

The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded: Chapter Three — *Outward means and occasions of thoughts of such spiritual things, which do not prove men to be spiritually minded. Preaching of the word. Exercise of gifts. Prayer. How we may know whether our thoughts of spiritual things in Prayer, are truly spiritual thoughts, proving us to be spiritually minded.*

I. PREACHING OF THE WORD

- “It is observed concerning many in the gospel, that they heard it willingly, received it with joy, and did many things gladly, upon the preaching of it; and we see the same thing exemplified in multitudes every day. But none of these things can be without many thoughts in the minds of such persons about the spiritual things of the word; for they are the effects of such thoughts, and, being wrought in the minds of men, will produce more of the same nature: yet were they all hypocrites concerning whom these things are spoken, and were never spiritually minded. The cause of this miscarriage is given us by our Savior, Matthew 13:20, 21.” (37)
- “It must be observed, that the best of men, the most holy and spiritually minded, may have, nay, ought to have, their thoughts of spiritual things excited, multiplied, and confirmed, by the preaching of the word.” (38)
- “Wherefore, although the vigorous actings of spiritual thoughts be occasional from the word, be more under and after the preaching of it than at other times, it is no more but what ariseth from the nature and use of the ordinance by God’s own appointment, nor is it any evidence that those with whom it is so are not spiritually minded, but, on the contrary, that they are. Yet where men have no other thoughts of this matter but what are occasioned by the outward dispensation of the word, such thoughts do not prove them to be spiritually minded.” (39)
 - A. The spiritually-minded hearer will demonstrate a love of the truth.**
 - B. The spiritually-minded hearer will enjoy inward spiritual satisfaction.**
 - C. The spiritually-minded hearer will experience observable spiritual growth.**

II. PRAYER

- “One principal end of it is to excite, stir up, and draw forth, the principle of grace, of faith and love in the heart, unto a due exercise in holy thoughts of God and spiritual things, with affections suitable unto them. Those who design not this end in prayer know not at all what it is to pray.” (40)
- “Gifts are nothing but a spiritual improvement of our natural faculties or abilities.” (41)
- “A man may read a long prayer that expresseth spiritual things, and yet never have one spiritual thought arise in his mind about them; for there is no exercise of any faculty of his mind required unto such reading, but only to attend unto the words that are to be read... [His spiritual thoughts may] all be merely occasional, from the present external performance of the duty, without any living spring or exercise of grace. In such a course may men of tolerable gifts continue all their days, unto the satisfaction of themselves and others, deceiving both them and their own souls.” (41)
- “For there is nothing whereby the refined sort of hypocrites do more deceive themselves and others, nothing whereby some men do give themselves more countenance in aft indulgence unto their lusts, than by this part of the form of godliness, when they deny the power thereof.” (42)
- “No persons are in greater danger of walking at hazard with God than those who live in the exercise of spiritual gifts in duties unto their own satisfaction and [that of] others; for they may countenance themselves with an appearance of every thing that should be in them in reality and power, when there is nothing of it in them.” (46)
- “And we may hear prayers sometimes that openly discover themselves unto spiritual sense to be the labor of the brain, by the help of gifts in memory and invention, without an evidence of any mixture of humility, reverence, or godly fear, without any acting of faith and love. They flow as wine, yet smell and taste of the unsavory cask from whence they proceed.” 46
- “So whilst spiritual gifts are used and employed only to excite, aid, and assist grace in its operations, they are unutterably useful; but if they put themselves in the room thereof, to do all that grace should do, they are hurtful and pernicious. We have need, therefore, to be very diligent in this inquiry whether our spiritual thoughts, even in our prayers, be not rather occasioned from the duty than spring from a gracious principle in our hearts, or are the actings of real saving grace.” (47)
 - A. Requires Diligent Self-Examination**
 - 1. We must test ourselves by Scripture.**

2. **We must pray fervently for God's help.**
- B. Produces Spiritual Growth:** "But how persons should continue in prayer in general according to the mind of God, so far as can be outwardly discovered, and yet thrive not at all as unto spiritual strength in their souls, is hard to be understood." (49)
1. **True prayer will ordinarily produce evident spiritual results.**
 2. **It is highly irregular (and even suspicious) for a believer to pray regularly and remain in sin.**
 3. **Those who find themselves praying and sinning should not stop praying; they should stop sinning.**
- C. Involves Genuine Fervency**
1. **Not merely natural affections or desires.**
 2. **Not merely sharp fears or convictions.**
 3. **Not merely the exercise of gifts.**
 - a. **We should not therefore despise spiritual gifts.**
 - b. **We should not replace extemporaneous prayer with the reading of prayers.**
 - i. **Because all spiritual gifts can be abused.**
 - ii. **Because the reading of prayers is even more liable to abuse.**
 - iii. **Because there are clear advantages to extemporaneous prayer.**
- D. Knowable and Distinguishable By Certain Marks**
1. **Diligent self-examination.**
 2. **Spiritual complacency or delight:** "If we have no experience of these things, it is evident that we walk at random in the best of our duties; for they are among the principal things that we do or ought to pray for. And if we have not experience of the effects of our prayers in our hearts, we neither have advantage by them nor give glory unto God in them." (56)
 - a. **True Christians can sometimes lack this delight.**
 - i. **Yet their godly sorrow produces joy.**
 - ii. **Yet the inward encouragement to persevere includes a measure of delight.**
 - iii. **Yet the Lord is faithful to hear their complaint and provide refreshment.**
 - iv. **Yet all who diligently seek this delight, even for long periods of time, shall eventually receive it.**
 - b. **Beware of pridefully delighting in your own spiritual gifts.**
 - i. **True delight in prayer stems from the great privilege of approaching God.**
 - ii. **True delight in prayer stems from the stirring up of our faith and love toward God.**
 3. **Spiritual fruit of godliness:** "For men to be earnest in prayer and thriftless in grace is a certain indication of prevalent corruptions, and want of being spiritually minded in prayer itself." (58) "He who prays as he ought will endeavor to live as he prays. This none can do who doth not with diligence keep his heart unto the things he hath prayed about. To pray earnestly and live carelessly is to proclaim that a man is not spiritually minded in his prayer." (59) "If there be generally an unsuitableness in our minds unto what we seem to contend for in our prayers, the gift may be in exercise, but the grace is wanting." (59)
 4. **Graces prevailing over gifts:** "Gifts are servants, not rulers, in the mind, — are bestowed on us to be serviceable unto grace; not to lead, but to follow it, and to be ready with their assistance on its exercise. For the most part, where they lead all, they are all alone." (59)
 5. **Active service to God and others:** "He, all whose religion lies in prayer and hearing, hath none at all... I shall not value his prayers at all, be he never so earnest and frequent in them, who gives not alms according to his ability." (60)

III. SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE

- "They that fear the Lord will be speaking to one another of the things wherein his glory is concerned (Mal. 3:16)." (61)
- "And accordingly there are some who are ready on all occasions to be speaking or making mention of things divine, spiritual, and holy; and it is to be wished that there were more of them. All the flagitious sins that the world is filled withal are not a greater evidence of the degeneracy of the Christian religion than this is, that it is grown unusual, yea, a shame or scorn, for

men to speak together of the things of God. It was not so when religion was in its primitive power and glory, nor is it so with them who really fear God and are sensible of their duty.” (61-62)

- “Ofttimes the track and course of men’s thoughts lie so out of the way, are so contrary, unto such things, that they seem strange unto them, they give them no entertainment. You do but cross their way with such discourses, whereon they stand still a little, and so pass on. Even the countenances of some men will change hereon, and they betake themselves unto an unsatisfied silence until they can divert unto other things. Some will make such replies of empty words as shall evidence their hearts to be far enough estranged from the things proposed unto them.” (62)
- “...the thoughts of spiritual things are with many, as guests that come into an inn, and not like children than dwell in the house.” (62)