and the same through all ages; what it was in the Jew and the heathen, that same it is in the Christian. Its name, as well as nature, is unalterable, i.e., foolishness with God.

I shall add no more, but the two or three following words.

1. Receive every inward and outward trouble, every disappointment, pain, uneasiness, temptation, darkness, and desolation, with both Your hands, as a true opportunity and blessed occasion of dying to self, and entering into a fuller fellowship with Your self-denying, suffering Savior.

2. Look at no inward or outward trouble in any other view; reject every other thought about it; and then every kind of trial and distress will become the blessed day of Your prosperity.

3. Be afraid of seeking or finding comfort in anything, but God alone: for that which gives you comfort, takes so much of Your heart from God. "Quid est cor purum? cui ex toto, et pure sufficit solus Deus, cui nihil sapit, quod nihil delectat, nisi Deus." That is, what constitutes a pure heart? One to which God alone is totally, and purely sufficient; to which nothing relishes, or gives delight, but God alone.

4. That state is best, which exercises the highest faith in, and fullest resignation to God.

5. What is it you want and seek, but that God may be all in all, in you? But how can this be, unless all creaturely good and evil become as nothing in you, or to you? "Oh anima mea, abstrahe te ab omnibus. Quid tibi cum mutabilibus creaturis? Solum sponsum tuum, qui omnium est autor creaturarum, expectans, hoc age, ut cor tuum ille liberum et expeditum semper inveniat, quoties illi ad ipsum venire placuerit." That is, Oh my soul! abstract Yourself from everything. What have you to do with changeable creatures? Waiting, and expecting Your bridegroom, who is

the author of all creatures, let it be Your sole concern, that He may find Your heart free and disengaged, as often as it shall please Him to visit you.

Be assured of this, that sooner or later, we must be brought to this conviction, that everything in Adam by nature is evil, and must be entirely given up; and that nothing that is creaturely, can make us better than we are by nature. Happy, therefore, and blessed are all those inward or outward troubles, that hasten this conviction in us; that with the whole strength of our souls, we may be driven to seek ALL from, and in GOD, without the least thought, hope, or contrivance after any other relief: then it is, that we are made truly partakers of the cross of CHRIST; and from the bottom of our hearts shall be enabled to say, with St. Paul, "God forbid that I should glory in anything, save the cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST: by which I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me."

Give up yourself to God without reserve. This implies such a state or habit of heart, as does nothing of itself, from its own reason, will or choice, but stands always in faith, hope, and absolute dependence upon being led by the Spirit of God into everything that is according to His will; seeking nothing by designing, reasoning, and reflection, how you shall best promote the honor of God, but in singleness of heart, meeting everything that everyday brings forth, as something that comes from GOD, and is to be received, and gone through by you, in such an heavenly use of it, as you would suppose the HOLY JESUS would have done, in such occurrences. This is an attainable degree of perfection; and by having CHRIST and His Spirit always in your eye, and *nothing else*, you will never be left to yourself, nor without the full guidance of GOD.

Farewell. William Law

FINIS.