

Signs of a Dying or Decaying Christian. 61

Do but read the Titles they give the one and the Title they give the other; what is the Holy Scripture, a **A DEAD LETTER**, that is its name; A three and sixpenny piece: What are their Pamphlets names, **LOVE TO THE LOST**, or a hand held forth to the helpless. *The Ancient of dayes is come. The measuring Reed of the Lord: The Morning watch: Seven Thunders uttering their voices: A Message sent forth from the risen seed of God: The new Creation brought forth: Beams of eternal brightness: The Trumpet of the Lord sounding forth: The Brasen Serpent lifted up: A Salutation from the breathings of life: A tender Visitation of the Fathers love to all the elect Children: A true light shining in England: The everlasting Rule born witness unto: The Banner of love: The scattered Sheep sought after: Joyful tydings to the begotten of God in all; The everlasting Gospel of Repentance and remission of sins held forth; A dore opened to the imprisoned seed in the World; A general Epistle to the Assembly of the First born; The true and everlasting Rule, &c.*

CHAP. IX.

Shewing that an itching ear in Christians after Novelties, bespeaks them decaying to godliness; with four Remedies against it.

SIGN IX.

WHen you are mighty inquisitive after Novelties, or new things, rather than wholesome Doctrine.

This Sign is too too common amongst Professors, and commonly ariseth from some dislike that they take, because things go not just as they will have them, after the light of their own eyes, such may know

know themselves, or at least be known by their instability or running from one thing to another; as Solomon saith, given to change, no longer contented than while they are prosecuting some notion or other, that hath in it the face of new, and if with their notion they prove to be accepted, then perhaps quieted for a while, till some other new conceit take them; but if not accepted; then they swell so big, that the bounds of the Church are too strait to hold them. And sure from hence hath risen the multitude of dividings in opinion, that now are on foot in our Land, men growing confidently conceited that they are in the right, and no reason shall sway them; but if their offer be rejected, then presently they make a schism, and so striving to get a party, crying out of great injustice, as though truth were onely in them, and withstood because their Notion is withstood. All this while the great end of Church being, and Ordinances appointing (to wit edification) not so much as thought of, but forgetting that blessed rule of Christ Jesus best followers (who became all things to all men that they might gain the more) drive on furiously, and come what will come in the issue, all must presently be as they see, or else they will be gone; whereas God knows if they were narrowly looked into, they would be found of the simple that are apt to believe every word, while the prudent looks well to his goings, not hasty to receive, nor hasty to forgo what he hath already received.

By this I would not be understood to palliate men, who count others giddy-headed for leaving an old Romish form, when by God they are otherwise persuaded, light breaking in, and truth being made manifest; but rather indeed would by this give such to understand, that the drift of what is here pointed at, hath

hath respect to such as in a right constituted Church cannot be contented; not in the least encouraging any others to be contented with false settlement, ignorantly concluding, that if they change, it will be to something new and not true. Men may change, but it must be for the better, yet how apt are persons to be affected with changes, that they will change though it be for the worst: At such sort of people my drift is, it being an evil that the Scripture is not wanting to tell us of, *Exod. 32.* in the beginning, *While Moses is but absent for a while from Israel, they cry to Aaron to make them new Gods, saying, that these be thy Gods O Israel;* in like manner, as you may read in *Numb. 11. 6.* compared with *21. 5.* Gods own appointment that once was welcome to them, now they loath it, while it remains the same from Gods own continued institution; yet they were a weary of it, calling it light bread: An unsettled people taken with new things because new, and a weary of this though true bread. The Author to the *Hebrews*, chap. *13. 8, 9* seems to rebuke such a spirit as this, *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to day, and for ever; Be not carried away with divers and strange Doctrines:* clearly noting, that they were ready to hearken after something or other that would have tended to their subverting; *That we henceforth be no more Children tossed too and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, (note that) by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but growing up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ.* All which premised bespeaks Professors care to be how they may stand *unmoveable, abiding, and abounding in the way of the Lord*, and not to be soon moved in their minds from their standing, because of some new spirit that seems to proffer it self.

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As a help therefore against this decay, I would humbly offer three or four directions, and so conclude this Sign.

That you would *pray* often for Gods leading before you take upon his Profession; Religion is a holy tye or Land-mark, a setting bounds to a mans wayes, squaring them by, and ordering them according to the written Word of God: Take away the Scriptures, and you take away Religions visible Rule: When the question was propounded by what means may a young man cleanse his way, it was answered in the same spirit, By taking heed thereto according to thy Word. As many as walk according to this Rule peace be on them: It is a blessed Antidote against that spirit of distraction that attends many in being so curious and inquisitive after Novelties (that they run hither and thither like *Noahs* Dove, resting nowhere) to pray often that God would settle and stablish them in his truth; when God leads the Soul after himself, he openeth the *understanding*, and *greatens* the desire after the good things to come, and this lessens the desire after those *fading* good things present, that our hearts may be stablished with *grace*, and not with meat, that is, with the valuable worth of what is durable, and not to be taken up with what at its best state is altogether *vanity*. O Christians! be often therefore upon your *knees* with God, that he would order your steps according to his word; make good *David* your Pattern for this, *Psal. 119 34. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy Law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.*

2. As well hear and duly consider what can be said against what you are about to receive, as what can be said for it. This will but tend to your strengthening in what is truth: Our Age is an inquisitive Age; many

many run to and fro; that knowledge is encreast and in the mouth of Babes: God doth ordain praise; therefore the World is now nearer to its end, and Satthans malice growing more as his time groweth shorter; so that now he doth transform himself into an Angel of light, and hath his Agents at work, to cause, if possible, many persons to stumble and fall by being too sodainly taken with what comes in their way, that is, neither duely weighing for nor against; like our Proverb, *Early ripe, and early rotten*, that is, taken with a new thing, because new, without pondering how far true; if a man fall in truths way, and close there, it doth not commend the nobleness of his wisdom, though truth be taken, if he fell in with it upon too ignoble terms. What makes so many in our dayes fulfil the Apostles words, *Gal. 1. 6. I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ to another Gospel.* What is the matter? Did you not fully consider what a valuable truth you at first made your choice? When any one heareth the word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, that is in the extent, or to its worth, seeth not that Jewel in it that would make any sinner sell all for its price; such are quickly offended, and so soon turned aside; and yet at the first heard the word, and with joy received it; but rain descended, floods came, and the winds of persecution blew upon them, so that by and by, or in a short space they are offended, and turn aside: Now the Spirits counsel is expresse that we *prove all things*, and then *hold fast* that which is good. He that goes to build, and considers not the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish, may meet with that Gospel Proverb: This man began to build, but was not able to finish; this makes so many too early espoused in a marriage tye turn extravagant; they consider not the

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charge of a Family, the loss of children, the cost of sicknesse, the thousands of necessities that a domestick state would call for beyond a single life : Thus the burden grows too heavy, being not from forewarn'd fore-arm'd, whilst he that tried all things considered the cost, counted up beforchand what hath hapned, had made it his free choice, takes up his cross, like the good Mother quickly reconciled with a morning smile from her dear Babe, as a sufficient compensation for the last nights toyl.

3. Be careful that you be able to warrant every principle of your practice, at least by two or more Texts of Scripture. Let (saith the holy Apostle *Paul*) the word of God dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another. Experience may be clouded, Conscience may be seared, Heart may be hardened, understanding blinded; but still the Law is light, the Word of God abideth for ever. Our blessed Lord that wanted not other arguments to damp the Tempter, besides the Scriptures, yet because that is a sure and infallible testimony, he flies thither for weapons to encounter Satan withall, still replying, *It is written, it is written, it is written, Matt. 4. 4. 7. 10.* the same reply to three great and severall temptations plainly teaching this to Christians, as the surest rule in the hour of temptation to fly unto. For this cause the holy Scriptures are rightly stil'd the *Spirits Sword*, *Eph. 6. 17.* and take the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God. When the Disciples hearts were heavy, and filled with sorrow about Christs Passion, how doth he seek to comfort and strengthen them, (but with this Cordial) *thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise again the third day.* In like manner, when our Lord was betrayed, and could have called to his help more than twelve Legions of Angels (that

(that is 6000 foot and 600 horse after the *Roman Account*) a strength much more than they that took him, to have rescued him, presently takes sanctuary here, *Mat. 26. 54.* But how then must the *Scriptures* be fulfilled, that thus it must be. O blessed Pattern to write by in all things thus to say; thus saith the word of the Lord, this Scripture tells me, that I am a great sinner, one of the worst of sinners, and that except I repent I shall perish for ever. It is the word of God that calls me to believe on the Son of God, in whom is the life of the World, and he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: It is the Word of God tells me, *strait* is the gate, and *narrow* is the way that leadeth unto life, and he that doth not take up his Cross and follow Christ, cannot be his Disciple; it is this Word commands me not onely to love God and my Brother, but to love my enemies that do me hurt, and though this go greatly against the grain of my spirit, to do good to them that doe evil to me, to give him bread in his strait, that denied me bread in my strait; but this must I do that the *Scriptures* might be fulfilled: *Bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.* Oh! this is a hard Lesson were it not thus written; it is Gods Word, and it is God that makes it an easie Word to me: my proud heart never would nor could stoop to this, did not his blessed Word command me so. Thus Christians in all your services let the Word of God go before you, let it be your Pillar of Cloud by day, and your Pillar of Fire by night, *Numb. 9. 22.* when the Cloud rested Israel rested, whether it were two dayes, a moneth, or a year, that the Cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle, the Children of Israel abode in their Tents and journied not, but when it was taken up they journied. This will make you like the good Builder that digged deep.

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deep, and laid his *Foundation* upon a *Rock*, so the rain, wind, and the floods came, and beat upon this House, but it fell not, because it was founded upon the *Word of God*.

Fourthly and lastly, Would you be delivered from this dying sign of being mighty inquisitive after new things rather than wholesome doctrine, then labour as far as you are knowers to *be doers*. Negligence here provoketh God to suffer a Spirit of error and *deep sleep* to fall upon many: To know is a blessing, if accompanied with the end wherefore *knowledge* was given; namely *to doe*, but is a *woe* when alone; *If you know these things happy are ye if ye do them*. Now I know that thou lovest me, before this tryal thou calledst me Lord God Almighty, and gavest me good words, and saidst I should be thy God, and thou wouldst love me, and fear me, but now I know that thou fearest me, thou hast given a large proof of it in this, that thou hast not withheld thy Son, thy only Son *Isaac*, whom thou lovest, from me, but didst at my word take the Lad, the Son of the Promise and of thy great affection, and laidst him upon the Altar, and didst stretch forth thine hand, and tookest the knife to slay him for an offering to the Lord. This is not onely the safest way to increase in knowledge, but it is a sure way to have knowledge sanctified, then doth God bless our little talent of knowledge with increase, and with comfort, when we put that little into practise. If you know that the state of such and such of Gods Children are *thirsty, naked, sick, and in prison*, and be as *unconcerned* for them as was Israel of old for their Brethren in Captivity, it will bring upon you the like woe. Woe saith the Spirit to them that are at ease in *Sion*, *Amos 6. 6.* that drink wine in Bowls, and anoint themselves with chief ointment, but are not grieved

grieved for the afflictions of *Joseph* : Such shall goe captive with the first that goe captive, they shall be, when God begins to reckon as singular in the punishment, as they were in the sin. Oh that this may be of use to all, thus far, that they would cry after knowledg, and lift up their voice for understanding; but withal to remember the blessing is not here : This work is imperfect, and will not profit till its fellow be added to it, *1am. 1. 25.* But who so looketh into the perfect Law of liberty; and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, (mark that) this man shall be blest in his deed. Consider what you read, and the blessing of God goe along with it, Amen.

CHAP. X.

Proving us dying to Christ, when others sinnings are not our sorrowings; with two Remedies against this Decay.

SIGN X.

When you can hear of foul miscarriages in others, with little or no heart remorse.

That is, When the knowledg of others sinning proves not thy sorrowing; where the name and honour of God lies near a heart, a deep wound must needs come at the tydings of miscarriage, and by this most certainly may a growing or declining Christian be read, and read himself if heeded; for answerable to the spiritual sense or feeling of things, will their behaviour be. A man that is wounded in his body, is more or less astonished at it, and amazed by it, as he more or less retains his senses; want whereof lessens not the wound, it rather shews the danger of such to be the greater : Three or four things considered must needs declare, and prove such Christians not only dy-

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ing but near dead, as can hear of others sinning, and by no means they themselves toucht with sorrowing.

First, the great dishonour that sin brings to God; the sin of no people dishonours God so much as the sin of Professors. *You have I know of all the Families of the earth, therefore I wil. punish you for all your iniquities, Amos 3. 2.*

Secondly, the great reproach it brings upon the Gospel; A man that never profess any thing better than making it his Trade to sin, though his estate be miserable, yet he professes not better; but for such as take upon them the name or profession of Jesus Christ, and not depart from, or again turn to iniquity, provokes the enemies of God to blaspheme, *1 Sam. 1. 12.*

Thirdly, The lamentable misery that such bring upon themselves; There is more hope of one that never made any profession; the sin of this is next door to impossibility of redemption from final hardening, *It had been better they had never known the way of truth, than after depart from the holy commandment, 2. Pet. 2. 1.*

4. The evil world by seeing such sin, are not onely tempted to remain in their sinful state, but to glory in it; for they may think they do but sin, and serve, and please themselves; and if Professors so do, why may not they? Thus the Devil secretly laughs at them, and openly gets advantage by them; *Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord. Elies. Sons that were in the Priest-hood are singled out with marks of Gods displeasure, as sinners of a deep dye, insomuch that want of suitable indignation against them for their evil in their Father Eli, who in other things was a good man, brings upon him that, that makes the ears of all Israel that heard of it to tingle,*

1 Sam.

1 Sam. 2 3, 4. What a plague was brought upon those that did evil before the Lord in *Moses* time? twenty four thousand slain till *Phineas* in his zeal to the Lord stood up and made an attonement, *Numb.* 25. It is without all question, that the Nations round about, were as to the act more wicked and abominable, as to the same and such like wickedness; yet we do not read of such severity in God toward them, as to those his own people that had seen his miracles, and his wonders; were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and say our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done this, I would scatter my people among the Nations, but for tempting the wicked to do more wickedly: Gods severity should be set out against his own people in bitter characters; this must needs render such very much dying to Christ, that can hear of foul miscarriages in other Professors, and not themselves taken with horror and astonishment, *My bowels, my bowels, I am pained at my heart, because thou hast heard, Oh my soul in Jerusalem, the sound of the Trumpet, the Alarm of War; set a mark upon the fore-heads of the men that sigh and weep for the abominations that are done in the midst thereof, Ezekiel* 9. 4. *I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assemblies, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it is a burthen, Zeph. 3. 18.* Doth not the Scripture with one consent describe the growing and declining Christian by this very mark? the one is sorrowful, the other mourns not; it is reported there is fornication amongst you, *1 Cor. 5.* and you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned: clearly noting, that this was none of their virtues, but indeed an evident token of spiritual loss in them, the contrary being so honourable in Gods account, viz. a sorrowful spirit at others misdoings;

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misdoings plainly proving, that if a wanting a certain character of great decay : I shall come now to offer briefly some Causes of this spiritual decay, and some Remedies to remove or prevent it, and so conclude this Sign:

First, want of zeal, that burning shining Grace, which when accompanied with judgment, cannot bear to see or hear of Miscariages in others, without personal horror; *As soon as Moses came nigh the Camp, and saw the Calf, and dancing that was there, his anger waxed hot, and he took the Calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, ground it to powder, Exod. 32.* So Phineas in his zeal to th^e Lord, when he saw the evils that were committed in the Camp, arose and slew both the man and the woman, and so the plague was staid.

But secondly, want of becoming love to others eternal welfare, is a cause of our not sorrowing at their sinnings; that good man *Jeremiah*, chap. 13. 17. *If they will not hear, (but persist in their evil way) his soul shall weep in secret places for their pride.* See this also in Jesus Christ, that had such love to perishing *Jerusalem*, *That when he was come near and beheld the City, he wept over it, Luke 19. 41.*

As Remedies against this decay; First, consider what a wide breach it makes in our spiritual state, and whither in a little time, it will bring us; *Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth, Revel. 2. 19.*

Secondly, In order to removing this, do as men do that have a desperate mortal disease growing upon them, if not speedily remedied; how will they go and run, pray and pay, leave no stone unturned, no means unattempted?

Even in like sort must spiritual diseases be looked
at

at and laboured with. Good *Nehemiah* when he did but hear of the Afflictions that his brethren for their sin were brought into, it wounds his heart, *chap. i. 4.* And it came to pass when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned and fasted certain dayes, and prayed before the God of heaven. Canst thou, my Christian Brother, hear of foul miscarriages in others, with little or no heart remorse? Art thou as it were unconcerned; Doth not others sinning prove thy wounding; far from thy heart is this consideration; How greatly is God dishonoured, and the soul of this poor creature endangered and the Enemies of God encouraged to continue in their impenitent estate.

Who that believeth in good earnest that there is a state where the worm shall never die, and fire never go out, that can behold any going towards this estate post haste, as it were, and not be like minded to Christ Jesus, who when he was come near poor *Jerusalem*, he beheld the City and wept over it, because they knew not the sad Calamity that was coming upon them. Doth it not invite pitty to behold our friend crying out with bitter cries in a Fever fit, or fit of the Stone or Collick, yea to behold him upon a Rack, broken with a Wheel, sawn asunder, drawn limb from limb with wild Horses, starved to death with pining hunger, like the Calamity of *Jerusalem*, where the hands of the pitiful women took and boyled in a pot their tender Children, they were their meat in the day of Famine. Oh! how ghastly is this to think on, much more to behold, who can refrain from bitter weeping to hear and behold such doleful cries: but what is this to *Hell*, there is death in death, pain perpetually; it is not *Hell* onely because the greatest of misery, and pain, and torment dwells there, but because it is for ever and ever. Therefore

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fore in beholding or hearing of others miscariages, we are to look upon them through that clear glass of a Gospel-like spirit, that sets every action in its own station, and then it will tell us, to miscarry in a matter of eternity is for nature intolerable, for duration eternal, and so the loss irreparable: *My bowels, my bowels, I am pained at my very heart, my heart maketh a noise in me, I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the Trumpet, the Alarm of War, Jer. 4 19.* But I shall leave this also to consideration, and pass to the eleaventh Sign of decay in godliness.

CHAP. XI.

Shewing that unsavoury talking among Christians when they meet, proves them earthly minded, with three Causes of this Decay; And twelve questions to be asked when they meet together.

SIGN XI.

When in your comings together, your usual talk is not savoury and heavenly.

Upon various occasions Christians meet together; sometimes with those that are wringing their hands for sorrow; sometimes with those that are clapping (as it were) their hands for joy; sometimes at the Assembly, sometimes at one anothers dwellings: Now all comings together Minister occasion of talking, and will greatly evidence where most is each others Treasure, it being natural for persons when they meet, by their voice to expresse what is the workings of their mind; And as the heart is more or less heaven-ward, so certainly will their talk bend more or less that way: Earthly-minded men when they meet, will be carrying on *their trade*, counting it matter of duty to promote

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mote what lieth nearest *their hearts*; so those that decay to spirituals, having begun to affect themselves with new Lovers, and so losing the sense they once had to the best things, may be discerned now to have changed for the worst, by their unfavourable and earthly talking; and how advantageous all meetings are to the promoting (whatsoever is designed) none is able to express, but such as experimentally make a view of it, well considering, *That evil communications corrupt good manners*; or lessens a mans hold to the best things, and when that precious time in Christians meeting together is so spent, that its rather spilt like water upon the ground, such leaving no favour of grace behind them, must needs argue, that they are falling, if not fallen from their first love, besides the dishonour done to God: great hath been the wrong such have done both themselves and their adherents, in publick or private assembling.

What more unpreparing the heart, and indisposing the affection to the spiritual worshipping of God, than either beforehand being in a carnal sleepy posture, or else in such unseasonable, if not worse? talking (some of their Farms, others of their Merchandise,) nay perhaps *backbiting* and *whisperingly* opening the infirmities of others, to the sowing prejudice in the hearts of those, that through ignorance and weakness incline to hear them; whereas on the contrary, such whose minds are alwayes carrying about with them the contemplating of Gods end, in giving opportunity after opportunity, put themselves with trembling care into such employment (*of still getting or doing good*) as may obtain from their gracious God, the approbation of redeeming time: See that good *Nehemiahs* practise for this, he no sooner meets *Haman*, (but what?) *I asked concerning the Jews that had escaped,*

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escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem; he is inquiring presently, how it fared with the people of God, and Jerusalem the City of David, and place of his Fathers Sepulcher, and how near his heart their welfare lay, as appears by his hearty affection and affliction at the evil tidings, Chap. 1. 4. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain dayes, and fasted and prayed before the Lord God of heaven. I shall add another Text, and then proceed to the causes of this Decay, Mal. 3. 16. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another (but their talking was so favoury and so heavenly) that the Lord hearkned and heard it, (yea) and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his Name.

In time of War, when the sword cuts off by thousands in a day, is there not great wringing of hands for sorrow, when the report is come to our knowledge, that the mighty are fallen in the gate, such a Father, such a Husband, such a Son, such a Brother? is not this our talk wherever we come? may not our trouble be read in every countenance, as good *Nehemiahs* was, when his heart was filled with sorrow, his countenance was so sad that it could not be hid from the King: Had we not a doleful instance of this in the time of *London's* late Fire and Plague? were not those doleful times the subject of all our talk, both to God and man? in all our assemblings together, what a stroke did it carry upon our hearts? How was our Pen employed to send about this dreadful tidings, that so famous a City should in three dayes be brought down to the dust, and more than seventy thousand of its Inhabitants carried as captives to their long home? Oh! the bitter cries in the Evening, with which salute we

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still shut up our doors, *Bring out your dead, Bring out your dead*, whose hearts were not affected then, whose looks were not dejected, whose tongues were not imployed when we met together, to be talking as in *Joels* time, they were commanded to tell their Children, and their Children commanded to tell their Children to another generation : That which the Palmer worm left hath the Locust eaten, that which the Locust left that hath the Canker-worm eaten, that which the Canker-worm hath left hath the Caterpillar eaten; that which our *Sword* left did the *Fire* waste, and that which the *Fire* left did the *Plague* sweep away, both persons and substance also. Now these dreadful strokes being strokes void of pitty, sparing none, the old man or he that stooped with age, nor yet the man of full strength, nor yet the babe of dayes; it left the *Mother* without *Child*, it left the little one without a *Mother* : From hence this became our talk whethersoever we went, it was our burden and song at Feasting or Fasting, the beginning and close of every Meeting.

Oh! whats the matter Christians when you meet, that your talk is so unsavoury, or less savoury than this was in its day; is not your day much more a needful day, to have all its meetings in all the spaces thereof filled with savoury and heavenly talking, where ever you go, a *Sword*, a *Plague*, a *Fire*, a *Famine* attends you, yea these in their perfection in their highest dimension. No loss like your loss, if you miss the blessed end of assembling, and it be not accompanied with savoury talking, of that City you are or should be always looking for. I shall close this Sign with the Holy Ghosts own words to the *Ephesian Church*, *Chap. 4.* 29. (when ye meet together) let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouths, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may Minister grace

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grace to the hearers. Ask not your friend or brother of his welfare in the common unsensible custome that men generally do, but in asking, ask with such a deportment, gracefulness, and gravity, that may preach the weight of heaven upon thy heart, and let your words be to this purpose; Ask him these twelve questions, as God shall help briefly, but ask them all in love. 1. Brother, are you *alive for God*? is your heart as warm now, you have been some years a Professor, as it was in the day of *your espousals*? 2. What is become of your Master sin? have you got the victory over it, doth it at all times, and in all conditions *speak faintly*? do you in truth *most loath* that which once you did *most love*? 3. Hath the remembrance of *Heaven and Hell* a reverential presence still upon your heart? have you not lost (are you sure) that feeling of these two states you once had; for it is a very *hard work* to keep *alive* this frame, and very *easy* to let it *goe*? 4. *Is Closet prayer* delightful to you still? are you ravish'd in secret Communion with God there? doth your *heart burn* within you whilst you are talking with him? 5. Doth the Cross of Christ dismay you yea or nay? how are you in a time of *Prosperity*? doth it much *lift you up*? how are you in a time of *Adversity*? doth it cast you *down* much? doth not *Christs yoke* seem too heavy for you, can you chearfully say still, Lord, thy will be done; it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good? 6. What sense have you of your *undone estate* out of *Christ*? do you still feelingly remember what a *vile filthy polluted state* you were in, when he first set his *love* upon you? hath your soul, your unconverted estate still in remembrance to *self-loathing*, and is your soul still *humbled* within you therefore. 7. Do you still believe you had been in *Hell* long ago, had you had a reward according to your
work,

work, and doth this thought live in you, so as to make you *thankful* for every thing, still in the *worst* condition, because you say, it is *mercy* it is not *worse*, it is of the *Lords* mercy we are not in *hell*? 8. Doth the sense of future good *greaten* in your esteem? have you as high a value of *heavenly things* as you had at your first Conversion? and doth estimation of *earthly things* grow daily less and less? 9. Is your *Conscience* tender still, and doth every little glance to declension create *sighing* there, cannot conscience charge you (are you sure) with the living in the *omission* of any known duty, or *commission* of any known sin? let me in love beseech you search narrowly here. 10. Is your *love* to our Lord *Jesus*, his Ordinances, and People, as much or more as it was in your espousal dayes, or is it *less*? be sure you be faithful to your own soul in this. 11. Is the great Lord God Almighty set before you all the day long? are your apprehensions of his omniscient eye, such as that you can in truth say with good *Job*, where ever you go, *Doth he not see my wayes, and count my goings*? 12. Are you every day more or less thinking of your *last day*, and that you are going shortly into the *shades of eternity*, and when you put off your *Cloathes* at night, is it still your meditation, that the time is at hand when you can never more put them on.

Now the causes of this decay, which being avoided, may also serve as Remedies against it; and they are three.

First, Long custome to Christian meetings.

Secondly, Unskilfulness in Gospel Self-denial.

Thirdly, Negligence to a plain duty.

First, Long custome to Christian Meetings; though this be not in it self a cause, yet it may be easily so converted; for without a godly jealousy over the heart in

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often meeting with Christians, the very custome of it will by little and little, steal away that spiritual vigour, that ought to run in the veins of every one, where ever they are, to the making their meeting as much as is possible, to Gods honour and their souls edifying; for custome begets such an aptness to any service, that except the heart be still examined, persons will be in meetings together, very destitute both of suitable preparation, and answerable expectation, and all through long custome; for as in sinning, it will take away in time the conscience of sin; so in the best performances it will rob a man of that forehand care that should attend him, unless he be much upon his watch.

Secondly, A second Cause is, Unskilfulness in one great point of Christianity; *viz.* Gospel self-denial, which stands in a conforming the whole man to be alwayes pleasing and serving the Lord; such knowing themselves not to be their own, but bought with a price, and therefore whether eating, drinking, talking, walking, to be doing all to the glory of God, whose they are: Now unskilfulness herein, will be still carrying on all affairs with much mixture; partly in designing the Lord, partly designing self; having not so learned to live upon anothers bottom, as the Gospel grace of self-denial teacheth, *Mat.* 16. 24, 25. *Mark.* 6. 34, 35. by which means many are at a great stand how to spend this and that opportunity, and so instead of asking their fellow Christian how he grows or stands affected to the best things, what temptations are upon him? at what times he finds himself most weak and unable to resist? and whether often in closet prayer, watchings, fastings? and what assurance he hath from some solid marks, whether he grows yea or nay? and what value he puts on fellowship with God, and enjoying the light of his countenance? what all this is, and what its worth,

When

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When it shines, when its clouded? but if instead of such Communings as these, time be vainly spent in hearing and telling some new thing, complaining rather of hard times, than hard hearts, this and the other outward loss, instead of true losing; if the case be thus it must needs proclaim you dying Christians; for that in your comings together, your talk is not savoury and heavenly.

Thirdly, A third Cause may be this, Negligence to a plain duty, *Heb. 10. 24, 25.* And let us consider one another, to provoke to love, and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of our selves together, as the manner of some is, but exhort one another daily, while it is called to day; (that is certainly, to be upon doing the work of the day) and so much the more, as you see the day approaching; Clearly implying, that we should be so far from neglect to spiritual and profitable talking when we meet, that it should be our care so to consider one another, wherein they begin to grow faint, weary, slow, remiss, and wanting, as to be provoking or seeking occasion to perswade and put forward such to that, that they ought not to be backward in: This was the Trade of Gods Children as you may read, *Acts. 15. 36.* And some dayes after, Paul said to Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our Brethren, in every City where we have preached the Word of the Lord, and see how they do, *Acts 18. 27.* Who when he was come helped them much, which had believed through grace. This certainly is as true in Paul and Barnabas, as in Apollo: let then I pray you, what hath been said in this Sign, serve for caution thus far, that you will all be careful when you feast, when you fast, when you sit by your fire, walk by the way, lie down, rise up, for the avoiding precious times mispending, to be talking of the Lord and his Laws: Consider what you read, and pass to the next.

CHAP. XII.

Proving Unpreparedness to hear the Word of God, a sign of dying to Christ; with three sorts of hindrances, which must be laid aside; and what must be our work, before Hearing, in Hearing, and after Hearing.

SIGN XII.

WHen you are so little prepared for the solemn Assemblies, that they come before you think of them, or long for them.

When persons suffer themselves to be so taken up with common or worldly business, as that they leave no room for Solemn Prayer, and Preparation, to meet in Gods Ordinances at dayes appointed; its an evident token of little reverence besetting the heart, and as little consideration who they are to meet: Now to come before the Lord in his Assembly, where he is wont to be, and hath promised to be, there doubtless remains a work upon us, to be done by us, by way of Preparation, and that because of Gods presence being there, as in the Temple, the Type of Gods Assembly or Gospel Church, Kings 1. 3. 9. *I will put my Name there, my heart, and my eyes, shall be there perpetually; his power, presence, and goodness shall be there, and he ever was, and is wont to meet his People there. Tell me O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest and makest thy flocks to rest at noon; if thou knowest not, go thy way and feed thy Kids by the Shepherds Tents, Cant. 1.* Now that great preparation as to this and that by way of duty ought to be, will appear by what may follow; want to prepare therefore must needs be a character of spiritual decay; and the rather if we consider, how strict the Lord was as to them that

that drew nigh him when he gave out the Law, *Exod. 19. 10.* And the Lord said unto Moses, go and sanctifie the people to day and to morrow, and let them wash their cloathes; and let the Priests also which come near to the Lord, sanctifie themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them. Nadab and Abihu, for not sanctifying the Lord when they drew nigh him, there went out a fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord, *Levit. 10. 2.* Most remarkable is that passage in good Joseph, *Gen. 41. 14.* Before he will come into the Kings presence, he shaveth himself, and changeth his rayment; layeth aside his prison Garments: How much rather should those prepare and lay aside, that come into the presence of the King of Kings: Hear the word of the Lord. ye that tremble at his word, *Ila. 66. 5.* Persons may hear from day to day, and remain much like the same, rather worse than better; which must needs argue some defect in themselves by unduly approaching near so solemn a Service: I shall therefore in humility offer some directions, what we may do in order to our profit, before hearing, in hearing, and after hearing.

First, Before Hearing, pray God blefs his Word unto you, and lead you in his way, *Psa. 25. 4. 5.* Shew me thy way O Lord, teach me thy path, lead me in thy truth; Teach me, for thou art the God of my salvation, on thee do I wait all the day, *Exod. 33. 15.* If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. This is as true in one case as another.

Secondly, Go to the Assembly with reverent considerations, that you are to meet God, *Amos 4. 12.* Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel, and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. King Rehoboam did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord, *2 Chron. 12. 14.* compared

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with Chap. 19. 3. *There are good things found in thee, in that thou preparest thy heart to seek God.*

Thirdly, Before you go to hear, you must lay aside all superfluity, 1 Pet. 2. 1. *Wherefore laying aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, receive with meekness the ingrafted Word.*

There are three sorts of Superfluities to be laid aside, which else will hinder you from profiting.

First, All those doubtful carping cares for the things of this life, you are incident to, Mat. 13. 22. Mark 4. 19.

Secondly, You must lay aside all those vexatious frets of this life you are incident to, Judges 16. 16. compared with 1 Sam. 1. 6, 7.

Thirdly, You must lay aside all those pleasant pleasing pleasures of this life you are incident to, Psal. 45. 10. 11. All or any of these being carried with us, and heeded by us, will so load us, that there will be no room for the Word to profit.

Fourthly, When you come to hear, come with hungry and thirsting, Mat. 5. 6. Psal. 42. 1, 2.

The second Direction as to Hearing is, what you must do in the time of Hearing.

First, You must hear with reverence as Gods Embassage, Psal. 2. 11. compared with 89 7. *God is greatly to be feared in the Assembly of the Saints, and to be had in reverence by all that are about him.*

Secondly, You must hear as Gods Word, Isa. 66. 2. 1 Thes. 2. 11.

Thirdly, you must hear with attention and godly fear, Isa 55. 2. Nehem. 8. 3. Luke 29. 48. *And all the people were very attentive to hear him.*

Fourthly, In Hearing, you must mix what you hear with faith, Heb 4. 1, 2. *But the word preached did not profit, it being not mixt with faith in them that heard.*

heard it, 2 Chron. 20. 26.

Fifthly, You must receive what you hear in the love of God, 2 Thes. 2. 10. Psal. 119. 97.

Sixthly, and lastly, You must hear with resolution to obey, Dent. 5. 27. Josh. 1. 16.

Now what must you do after Hearing?

First, You must remember what ye have heard, 2 Pet. 3. 1, 2. Secondly, That you may remember, you must meditate upon it, Josh. 1. 8. Psal. 1. 2. Thirdly, of all the Sermons you hear, pick out something most profitable, and confer about it, Mark 4. 10. Fourthly, You must put into practise what you hear, Eccles. 9. 10. Jam. 2. 25. Luke 11. 2.

I shall now hint three Reasons of this great Care thus to assemble and hear Gods word, and then proceed to the Thirteenth Sign.

First, Because it is the great Ordinance of Conversion. Secondly, The means of a Christians growth, and Sanctification. Thirdly, Negligence in it, a great aggravation of Condemnation.

First, Because it is the great Ordinance of Conversion. The Ordinance of Preaching is Gods usual method by which knowledge of himself is brought to poor sinners: Faith (saith the Spirit) comes by hearing, and hearing is ordained in order to believing; how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard, and how can they hear without a Preacher: Where there is no vision the people perish. When the sins of Professors have been such as to provoke God to send a famine of the Word, such a people have been nigh to destruction.

It is an evident token of Gods great love and good will to sinners, when he is pleased to afford the Gospel: The continuance of it is more needful than the continuance of the light of the Sun, and its removal

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more dreadful than a *Famine of bread*; but this hath not such a presence upon our hearts. Christians are not so apprehensive of *Gospel-worth*, nor *Gospel-want*, to prize it, and to praise God for it; and that is a great reason they thrive so little under its continual showers. Do but study what the Gospel is, it is the effect of Gods Love, Christs Death, the Holy Spirits Gift; It is good news to every Creature, all the priviledges of Heaven are made known by the means of the *Gospel*, witness the dark estate of those people who are deprived of it, they worship the Sun, Moon, Stars, Stocks, Stones; yea the *Devil* himself in his own shape appears among them, and converseth with them; the good Lord help *England* and *London* to put a higher value of this great Ordinance of Conversion.

But secondly, It is the means of a Christians growth and sanctification: take away the Word, and you take away his Food; the Gospel is to a Convert as milk is to a new born Babe, even its natural nourishment; the Gospel is that which makes known Gods heart to him, and his own heart to himself, there he hears and reads that blessed attribute of God, that he is great, and therefore the object of all our fear; and that he is good, and therefore to be the object of all our love; and that he is rich, and therefore the object of all our treasure; and that he is all things to all that call upon him in truth. Here a Christian learns to know the nature of sin, and its deceitfulness, the strength of the tempter, his power, policy and malice; yea how weak he is in the hands of his spiritual adversaries, the *Flesh*, the *World*, and the *Devil*, without the help of this Almighty, and learns here to know that through him we shall be made able to do all things, to whom be glory, Amen.

Thirdly, To be negligent to assemble and hear Gods

Gods Word is a great aggravation of our Condemnation. For God to afford the means, and we to abuse that means, by neglecting the season will render us *Bethsaidaes estate, Wo unto thee Corazin, wo unto thee Bethsaida, for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Tyre and Sydon, they had repented long agoe, Matt. 11. 21, 22. It shall be more tollerable for them in the Day of Judgment than for such a people.* When our Lord Jesus came near *Jerusalem* he wept over it, and prophesied their desolation, because they knew not the day of their visitation : We are made of God (saith the Apostle) the savour of *life unto life* in them that are *saved*, but the savour of *death* unto death in them that perish. Gods word shall not return in *vain*, where it doth not soften, it will *certainly harden*. The Condemnation of the people of *England* must needs, to common sense, be much greater than the Condemnation of the Indians that have not the means we have : Woful will our account be in the great day if we are found *unconverted*, or not *mortified* and *sanctified* by so great a priviledge as we enjoy over and above what they enjoy, may not God truly say, You I have called, but you have refused, I stretched out my hands, but were not regarded : the Lord of life was preached among you, and eminently set forth, *crucified before your eyes* ; I sent to you by my Messengers, rising up betimes and sending them, because I had compassion on poor *England*, but they would none of my reproof, I will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh. O let us remember this, if the Gospel prove not the means of our softning, it will prove the highest aggravation of our Condemnation.

CHAP. XIII.

Proving the state of such to be sad, who assemble together more for fear of mans eye than Gods : with four Discriptions, how such may be known, (or know themselves) with two Causes of this decay.

SIGN XIII.

WHen you come to the Assembly, more for fear of Brethren's eye, than Christ's omniscient and all-piercing eye.

That is, you are so indifferent as to coming, that would none miss you nor question you for it, you could dispence well with absence, and that without any material hinderance; 'tis much to be feared that this decay prevails strongly with many Professors, who have neither hungering, or thirsting at least, at that early rate they once had, and still doubtless ought to have, were they not losing their relish to Ordinances, and the fellowship that they have had with God through them; for now they begin to cease looking at things with an eye of faith, and have all or most of their recourse to things after an eye of carnal sense; and so no fear holds them to the outward order of Gods House, but what is taught by the precept of men; and were they not lyable to censures both from the Assembly and others (who have taken notice of their being Professors) could as to the eye and censure of Jesus Christ quit all; wherefore the Lord said, *Isa. 29. 13. For as much as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me; (note that) it is far to many degrees alienated, and their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men; it is from hence*
very

very evident, that they though they did come together, yet it was not from a right principle, their person and their heart was asunder, and God is pleased to note them out as people fearing him only with an outside fear; therefore he will proceed to do a marvellous work upon them: the Prophet *Ezek.* 33. 30, 31. meets with such a people, as are still a quarelling with the Prophets words, and talking against him in the doors of their houses; yet would say, *Come I pray and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord, coming as his people come, sit before him as his people do, hear his word, and with their mouth shew much love; but their heart runs after covetousness.* So in the time of the Prophet, *Mal.* 4. 3. there you have a description of a decaying, and growing Professor; one is so weary, that they are ready to throw all profession off, crying, *It is in vain to serve the Lord, and what profit is it that we keep his Ordinances?* at the same time those truly spiritual, that feared Gods eye more than mans, they speak the oftner one to another, fearing him, and thinking upon his Name.

Alas! Alas! If Satan and the World have got such a part in our heart, that we come to Meetings, to the Fold of Christ, with such a common sense and estimation, that would none miss us, it would nothing trouble us to be absent. This doth undoubtedly betoken a great benumbedness of spirit Godward, and that the least Argument hath most force, namely Brethrens eye; it is a strong symptome of a darkened understanding, and calls for deep humiliation in order to a recovery to that spiritual frame that once was, it being certain now the appetite is much lost, and now Prayer, Hearing, Reading and Feasting with the Lord at his Table, eating of his Bread, and drinking of his Wine are of no estimation, and what must follow but the

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the loss of spiritual feeling, and where will this end but in *Atheism*, and living by sense like such are justly branded in Scripture with *twice dead*, *plucked up by the roots*; for take away the right ends of meeting, I mean the sense of them from the heart in their excellent uses and ends, and you suffer your selves to be carried into Egyptian darkness.

The same Lord that hath ordained food as a great and principal means of life, without which none hath a promise in Gods ordinary way to continue his outward being. In like manner hath God ordained and set up as his great light in the world (his Church) where he hath promised his presence shall be, and where he will meet those that meet him in this way; for there he causeth his Flocks to rest at Even, and we have no promise of being fed and visited out of this way of God where it is to be come at; *Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy wayes, Isa. 64. 5* No man in his wits goeth about to gather *Grapes of thorns*, or *Figs of thistles*; if we expect Gods presence we must seek it in Gods way. It is verily matter of great lamentation that any mortal should come to this pass, what for one whose breath is in his nostrils, that *to day is a Man, and to morrow is Worms meat*, to day above ground, and to morrow under ground; to day a Convector in the air, to morrow closed up in the Clifts of the earth, there to lie and rot, and to be eaten with worms, and his place in the world to know him no more, and yet for such a person to lose his reason, and the nobleness of his nature and spirit, so much as to come to the Assembly of Gods people only for fear of mans rebuke or frown; is not he to be feared that kills soul and body, and casts them into hell, whose eyes seeth not as mans eye seeth, they only center in appearance, he looketh

looketh into the hearts, telling the thoughts, seeth the intents afar off, *but all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to doe, Heb. 4. 13.*

I shall give two or three descriptions, how such may know themselves, or be known; and so pass to the next Sign.

First, Such when by more or less weighty occasions, they are hindered from the Assembly, you will not find them troubled; whereas a truly growing Christian; though hindered even by God, yet he is thirsting, hungry, and thinks it long, saying with *David, O when shall I come and appear before thee, Psal. 41, 1, 2.*

Secondly, Such may be known, and know themselves by this, they are of all others most apt to be discontented, it is seldom but one thing or other troubles them, and goes not as they would have it; whereas the more spiritual, dwells so much in charity with every one, that they are ready to construe every thing to the best; so neither much troubling, nor much troubled.

Thirdly, If any Schism or Faction rise, you shall find these more apt than any other to close with it, and so zealous for a while as passes, but it holds not long.

Fourthly, you shall find such very forward at propagating some lesser matters of Gods Law, while the more weighty they themselves live strangers to; a chief cause of all this is.

First, large zeal, but shallow judgment.

Secondly, a too much prying into the wayes of others, and too little into their own.

CHAP. XIV.

Shewing our state dying, when we are more troubled at the decayes in our House, than in Christs House; with four marks to know when we are so dying.

SIGN XIV.

When the decay in Christs House, less troubles you than the decay in your own House.

This decay wherever found, notes a man very far gone on the dying hand; if Trade decayes, then nothing but complaining, if loss by fire or sickness, or death, then all is out of order, it breaketh their rest, they cannot sleep by night, disturbs them in the worship of God, they cannot pray, read, or meditate by day; It is evident with such, the affairs of their own house lyeth nearer their heart, than the affairs of Christs House, far from a truly growing Christian, who is all out of order when it goeth not well with the Church of God.

Now by decay here in the Sign, I would be understood of persons in Christ Jesus profession, who dye in their zeal, love, and fear, &c. that begin to walk faintly after Christ Jesus, flat to prayer, to reading, to hearing, cold and careless to spiritual visiting one another, seldom and little in spiritual talk, when they meet together, not now as once, make it their trade and their business to be making the name of Christ great wherever they come; but either say nothing, or that that comes to nothing, having no spirit or savour in it; yet once was early at the Ordinances, quickly troubled if things went amiss; much joyed when all were in a holy harmony; but now being discovered to have
lost

lost most of their spiritual relish to those good things they once flourished in, and this not working trouble of heart on fellow brethren, and beholders, must needs argue great decay.

That such decay in Christs House, even among those in his spiritual profession, hath been, and too too much at this day is very evident both from Scripture and Experience.

First, from Scripture, 1 Cor. 3. beginning. *And I Brethren could not speak to you as to spiritual, but as to carnal, even babes in Christ, whereas there is among you envy, division, and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk as men.*

First, this same people as the first Chapter makes appear, had such grace from God given by Christ Jesus, that they were *enriched in all utterance, and in all knowledge; so that they came behind other Churches in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Again this holy Apostle, in Ephes. 2. 12. complains greatly of their decay; many had sinned, and had not repented of the fornication, and uncleanness they had committed. From whence it is very observable, that their decay was such, that their Senses or Feeling were well nigh departed from them, they were guilty of high crimes, among which were debates, envyings, wrath, strife, backbiting, whispering, swelling tumults; yet not humbled among themselves for all this: In like manner the Galathian Church, Chap. 4. That once if it had been possible, they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to the Apostle St. Paul, now counts him their enemy for telling them the truth; so Revel. 3. 17. *Thou saist I am rich, and increast with goods, and have need of nothing; but knowest not that thou art poor and miserable, and blind and naked.*

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It would be tedious to tell what experience could speak of the same thing in our dayes; are there not many that at their first entrance into Christs Vineyard, never thought that they loved enough, heard, prayed, laboured enough, that had mighty Parts, Gifts and Graces, and did mightily improve them to the best services; yet now are grown *huskish, dry, and barren*, and rare to hear any spiritual expressions from them; Now count Meetings burthensome, *Duties tedious*, sit as dull under the use of Christs Ordinances, as though their stomach did *loath* now, what was once as the morning dew to them; who can withhold being grieved and afflicted at this, unless his eyes be out, and his spiritual feeling gone? It therefore may concern all those that read this, to make enquiry with themselves what impression such tydings as these of decayes in Christs House, make upon their hearts; for answerable to ones esteem of things, and making any thing their treasure, will their sorrow and trouble be to see it wasting, whether Husband, Wife, Children, Houses or Lands, or the prosperity and well-faring of Gods House lye nearer the heart, may easily be discerned by the effects that will follow; *O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turns their backs upon their enemies! for the Cananites, and the Inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and environ us round, and what wilt thou do for thy great name?* Josh. 7. 8, 9. Joshua in the fight or flight might have been taken or slain, yet that is not highest in his thought, nor lyeth nearest to his heart; his great fear is what to do for the GREAT NAME, fearing the Cananite should have occasion to speak lightly of it: I would not by what hath been said, be thought to prohibit persons being troubled at outward decay, that would be a way to hold them from such diligence as ought to be, to remove or prevent it;
but

but we may know whether we are less troubled at decay in Christs House, than in our own, by these following.

First, By observing which way the drift of our praying to God bends most, where the Shoe pincheth most, there the complaint will be most prevalent. When two straits meet, decay in *Christs House*, and decay in our own, it is a time of tryal which cause or concern hath the highest room in our *hearts*. What persons most value, that they most remember and bend their care to preserve, if in time of prayer your spirit run more out for reparation of your own house Decay than of the *House of God*; this is lamentable sad, and let it be for a lamentation, though it is truth, decay in our own house, is truly a tryal, and ought to awaken in the work of diligence, yet to give this the chief room, is to preferre the smallest matters before the one thing needful or chief concern. Let us read for our imitation Davids spirit, *Psal. 137. 6. If I do not remember thee let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I preferre not Jerusalem above my chief joy.*

Secondly, by observing in which channel our complaints to men run most, as our praying to God, if the bent do run most for our own domestick affairs, so in like manner when we meet and greet one another if that be the uppermost in our thoughts, and we big with desire, as it were to be *delivered*; it is evident our concern lies nearer our hearts than *Christs*, else am I bold to affirm where the contrary is, even when pinching straits do possess, it is scarce remembered but occasionally, especially in the height of *Christ* and his *Churches service*, and then comes home that blessed Cordial as to outward things, not to be over-careful, but in every condition by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to let our requests be made

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known to God, who hath said it, and never failed, he will supply all wants in six troubles, and in seven he never did, nor never will forsake those that seek first his *Kingdom* or concern, but either will give them a full portion of supply in the *kind*, or of content or advantage some other way; teaching them from experience to say this is the best condition, a sweet morsel brought out of a bitter herb.

But thirdly, when the thoughts of our own house decays are so prevalent, that they molest us in the highest of our spiritual performances, this is a deep sign of little sense of the decay in Christs house, when we cannot pray, read, hear, watch, fast, or be in the performance of any Gospel duty, but still molested, all this availeth me nothing while *Mordecai* the Jew sits at the Kings Gate; on the contrary, a truly growing Christian all he is and hath is of no value while it goeth ill with the Church of God, O Lord, what shall I say when *Israel* turneth their backs before their enemies, would God we had been content to have dwelt on the other side of *Jordan*, for the *Canaanite* will hear of it, and what shall become of thy great Name, this lay so near good *Joshuas* heart, that he mattered not his lying low, so that soared high; now if thou wilt kill all this people as one man, then the *Egyptians* shall hear of it, and will say, because God was not able to deliver them hath he done this. Oh rather Lord I beseech thee blot my name out of thy book.

Fourthly, Whether in compassion our choice answers the lesser call, and rejects the greater, that is, we will rather put our helping hand to the removing the decay of our house, than Christs house, this is also an evident token of great declension. But how all these Marks may be prevented or removed; I shall God assisting give some brief help, and so conclude this sign.

First by shewing the great possibility of spiritual decay or declension from our first love to Christ and his people, both Scripture and Experience doth fully teach, that it is a hard work to begin to do *well*, and cease to do *evil*, and a harder work to continue to *do well*, and remain for years in the same frame of spirit and vigor for God, to flourish like the green Bay tree to renew our strength, and retain our spiritual heat is a very difficult work easie in the *talk* of, but hard in the *walk* of; but it is the hardest *work* of all to *end well*, to remain the same till death doth close up our eyes is a task so difficult, that nothing short of the mighty power of God can ever bring us to period in it: all the seven flourishing Churches in *Asia* save two blame worthy, though they had many good things in them; yet in danger to be unchurcht, so far from a thorough perseverance in universal obedience: And of six hundred thousand that went after God in the Wilderness but two enter'd *Canaan*. The thousands of cautions in Scripture to *take heed, watch, pray* doth sufficiently declare how hard a work it is to stand and keep our ground, and on the contrary how easie it is to decline and let go our first unwearied diligence: *My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and have hewn out to themselves Cisterns, broken Cisterns, that can hold no water, Jer. 2. 13.* Therefore saith the Spirit to the *Ephesian Church, chap. 6. 11. 13.* Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against all the wiles of the Devil, and having done all to *stand*; as if the Spirit should say, it is as much as ever you can doe to keep from slipping and *falling* when you have done all, for you fight not only with flesh and blood, but with spiritual wickedness in high places, perswading them to be cloathed with Christian armour on every part,

H 2

praying

praying alwayes with all prayer and supplication and watching thereto with all perseverance; what I say to you I say to all *watch, watch, watch,* and *pray*, three times together gives Christ Jesus this counsel to his Disciples, lest they be foild by temptation.

But secondly, that the decay in Christs house, and your own heart may both trouble you when they come, I shall humbly offer this blessed expedient, that you take *diligent heed* to maintain the *same sense* of that undone and helpless condition which grace found you in at your first conversion to the day of your desolation: what were you before conversion, *Rebels, Enemies* in your *minds, darkness,* Fiends of Hell, Enemies of Heaven, haters of God, full of all iniquity; *your throats are an open sepulcher, your tongues are full of deceit, the poyson of Asps under your lips, your mouths full of cursing and bitterness, your feet swift to shed blood, having no fear of God before your eyes.* Was not this your state, can you ever forget those black deeds of darkness you traded in, and was given up unto, serving divers lusts and pleasures: Do you not remember when the first wakening came, it told you that at that time you were without Christ, which is the *inlett* to all misery, aliens from the Common-wealth of Israel, strangers to the Covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, which is the final conclusion of all misery; Ephes. 2. 12. Had you died in this estate, then what must have become of you, for the end of these things is death, not temporal only but *eternal*; for they that doe such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God: Can you forget those dreadful bitter cries and that anguish you were in when the commandment came? Did not sin then revive & you die? Were not such as this your language, *wo, wo is me I am undone, I shall be damned to all eternity, mercy is gone, it is gone, it is too late,*

late, my day is over? Do you not remember that bitter Rowl written within and without, *Lamentations, mourning and woe*? Did not your sleep depart from you, and your stomachs nauseate its meat? Did not desire fail, and *Conscience* tear you? Were not this your frame, and much more in the dayes of your conviction and sight of Sin. How welcome then would *one smile* from Christ Jesus have been, to have heard his Voice in that bitter Agony, but to have whispered in thy Ear, *Son be of good chear, thy Sins are forgiven thee*; would not such a word have been as Life from the the Dead; did not your Hearts then say, *Speak Lord*, but the word, have mercy on my Soul, wash me throughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my Sin, for I acknowledg my transgression, and my Sins are ever before me; follows me like a Lion ready to tear my Flesh in pieces for a Prey! Oh call to remembrance your Confessions and Promises, look over your *Dyary Book*, did not your Heart and Mouth then beseech the Lord, that he would forgive your Sin which was great; did you not tell him if the World was yours, you would give it for a *Pardon, the first born for your Transgression*, and the fruit of your Bodies, for the *Sin of your Souls*; ask your Conscience now, if this and a thousand times more was not your Language then; did not you say, I will lie at thy Majesties feet, yea feed upon puls, and roul my mouth in Ashes, let me but find Mercy. Still but Conscience, and rebuke the *Devil* that goeth about to devour me. Brother Convert, is not this a truth; oh whats the matter now, what meaneth this strang change, doth the decay in Christs house, and thy own Hearr, little or not at all trouble thee, whence is this strange change, wilt thou turn Monster, that nothing but a Miracle can save thee, from a fatal fi-

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nal fall; what meaneth this bleeting of Sheep and lowing of Oxen; what more in debt to a Saviour, and less humble, less thankful, less watchful, less pitiful, less painful; whither will this bring you; where will it end; oh call to remembrance from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do thy first work, or else God will come upon thee, and remove thy Candlestick, unchurch and dismember thee, *except thou repent Rev. 2. 5.* I humbly beg such Christians as are going into this declension, that they would duly consider what hath been offered, and call to remembrance their own evil ways and doings that were not good, and abhor themselves for ever in Dust and Ashes; this will make Christ in his Visits, Mercies, and Chides, yea every state and strait welcome still; so will you grow up like the green Bay Tree, yea taller in Humility than the Cedar in Lebanon: the blessing of God bring my poor Mite home to your Hearts, to this great end. *Amen, Amen.*

CHAP. XV.

Shewing that want of weeping in some, when others of Christs Children with grief are stooping, declares such to him a dying: shewing also in four respects how we are to pity; with four Remedies against this Decay.

SIGN XV.

When you can see Christs Children bowed with trouble, and you not, or little sympathize with them.

Although affliction cometh not forth out of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; yet man

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is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward, Job 5, 6. 7. Were the Scripture silent, every mans experience doth sufficiently evidence mans very State here, to be a State of trouble, neither Sex nor Age, nor Employment, nor outward Estate, whither high or low, rich or poor, is exempted from trouble, while there is a Devil to tempt, a World to allure, a frail Body of Infirmities, there will be trouble; go to the Court, and there is Hand, Head, and Heart full of trouble; the Throne is big with business still in trouble, in trouble again till out of trouble, that is the present condition; not at all at rest, because it is not otherwise, impatient for a change, and yet as quickly weary of the change when attained; desires still growing, yea, new motions still attending Mortals: Go to the City and the thousands there, big also with business, running hither and thither, some wringing of hands for sorrow; Sicknes is come to the windows, and Death to the bed side; here is wailing for an only Son, and there is the groaning of the oppressed, wishing at Evening, would God it were Morning, and no sooner hath the Sun appeared for some Minutes in its Lustre, but they are wishing it were Evening again; some pineing away with pinching Hunger, for want of the Fruits of the Field; others pineing away with a pinching Disease, have Meat but no Appetite; some crying out I go Childless, give me Children or else I dye; others wailing at their misfortunes, wo is me that ever I was a Father or a Mother; in rest no where, Pallace nor Prison, Market nor Closet, City nor Country, Court nor Camp, can claim this one Prerogative; Here am I free from trouble; the Youth weary of his yoke, the Eye and Conduct of Father or Master is too strait, his Bonds too great to hold long, the Reigne must be lengthened,

ned, or all is out of order, yet but a few Months change every way as strange, this year a Prisoner in the mind, because not at his own hands, making his own provision, next year a Slave to a cruel Goaler, looking through Iron Grates seven fold more a Prisoner; Oh, what is Man, where is rest for him to be found under the Sun. Doth not experience tell us, *Wormwood and Gall* attends us every where, ebbing or flowing every 24 hours, and unstable as the water; Country life too *Melancholy*, City Life too *Jolly*. What period of our Life shall we call free, from *Birth* to *Death*; from seven dayes old, to seventy years old, all *Labour* and *Travel*. Do we not come into the World with crying, doth not *pain* with *Hunger* or *Cold*, pinch us as early as we are born, the heart of the *Father* glad to day that he hath a *Son*, but to morrow much more *sad*, for the buble disappeared, and is gone to its place: If we live till seven years of *Age*, have we not seven Changes by then, is not the best of that *Joy* now turned into *Wormwood* with a *Feaver* fit; do we float upon the water a little longer, and make our *Mothers Heart* glad; very possible it is, but that it may be the *more sad* before our Tragedy end, anon comes Tidings the fall of a *Tyl*, or depth of the *water*, or crush of the *wheel* hath broke our curious *Venus Glass* all to pieces; but do we float a little longer, and get from under the Wing of our Guardian, arriving at a Marriage State, ere our *first born* hath floated one Month in the World, our Months are gone; and thus from Period to Period should we attain to the utmost age of Man and length of time, it is all but a *Span*; and here we must conclude with the *Preacher*, in much *Wisdom* is much *Grief*, and he that increaseth *Knowledge* increaseth *Sorrow*; *Eccle. i. ult.* Thus our *vain life* from age to age in all its periods begins with

Crying

Crying, and closeth with trembling, afraid of what is high, and fears in the way, and the Almond Tree, looks white, and the grinders growes low, and the Grasshopper is a Burden, and desire fails, and Man goeth to his long home, and the Mourners go about the Streets, vanity of vanities saith the Preacher, all is vanity; and this is your State, this is your portion under the Sun. Oh ye sons of Men; all this you may read in the book of Nature: But come to the Book of Scriptures, had not Jacob his trouble; the days of the years of my Pilgrimage are 130 years; few and evil, or troublesome have they been, (Gen. 47. 9) Job had his troubles, and was weary with complaining, David bowed down with trouble, Jeremiah in lamentable Complaints, St. Paul's words from Birth to Death may be here taken up, even unto this present hour. We both hunger and thirst, are naked and buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place, never at rest wherever we are, nor never shall be under the Sun; thus much for explication of this term in the Sign, namely trouble, which though it carry a part in the Sign, yet the distinguishing mark of decaying in Godliness is, when any of these kind of troubles are the portion of others, we can see it or know it with little or no Simpathy. For when trouble or afflictions of any kind from the Lord, are great upon some, it is an evident token of decay in such, as have not a fellow-feeling towards them. Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and lye upon Beds of Ivory, stretching themselves upon their couches that drink their wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with chief Oynments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, in Amos 6. from the 1. to the 7. Some we may see there lived a careless life, feeding to the full, had even what heart could wish, felt not the trouble in person, that at the same time was

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was their bretherens portion; yet are not grieved for the afflictions of *Joseph*, but lived at the height of Joy, under their own fulness, and were not compassionately affected with others penury: This hath been found among the people of God, but ill taken from them, *Numb. 20.* We shall find that *Israel* (who knew all the travail that had befallen them) to let them pass by his high way; but he shewed them no pity, was fallen from that sympathizing Spirit that ought to be in him. God will not forget to take notice of this, and reckon for it; which proves that pity in his people one to another, is Gods expectation from them, *Amos 1, 11.* Thus saith the Lord, for three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because he pursued his Brother with the Sword, and cast off all pity.

But some may Object and say, shall we pity those, (though Gods own people) that have brought by their sinning, what misery is come upon them?

Ans. Yes, God expects this from his peoples enemies, how much rather from their friends *Isa. 47. 5, 6.* Sit thou silent, and get thee into darkness, O Daughter of the Caldeans, for thou shalt no more be called the Lady of Kingdomes; I was wroth with my people, and gave them into thy hands, but thou didst show them no pity, upon the ancient hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke; For this cause they must get them into darkness, clearly noting, that though God for his peoples evils, do afflict and trouble them, yet it is not at all, either to warrant his people, or his peoples enemies, to add to the burthen he layeth upon them; but on the contrary calls for pity, yet not pity with their sins, but such pity as may reduce them from their sins.

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First, in taking notice that they are in misery, *Remember O Lord what is come upon us, consider and behold our reproach.* The Church counts it of tendency to her healing, by having her affliction taken notice of.

Secondly, you must pity them in helping them to understand the cause why it is come *Lam. 3. 36. Wherefore doth the living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin.*

Thirdly, Pity in provoaking them to search and try their ways, and turn to the Lord their God.

Fourthly, Pity in helping them down; that is, laying the displeasure of God before them to humble them; and when duly humbled, to comfort them; lest such should be swallowed up with over much sorrow; We may conclude this evil to be very common among professors, and it may call upon them to a self-examining, whether, and wherein they are under this spiritual decay; for the removing or preventing of which, I shall offer three or four things briefly, and so conclude this Sign:

First, to consider the precepts for this duty, and from whom they come, *Rom. 12. 10. 14. Be kindly affectionate one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another; weep with them that weep; put on as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, Who is afflicted, and I burn not?*

Secondly, consider the danger of being wanting here.

First, it makes us most unlike God, *in all their afflictions he was afflicted.*

Secondly, It opens a door to let in upon us equal misery, *Amos 6. 7. Therefore shall they go into captivity, with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretch themselves shall be removed.*

Thirdly,

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Thirdly, it leads the way to heart-hardning *Zech. 7. 10. Oppress not the widow, fatherless, stranger, nor poor; but they refused to hearken, and made their heart as an Adamant stone.*

A third help against this decay, is to be considering or laying to heart the condition of such, thinking it may now be, and yet may be our own; you that are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, *Considering thy self, lest thou also be tempted, bearge one anothers Burthens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ, Gal. 6. beginning.*

Fourthly, A fourth help against this decay, look to the Lord *Jesus* for your Copy, and write after him, he could see no Saint or Sinner bowed with trouble, but he had sympathy for them, the Garment of his pitty was ready to over spread all persons, and in all conditions; behold his practice for your example. — And great Multitudes came to him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, and maimed, casting them down at *Jesus* feet (what then) and he healed them saying, *I have Compassion on the Multitude, because they have continued with me three days, and have nothing to eat, I will not send them away Fasting least they Faint by the way; How often would he in his pitty have healed Jerusalem, and when it was too late, and the day of their Visitation over; yet he cannot come near the City, but falls a weeping to shew his sympathy, though they had sinned past recovery, like that worthy passage Luke 10. that left Jerusalem or the Church, and went down to Jerico or the World, and there fell among Thieves, which stripped him, wounded him, and left him half dead; then comes the Priest, he looks on, and away goes he; then comes a Levite and looks on, passing away likewise, now comes this good Samaritan, and when he saw him*

him he went nearer, and had compassion on him, did not only shake the head, and say the Lord help thee, be warmed and filled, but went nearer yet, and bound up his wounds, powring in Wine to chear him in his fainting, and Oyle to heal him of his Grief, and sets him on his beast, and brings him to an Inn, and takes care of him. In all his peoples afflictions he was afflicted; let every one of us therefore please with Sympathy his Neighbour, for his good to Edification, for even Christ pleased not himself; but as it is written, the reproaches of them that Reproached thee fell on me, Rom. 15. 2, 3.

CHAP. XVI.

Shewing that when the name of Christ, and credit to his Gospel; is not so dear to us as personal sufferings we are then surely on the dying hand: and that in estate, body, and life, we ought to submit if called to suffering: with four cause: of decay here.

SIGN XVI.

When you will rather betray the Name of Christ Jesus, and the credit of his Gospel by your silence; then appear for it to your own suffering and disparagement.

Three things may be observable as to the opening of this Sign.

First, what is meant by the Name of Jesus.

Name refers to his person, and properties, as his power, wisdom, Judgment, mercy, justice, goodness; dishonour done to all or any of these, is done to him, because this is the matter or substance he is made known by, and understood to be; tis clear that

Name