THE
PATH
OF
TRUE
GODLINESS



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Willem Teellinck, The Path of True Godliness, 1636

Additional titles are under consideration.

# THE PATH OF TRUE GODLINESS

Willem Teellinck



Translated by Annemie Godbehere Edited by Joel R. Beeke



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## Contents

	Series Preface 7 Introduction 11
Book 1	The Character of True Godliness 31
Book 2	The Kingdom of Darkness Opposes the Practice of Godliness 55
Book 3	The Kingdom of Grace Promotes Godliness 85
Book 4	Godly Living Is the True Goal of Life 125
Book 5	The Means to Attain the True Purpose of Life 147
Book 6	Using God-Given Means to Practice True Godliness 175
Book 7	Motives to Practice Godliness Derived from God's Attributes 237
Book 8	Motives to Practice Godliness Derived from Our Own Condition 251
Book 9	Three More Reasons for Practicing Godliness 275
	Dutch Reformed Translation Society 301

### Series Preface

X

The Nadere Reformatie (a term translated into English as either the "Dutch Second Reformation" or the "Further Reformation") paralleled the historical and spiritual development of English Puritanism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From its teachers came the watchword of post-Reformation piety: Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda ("The church always being reformed").

Proponents of the *Nadere Reformatie* used that phrase to indicate their commitment to the doctrinal and ecclesiological reforms of the Reformation of the sixteenth century as well as to the ongoing reformation of the church. Their intent was not to alter Reformed doctrine. Rather, they proposed the development of a life of piety based on that doctrine within Reformed churches that, in turn, would impact all spheres of life.

Dutch scholars responsible for a periodical on the *Nadere Reformatie* recently formulated the following definition of the movement:

The Dutch Second (or "Further") Reformation is that movement within the Dutch Reformed Church during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which, as a reaction to the declension or absence of a living faith, made both the personal experience of faith and godliness matters of central importance. From that perspective the movement formulated substantial and procedural reformation initiatives, submitting them to the proper ecclesiastical, political,

8 Series Preface

and social agencies, and pursued those initiatives through a further reformation of the church, society, and state in both word and deed.<sup>1</sup>

To further their program of active personal, spiritual, ecclesiastical, and social reformation, the writers of the *Nadere Reformatie* produced some of the finest, most profound literature in the Protestant tradition. Furthermore, because the Dutch Reformed piety of the seventeenth century grew out of Reformed orthodoxy and included among its founders and exponents several erudite orthodox theologians—such as Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Johannes Hoornbeeck—the works of the *Nadere Reformatie* do not give evidence of the kind of antagonism between theology and piety that belonged to the Pietist phase of German Lutheranism. Rather, the proponents of the *Nadere Reformatie* offered a balance of doctrine and piety as well as theology and life that has seldom been equaled in church history.

The Nadere Reformatie has generally been overlooked in English-speaking circles due to the lack of primary sources in English. The works of Jean Taffin and Willem Teellinck, two early Nadere Reformatie authors, were translated into English in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but those now-antiquated translations have not reappeared in more recent times. Moreover, the larger body of works of famous dogmaticians such as Voetius and Hoornbeeck or of pastors such as Theodorus à Brakel, Jacobus Koelman, Jodocus van Lodenstein, Wilhelmus Schortinghuis, and Godefridus Udemans remained untranslated until now. Two exceptions are Alexander Comrie's ABC of Faith, first published in English in 1978, and Wilhelmus à Brakel's Christian's Reasonable Service, translated into English and published in four volumes in 1992–95.

The present series addresses the need for further translation of these "old writers," as they are affectionately called by those who know them in Dutch. It also contributes significant biblical and historical insights to the contemporary emphasis on discipleship and spirituality.

In this series, the editors and translators present a representative sampling of the writings of this vibrant movement, along with introductions that open both the texts and the lives of the various authors to the modern reader. The series is intended for the lay reader as

<sup>1.</sup> Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie 19 (1995): 108.

Series Preface 9

well as for pastors and scholars, all of whom should benefit from this introduction to the literature of the *Nadere Reformatie* movement, much as the Dutch have benefited from the translation of numerous English Puritan works into their language.

On behalf of the Dutch Reformed Translation Society, Joel Beeke James A. De Jong Richard Muller Eugene Osterhaven

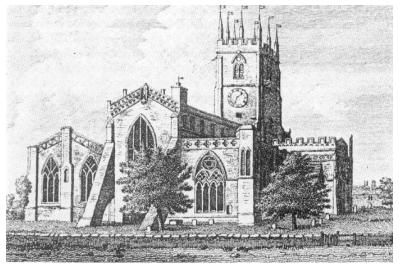


Willem Teellinck (1579-1629)

hristians know that the practice of godliness is no easy task. They want to glorify God but often do not know how to go about it. They know they need "to put on the whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:11) but often have little understanding of what it is or how to use it. For example, how does the believer use the Word of God to arm himself, to uncover the schemes of the enemy, and to press on to victory? How do we use prayer in this battle? Should we tell God in prayer how strong our enemies are, how weak we are, and how desperately we need his Son to help us? How do believers flee from temptation? What can they do to purge their minds of blasphemous thoughts and selfish pride? How should they battle a sense of despair when affliction strikes? How can they learn from mature Christians how to fight the good fight of faith? What is the proper role of self-examination in this fight? How does the believer open his heart to God's promises?

These are questions that Willem Teellinck answers. This book is packed with scriptural and practical guidance for Christians who earnestly desire to live holy lives focused on God and his glory.

Teellinck is often called "the father of the Dutch Nadere Reformatie" (usually translated as the "Further" or "Second Reformation"), much as William Perkins is called the father of English Puritanism. The Nadere Reformatie, on occasion also translated as Dutch Precisianism, Pietism, or Puritanism, was primarily a seventeenthand early eighteenth-century movement that roughly paralleled English Puritanism. It dates from such early representatives as Jean Taffin (1528/9–1602) and Willem Teellinck (1579–1629) to its last



The Banbury church in the eighteenth century

major contributors, Alexander Comrie (1706–74) and Theodorus van der Groe (1705–84). Like English Puritanism, it stressed the necessity of a vital Christian piety, true to the teachings of Scripture and the Reformed confessions and consistently worked out in all aspects of one's daily life.

### Education and Family Life

Willem Teellinck was born January 4, 1579, in Zerikzee, the main town on the island of Duiveland, Zeeland, to a godly, prominent family. He was the youngest of eight children. His father, Joost Teellinck (1543–94), who served as mayor of Zerikzee two years prior to Willem's birth, died when Willem was fifteen years old. His mother, Johanna de Jonge (1552–1609), survived her husband by fifteen years but was often sickly when Willem was young. Willem was well educated in his youth; he studied law at St. Andrews in Scotland (1600) and at the University of Poitiers in France, where he earned a doctorate in 1603.

The following year he spent nine months with the Puritan community in England. His lodging with a godly family in Banbury

and his exposure to Puritan godliness—lived out through extensive family worship, private prayer, sermon discussions, Sabbath observance, fasting, spiritual fellowship, self-examination, heartfelt piety, and good works—profoundly impressed him. At that time, Psalmsinging could be heard everywhere a person walked in Banbury, particularly on Sabbath days. These Puritans did not feel at home in the established church; they believed that the Reformation had been shortchanged in England, and they greatly admired Calvin's Genevan model for church, society, and family life. Godly Puritans in England such as John Dod (d. 1645) and Arthur Hildersham (1563–1632) were their mentors, and the people lived what these divines taught. Teellinck would later write about the fruits of their holy living: "Their Christian walk was such that it convinced even their most bitter foes of the sincerity and wholeheartedness of their faith and practice. The foes saw faith working powerfully through love, demonstrated in their straightforward business dealings, charitable deeds to the poor, visiting and comforting the sick and oppressed, educating the ignorant, convincing the erring, punishing the wicked, reproving the idle, and encouraging the devout. And all this was done with diligence and sensitivity, as well as joy, peace,



Some old houses on High Street, Banbury





John Dod (d. 1645)

Arthur Hildersham (1563-1632)

and happiness, such that it was obvious that the Lord was truly with them."

Teellinck believed the Lord converted him in England. A zeal for God's truth and Puritan piety that was never quenched was born in his heart. He surrendered his life to the Lord and considered changing his field of study to theology. After consulting some astute theologians in England and holding a day of prayer and fasting with his friends, Teellinck decided to study theology at Leiden. He trained there for two years under Lucas Trelcatius (1542–1602), Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641), and James Arminius (1560–1609). He felt most attached to Trelcatius and tried to stay neutral in the tensions that had developed between Gomarus and Arminius.

While in England, Teellinck met Martha Greendon, a young Puritan woman from Derby, who became his wife. She shared Teellinck's life goal of living out the Puritan *praxis pietatis* ("practice of piety") in family life as well as in parish work. Their first son, Johannes, died in infancy. They were then blessed with three sons—Maximiliaan, Theodorus, and Johannes—all of whom became Reformed ministers with emphases similar to their father's. They also had two daughters: Johanna, who married an English minister, and Maria, who married a political official at Middelburg. The oldest son, Maximiliaan, became pastor of the English-speaking church at Vlissingen in 1627, then served at Middelburg until his death in 1653. Willem Teellinck did not live to see his younger sons ordained

into the ministry. None of the sons became as renowned as their father, although Johannes drew some attention as pastor at Utrecht through his book *Den Vruchtbaarmakende Wijnstock* (Christ, the Fructifying Vine) and a sermon on God's promises. In both he tried to move the Second Reformation in a more objective direction.

Teellinck edified his family by his godly example. He was hospitable and philanthropic, yet he stressed simplicity in furnishings, clothing, and food. He generally steered conversation at mealtimes in a spiritual direction. Foolish conversation was not tolerated. Family worship was scrupulously practiced the Puritan way. Once a week, Teellinck invited a few of the godliest members of his congregation to join his family for devotions. Overnight guests were always welcome and were expected to participate in family worship. Once or twice a year, the Teellincks observed a family day of prayer and fasting. Teellinck regarded this practice as helpful for moving himself and his family to dedicate themselves entirely to God.

### Pastoral Ministry

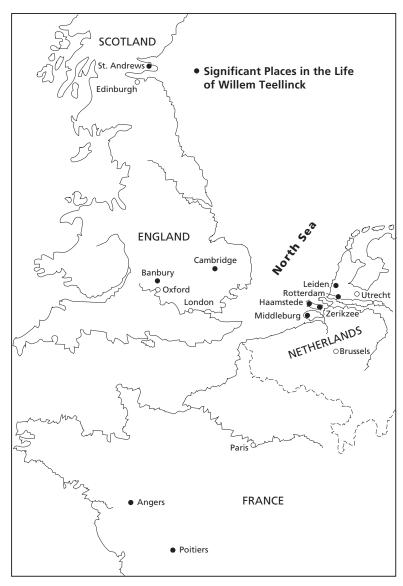
Willem Teellinck was ordained into the pastoral ministry in 1606 and served the Burgh-Haamstede parish on the island of Duiveland for seven fairly fruitful years. There were several conversions, but Teellinck, much like his predecessor, Godfridus Udemans (c. 1580–1649), struggled with village life, which was rough and undisciplined. The classis minutes of that time frequently address the problems of alcohol abuse, Sabbath desecration, fighting, carnival attendance, and a general disorderly spirit.

During this pastorate, Teellinck wrote his first books. In his first publication, *Philopatris ofte Christelijke Bericht* (The Love of Fatherland, or A Christian Report), published in 1608, he stressed the Dutch government's need to implement strict laws to combat the sins and faults of the populace. In 1610, Teellinck visited England to renew ties with his Puritan colleagues Thomas Taylor, Dod, and Hildersham. During that stay, he preached to the Dutch congregation in London. In 1612, he was delegated by Zeeland to go to The Hague to lobby the National Estates General for a national synod dedicated to resolving the growing problems associated with Arminianism

From 1613 until his death in 1629, Teellinck served as pastor in Middelburg, a flourishing city that had six Reformed churches—four Dutch, one English, and one French. People were drawn to his ministry by his sincere conversation and preaching, faithful visiting and catechizing, godly walk and selfless demeanor, and sim-



The interior of the Reformed church at Haamstede. Teellinck preached from this pulpit, which was installed in 1610 during his ministry there.



ple and practical writings. He demonstrated the conviction that a pastor ought to be the godliest person in the congregation—and his godliness involved self-denial. When a pestilence swept through Middelburg in 1624, for example, Teellinck not only called people

to public and private repentance but also visited numerous infected homes, even as he urged others not to put themselves at risk by doing so.

Teellinck's hard work in Middelburg bore fruit. Five years after his arrival, he wrote to his congregation in his *Noodwendig Vertoogh* (Urgent Discourse): "We have every reason to thank the Lord. You come to church in large numbers each Sunday; our four church buildings cannot contain all the people. Many of your families may be called 'little churches.' There is good order according to good rules. Many of you use the means of grace diligently and you gladly listen to our admonitions to exercise godliness." Yet Teellinck remained burdened for the indifference in and beyond his flock. The "constant hurt and pain" that he carried in his heart because of the spiritual laxity and carnality that prevailed in church and society moved him to use his prodigious energies and gifts in speaking and writing to bring about a comprehensive reformation in every sphere of life.



The new church at Middelburg

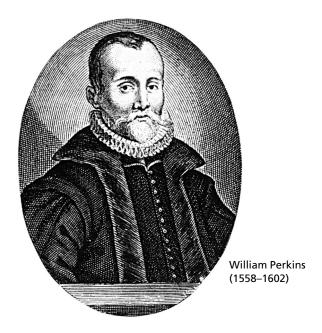
Near the end of his life, Teellinck developed a mystical emphasis that had surfaced only occasionally in his earlier writings. That mysticism became evident in the posthumously published <code>Soliloquium</code> (Soliloquy) and <code>Het Nieuwe Jeruzalem</code> (The New Jerusalem). The latter book is reminiscent of the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux. Feelings and emotions are accented more than faith; the believing soul becomes one with Christ in tender communion.

Teellinck battled ill health for most of his ministry. He passed away on April 8, 1629, at the age of fifty. He was mourned by thousands and was buried in the churchyard of St. Pieters Church in Middelburg.

### Sermons

In his preaching, Teellinck infiltrated the Dutch scene with English Puritan pathos. His sermons focused on the practice of godliness, and he preached often on the necessity of repentance. He had the gifts to rebuke sin and pronounce God's impending judgments while simultaneously drawing people to the love of God and wooing them to Christ. He despised trivialities from the pulpit, which included flowery expressions and petty illustrations. He was blunt and forthright in expressing himself, even to the point of coarseness. Not everyone appreciated his reference to God as the "first tailor" or to Paul as a *voor-vrijer* of Christ—that is, one who would deliver a suitor's overture to a young woman.

Teellinck was a practical preacher who addressed current events. For example, when Admiral Piet Hein captured the Spanish Silver-fleet and all of the Netherlands rejoiced, Teellinck preached from 1 Timothy 6:17–19, stressing that the riches of this world are counterfeit and that only the riches of Christ are authentic. Teellinck also addressed the current trends and fashions of the day. At times he was criticized for being legalistic in his sermons against luxury in dress, amorous literature, excessive drinking, dancing, traveling on the Sabbath, overindulgence in feasting, and the neglect of fasting. However, that was only one strand of a complex web of practical godliness that Teellinck sought to weave in the hearts and lives of his parishioners. Though he castigated the eth-



ical insensibilities of some professing believers and deplored spiritual deadness in the church, his overarching emphasis was to build up the believer's "most holy faith" and to move the church toward a "new life in Christ."

Homiletically, Teellinck was influenced by William Perkins (1558–1602), who advocated the Puritan "plain method" of preaching. After exegeting a text, Teellinck drew out various doctrines, explained how these doctrines should benefit the hearer by means of comfort and admonition, and then applied wisdom gleaned from the text to saved and unsaved hearers. Though not an eloquent orator, Teellinck was an effective preacher. After hearing Teellinck preach on a few occasions, Gisbertus Voetius wrote, "Since that time my heart's desire has been that I and all other preachers of this land could duplicate this kind of powerful preaching."

The Netherlands was not as ready for Teellinck as England had been for Perkins, however. Teellinck's insistence on connecting the fruits of love with the acts of justifying faith did not appeal to some of his peers. They found his call for renewal in church, school, family, government, and society too intense. So on the one

hand, Teellinck's preaching against dead Reformed orthodoxy brought him under suspicion by the orthodox Reformed, while on the other hand, Arminians censored him for his devotion to that same Reformed orthodoxy and resented his popularity with laypeople.

### Writing Ministry

Teellinck's goals for the reformation of the church are most evident in his writings. His numerous works sought to build up people in the faith by moving the Reformed Church beyond reformation in doctrine and polity to reformation in life and practice. Even more than Perkins, Teellinck stressed godly living, fruits of love, marks of grace, and primacy of the will.

Teellinck produced 127 manuscripts in all, sixty of which were printed. Those sixty included twenty full-length books. Franciscus Ridderus published a representative anthology of Teellinck's works in 1656 titled *Uyt de Geschriften en Tractaten van Mr. Willem Teellinck* (From the Writings and Tracts of Mr. Willem Teellinck). Three years later Teellinck's sons began printing his works, but they never got beyond three folio volumes titled *Alle de wercken van Mr. Willem Teellinck* (The Works of Mr. Willem Teellinck). Most of Teellinck's writings can be divided into five categories:

- Exegetical. Teellinck's exegesis of Romans 7 was published posthumously as De Worstelinghe eenes Bekeerden Sondaers (The Wrestling of a Converted Sinner). He published commentaries on Malachi, Judges 13–16, and Isaiah 9:5. His commentary on the Pentateuch, Verklaeringe Over de Vijf Boecken Moses (Exposition of the Five Books of Moses), which was ready for print shortly before his death, was lost. All of his exegetical works were written on a popular level. His concern was always for the genuine practice of Christianity.
- Catechetical. Teellinck's catechetical writings include his Huysboeck (Family Manual), a commentary on the Compendium of the Heidelberg Catechism intended for family devotions, and Sleutel der Devotie openende de Deure des Hemels voor ons (The Key of Devotion Opening the Door of Heaven for Us), a two-volume work of

dialogues that addresses many questions about spiritual and practical Christian living.

- Edificatory. The majority of Teellinck's books were written to edify and instruct believers and usually focused on a single theme. Een getrouwe Bericht hoe men sich in geval van Sieckte Dragen Moet (A Faithful Account of How One Should Conduct Oneself in Time of Sickness) provides practical guidance for coping with affliction. Den Christelijcken Leidsman, Aanwijzend de Practycke der Warer Bekeeringhe (The Christian Guide, Showing the Practice of True Conversion) was written to challenge Calvinists spiritually and to warn them about Arminian ideas. Noodwendigh Vertoogh Aengaende de Tegenwoordigen Bedroefden Staet van Gods Volck (Urgent Discussion Regarding the Present Sad State of God's People)—one of his most important books, written shortly before his death—strongly emphasizes the need for reform of Christian life.
- Admonitory. In Wraeck-Sweert (Sword of Revenge), Teellinck warns of divine judgments that will descend upon the people who fail to repent and turn to God. In Zions Basuijne (The Trumpet of Zion), he tells representatives of the provinces that the Netherlands cannot be saved without a spiritual and moral reformation. Teellinck often wrote short books to warn against specific sins. In Timotheus (Timothy), he warns about the use of images, and in Den Spiegel der Zedicheyt (The Mirror of Morality), he opposes immodesty and extravagance in dress.
- Polemical. In Balaam, Teellinck warns against Roman Catholicism, and in Den Volstandigen Christen (The Mature Christian), against Arminianism. In Eubolus, Teellinck opposes Arminians for their man-centered doctrine, though he also points out faults of the Calvinists. Teellinck believed that most Calvinists focused on sound doctrine at the expense of practical godliness. He thought that Calvinists should read practical writers (practijk-scribenten) such as William Perkins and Jean Taffin. He also stressed that staunch orthodoxy is worthless if confession is not made from the heart. Because of this emphasis, some Reformed leaders charged Teellinck with being too emotionally subjective and put him in league with the Arminians. Teellinck responded to these charges by saying that he emphasized both soundness of doctrine and godliness of life.

Major Themes: Sanctification, Devotion, Sabbath-Keeping, the Lord's Supper

Teellinck's writings focused on four major themes: sanctification, devotion, the Lord's Supper, and Sabbath-keeping. The present book, *The True Path of Godliness*, is his major work on sanctification.

Teellinck's most extensive work, *Sleutel der Devotie* (The Key of Devotion), offers nearly eight hundred pages on the subject of devotion, which is, for Teellinck, one aspect of sanctification. Teellinck's preface explains devotion as commitment to God in Christ, which is man's highest calling.

Teellinck also wrote extensively about the Lord's Supper, particularly in his *Het Geestelijk Sieraad van Christus' Bruiloftskinderen, of de Praktijk van het H. Avondmaal* (The Spiritual Ornament of Christ's Children of the Bridechamber, or The Use of the Holy Supper), which was reprinted eleven times from 1620 to 1665. The book consists of four lengthy sermons, the first of which details a believer's duty toward the Lord's Supper; the second, preparation for the Supper; the third, partaking of the Supper; and the fourth, conduct after the Supper.

Teellinck was offended by how easily the Lord's Day was profaned in the Netherlands. In 1622, he wrote *De Rusttijdt, ofte Tractaet van d'onderhoudinge des Christelijcke Rustdachs, diemen gemeynlijck den Sondach Noemt* (The Time of Rest, or A Tract about Maintaining the Christian Day of Rest, Which Is Generally Called the Sunday). Divided into seven books, *De Rustijdt* urges strict observance of the Sabbath and includes details from Teellinck's own experience on how to prepare for the Sabbath.

### Sanctification and The Path of True Godliness

Teellinck's first love was to promote the Puritan ideal of the sanctification of life in all its aspects, nurtured by heartfelt devotion. That is why *The Path of True Godliness* was chosen as the first of his writings to be translated into English.

The Path of True Godliness, originally titled Noord-Sterre, aawijzende de juiste richting van de ware godzalighed (North Star, Showing the Right Direction of True Godliness), was printed four times

# Noord-sterre/

Aen-wijsende De rechte streke Van de vvare Godsalicheyt.

DOOR

Willem Teellinck, Bedienaer des H. Evangelij, binnen MIDDELEVEGH.



TOT MIDDELBURGH,

Shedruckt by Hans vander Hellen: boog Geeraert vande Vivre moonende by de nieuwe Beurfein de Drucherie/ 1621. Title page of the first edition of North Star

in Dutch: in 1621, at Middelburg by Hans van der Hellen; in 1636, at Groningen by Nathanael Rooman; in 1642, at Groningen by Jan Claesen; and in 1971, at Dordrecht by J. P. van den Tol. This last edition, edited by J. van der Haar (from the 1636 edition), was used as the basis for this translation. The translation does not include Teellinck's lengthy foreword to his brother Ewoud (in which he complains that many professing Christians are too worldly and forget God), his preface to the "Receiver General of Their Noble Mighty Lordships, the Estates of Zeeland," or his address to the Christian reader, none of which contributes to the substance of this volume.

The Path of True Godliness, Teellinck's major work on sanctification, is a Puritan-style manual on how to practice godliness. Teellinck divided this work into nine sections, which he called "books," then subdivided the books into eighty-one "chapters." We have kept the book divisions, only shortening the titles, and used the chapter titles as subdivision headings.

- Book 1. Since many people boast of their faith but have no saving knowledge of the truth, Teellinck feels a need to address three matters in this book: (1) what true godliness is, (2) how believers should conduct themselves in practicing godliness, and (3) why the exercise of true godliness is of utmost importance.
- *Book 2.* The second book discusses the realm of darkness that opposes the practice of godliness. The three main powers of this realm are our own depraved flesh, the world, and the devil.
- Book 3. Teellinck shows how the kingdom of grace, in contrast to the realm of darkness, promotes godliness. The kingdom of grace possesses three powers: the renewed spirit, which wars against the flesh; the church of God, which fights against the world; and the Spirit of God, who opposes the devil. Each of these powers possesses three gifts that oppose and overcome its enemy in the realm of darkness.
- Book 4. The fourth book shows us how to respond to these two realms. We must at all times keep life's three major purposes before us: the glory of God, the salvation of our own souls, and the promotion of the salvation of others. Teellinck then explains how the realm of darkness tries to divert people from life's real purposes by influencing them to live without ever knowing those purposes, to pursue wrong purposes, or to pursue the right purposes only halfheartedly.
- *Book 5.* This book describes the means of achieving the true purposes of life: God's holy ordinances, God's works, and God's promises. It also describes people upon whom it is especially incumbent to use those means: civil authorities, church office bearers (especially pastors), and ordinary Christians.
- *Book* 6. This book shows how Christians must attain the right purposes of life through the assistance of the right means described in the last book, all the while living consistently, watching diligently, and struggling against every hindrance.

Book 7. Here Teellinck provides us with a variety of God-centered motivations for practicing godliness. These include the Father's wisdom, omnipotence, and loving-kindness; the Son's incarnation, exemplary life, and kind invitations to come to him; and the Spirit's promise to give new hearts, to overlook weaknesses, and to graciously reward the practice of godliness.

*Book 8.* This book contains motivations for practicing godliness and is divided into three major sections: our natural condition, the manifold blessings of God, and the promises we make to God.

Book 9. The last book presents motivations for practicing godliness from the excellence of the godly life, including the glorious God we serve, the glorious work that is accomplished, and the glorious fruits that result; the misery of the godless life, including the awful master that is served, the detestable work that is accomplished, and the shameful fruits that result; and the emptiness of material things with regard to this life, to death, and to life after death.

Throughout this book, Teellinck insists on the need for personal religious experience and the detailed regulation of Christian conduct in life, especially in regard to prayer, fasting, Christian education, and Sabbath observance but also extending to mealtimes, clothing, dancing, carnivals, and card playing. Notwithstanding his intensely spiritual and practical emphasis on inward godliness, the modern reader may be somewhat taken aback by his repeated negative references to a number of these outward things. To understand Teellinck in these cases, one must understand two things.

First, Teellinck's stress on external sanctification must be understood against the backdrop of the numerous sins and faults of his generation that deeply troubled him. According to Teellinck and like-minded contemporaries, both society and the church were plagued by lasciviousness, which was promoted by dancing, immoral jokes, amorous literature, and card playing, often accompanied by gambling.

Teellinck also complained about the abuse of worship by church members. Preaching was not highly respected. Many attended church only out of custom. A fair number extended their dinner hour so that they could not attend the evening service. When they did come, some slept or yawned openly, and a few talked to one another during worship. Sacraments fared no better. Some people unnecessarily postponed the baptism of their children. Others would

enter the service late, have their child baptized, and leave before the service concluded. Scores of parents were not fulfilling their baptismal vows to instruct their children in the doctrines of Scripture. Some church members presented themselves at the Table of the Lord without knowing the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, or they entered church after the sermon was over just in time to partake of the Supper. Few sacrificed in giving to the church; their offerings were usually meager and given thoughtlessly.

Sabbath days were ill-spent by many. Many people attended church only once on Sunday, even if they had no other obligations for the day. The remainder of the day was not spent in personal Bible study, self-examination, holy meditation, or spiritual conversation. Many would work at unnecessary occupations or take pleasure trips. Some would frequent taverns, even after attending the Lord's Supper.

Family life often followed little or no order. Discipline was minimal at best, and family and private worship were often neglected. Parents did not talk to their children about the sermons or about their catechism class. Some let their children dance, play cards, sing sinful love songs, and exchange jokes. There was little waging of war against the devil, the world, and the self.

Christian education was neglected. In many towns, the teachers themselves were ignorant of the basics of vital Christianity. Many young people from the church married unbelievers, staging grandiose wedding receptions at which guests drank too much. Wearing of immodest clothing was on the increase—even in the church. Many had an inordinate desire for keeping up with the latest fashions. The poor and the orphans were oppressed. Selfishness and idleness abounded.

These, then, were some of Teellinck's complaints that are repeated throughout his writings. Did he exaggerate his case? Many today might think so, but to understand history rightly we must always place ourselves in the era in which the author lived. We must not forget that many of Teellinck's contemporaries voiced similar complaints. As we read Teellinck's lists of admonitions against various evils, we must bear in mind the pastoral context in the midst of which he labored.

Second, like most Reformed forefathers who focused on a practical, vital religion of experience, Teellinck believed that true spir-

ituality is inseparable from an outward walk of life that flees all kinds of worldliness. Whatever we may think of Teellinck's warnings against external forms of worldly behavior, we may be certain of one thing: He was motivated by a zealous desire for God's glory, not by legalism. Teellinck and nearly all those who stressed Reformed spirituality in the seventeenth century believed that serious admonitions against a worldly spirit were a natural outgrowth of scriptural teachings such as "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20); "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2); "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31); and "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

In Teellinck's day, the only way to travel long distances was by sea. Sea travel involved many dangers and problems of navigation; it was easy to lose one's way. Travelers looked to the north star as a fixed point to help them keep to a true course. Teellinck intended this book to be a north star to those laboring to practice godliness as they traversed the seas of life. Read this book, then keep it handy to refer to for spiritual problems you encounter. Let it assist you in your daily walk with God as you strive to stay focused on your ultimate North Star, Jesus Christ, who is our sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30).

### Influence

Teellinck's major influence was injecting Puritan color into the Dutch Second Reformation. Though he never taught theology at a university, was no scholar at heart, and was not eloquent, his life, sermons, and writings helped shape the piety of the entire movement.

Teellinck was one of the most influential "old writers" (oude schrijvers) of the seventeenth century. More than 150 editions of his books were printed in Dutch. Moreover, his practical piety was carried on and reshaped by other major Dutch Second Reformation writers such as Voetius. Four of his books were translated into English in the 1620s but were never reprinted: The Balance of the Sanctuary,

Paul's Complaint against His Natural Corruption, The Christian Conflict and Conquest, and The Resting Place of the Mind. Several of Teellinck's books were also translated into German. One of Germany's most influential Pietists, Friedrich Adolph Lampe (1683–1729), often used Teellinck's writings to promote the practice of godly living. Thus, Teellinck left his mark on both continental and American pietism.

Teellinck's influence waned in the Netherlands in the eighteenth century when the Dutch Second Reformation became more of an introspective movement that stressed passivity rather than activity in practical Christian living. Only his *Het Nieuwe Jeruzalem* was reprinted in 1731.

Four of Teellinck's smaller works were reprinted in the nineteenth century. His writings drew the attention of Heinrich Heppe in 1879, Albrecht Ritschl in 1880, and Willem Engelberts, who wrote a doctoral dissertation on Teellinck in 1898. H. Bouwman's Willem Teellinck en de practijk der godzalighed (Willem Teellinck and the Practice of Godliness), written in 1928, defends Teellinck against the somewhat negative views of Heppe and Ritschl. More of Teellinck's major titles were reprinted in the twentieth century, beginning in 1969. Some scholars associated with the Stichting Studie der Nadere Reformatie—Willem op't Hof in particular—are now studying and writing extensively about Teellinck's life and writings. Teellinck is being increasingly read in the Netherlands today.

The Practice of True Godliness deserves a hearing in English at the present hour. Teellinck's positive emphasis in promoting biblical, Reformed spirituality serves as a corrective to much false spirituality being marketed today. It also serves as an important corrective to orthodox teaching that presents truth to the mind but does not apply it to the heart and daily life. Teellinck helps us link a clear mind, a warm heart, and helping hands to serve God with the whole person, which is our reasonable service. He fleshes out James's emphasis, saying to us on every page, "Show me your faith by your works" (cf. James 2:18).

# воок 1

### The Character of True Godliness



The apostle Paul assures us that the true Christian faith is knowledge that leads to godliness. Today, unfortunately, many are found who glory in the Christian faith but do not have even the barest knowledge of the truth. Additionally, many are found who have some knowledge of the truth but not enough to produce godliness. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him." Among those who have a form of godliness are many who deny its power, complains the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 3:5.

Therefore, to instruct the simple, we intend to show how all those who glory in the Christian faith and possess some knowledge of the truth may use such knowledge to practice true godliness, which brings with it, in every way, great gain with contentment, since this godliness contains promises from almighty God for this life and the life to come. For our purpose, then, we will deal with the following three topics:

- · what true godliness is and of what it consists
- how we should conduct ourselves in order to live in the practice of godliness
- why we should prefer to practice true godliness above all other works

### What True Godliness Is

True godliness is a gift of God by which man is made willing and able to serve God. He no longer lives according to the lusts of the flesh, as the ungodly do, but according to the will of God, revealed to us in his Word. For this reason, the godly life, in which we give ourselves over to the service of God so that we live no longer for ourselves but for God, is called our reasonable service. That means we regulate our service to God according to the direction of the reasonable "milk" of God's Word, not according to our own notion or understanding (1 Peter 2:2).

They who sincerely render this reasonable service show in every respect how much they value, highly esteem, and treasure the Lord their God. Because these godly people (and they alone!) make the things of God their chief occupation in every way, they regulate and direct their whole conduct accordingly. They show thereby to the whole world that they subordinate all their own interests to the Word of the Lord and to his holy will, to their honor and to his service. This true godliness, which magnifies the Lord our God in every respect (which is how it shows itself), consists mainly of three things, three holy exercises, which we will now consider.

### True Godliness Shows Itself in Three Ways

A Sincere Resolve to Live a Godly Life, according to God's Word, from Henceforth

The first holy exercise in which true godliness shows itself in a lively way is that one makes a sincere resolve, and comes to a firm decision, to walk from henceforth in all the ways of the Lord, always making God's good, acceptable, and perfect will a rule of life, and

making God's glory the chief end of all one does. This was David's resolve according to Psalm 119:44: "So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever." And again in verse 106, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." In this, the good conscience of the godly shows itself. The apostle Paul was also of the same mind when he says, "For we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly" (Heb. 13:18). The first exercise of godliness consists of three parts.

1. We are firmly minded to cease from all evil, which we clearly know to be displeasing to God. Everyone knows that this is the duty to which the godly man is bound (Psalm 15). The Lord our God commands us to forsake, avoid, and shun

all ungodliness, superstition, and profaning of his holy name, his holy ordinances, and his holy day of rest

all disobedience or contempt for authority of father or mother, master or mistress

all hate, envy, quarreling, anger, jealousy, and bitterness toward and unreconciled differences with our neighbor

all lewdness and frivolousness

all pomp, splendor, and excess in clothes and festive occasions

all unchastity

all idle talk, songs, and books

all gluttony, drunkenness, and drinking

all laziness, falsehood, and deceit in earning our living or in our calling

all avarice and filthy lucre

all lies, false witness, slander, and backbiting

in short, all wicked and wrong practices and desires

When we read in the Word of the Lord that God detests such things, we must sincerely resolve, if we wish to show that we are godly people, to avoid and shun these things—yes, all of them.

So we must immediately cut ourselves loose from the sins that we, in fact, can leave off and forsake—for example, from those evil deeds and practices that are done with our bodily members, such as drunkenness, fornication, idle talk or songs, backbiting, deceit, and a thousand other evil things. These we *can* forsake immediately, if we are willing. We must both give these up and, as the saying goes, "keep our hands off" if we would abide before God the Lord with nothing for which to make excuses.

Surely, no one should accept the excuse of a thief who goes stealing and breaking into homes at night and then claims that he should be excused because he just can't stop. Frankly, the same applies to those who get drunk, fornicate, slander, or indulge in idle talk, since these things are done with the members of the body. A fornicator or drunkard can and must stop his fornication or drunkenness just as the thief must stop his stealing. All these things stand on the same level before God, however much the judgment of men may regard one sin more shameful than another.

Concerning other sins such as anger, envy, evil lusts, and all other sins of the inner man that are not committed with our bodily members but burn deep in our heart and cling to us as spots to a leopard—these we should surely forsake with a most heartfelt determination. For these sins we should daily humble ourselves, and we must constantly fight against them, crying out with the apostle in all sincerity, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

If we would show that we are truly godly people, then we must absolutely not indulge ourselves in such things as the godless are accustomed to use. As soon as we learn how displeasing such things are to God, and if we are really serious and want to show that we are indeed godly people, we must be found fighting against them all. We should therefore deny ourselves for God's sake, even if we loved some of these sins as much as our own right eye, yes, even if some sin seems as necessary and as profitable to us as our own right hand. Nevertheless, in such cases we must cut sin off for God's sake.

2. We are sincere in performing all the good works that we already know are pleasing to God. Who doubts that this, too, is what the godly are bound to do? In his Word, the Lord commands us

to believe in him and in his Son Jesus Christ; to fear him, love him, and cleave to him

to pray to him, to read his Word diligently, to meditate on it, to keep it in our heart, to speak about it, and to glorify him and praise him in song

to be meek and patient in all he sends upon us

to remember and keep his holy day of rest

to love the assemblies of the faithful and attend them frequently

to have a heart for the concerns of his church and people

to humble ourselves and to mourn not only for our own sins but also for those of the nation and to rejoice greatly when we see progress

to submit to and obey those who have been placed in authority and to have a care for those who are under our authority, to lead them to the fear of God

to show love to our neighbors, to give alms to help the needy, and to visit the sick and the prisoners

to return no evil for evil but to do good to those who cause us grief and to bless those who curse us

to be humble, modest, chaste, discreet, and temperate in our manner of life

to be diligent, prudent, and upright in the pursuit of our calling to season our words with salt, to defend the innocent, and to shame the evil tongue and oppose it

in short, ever to practice "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8)

To that end, we should also endeavor to fill our hearts with many holy desires, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, and, indeed, to desire the Spirit's gifts. Above all things of the world, we should seek to experience the power of Christ's death in order to put to death our members, which are upon the earth, and all evil desires and to feel the power of his resurrection in order to rise again in newness of life and so express the life of Christ in our own life.

When we read in the Word of God that these and the like things please God, we should determine to practice them in earnest—yes,

all these things—and to live accordingly. What we can in fact do we should cultivate and practice right away, everything in its season, and not first sleep on it for a night. What we cannot so easily take in hand, there we must exert ourselves and strive to receive the gift of God by which we are enabled to perform these praiseworthy things as well.

3. We must also heartily wish and sincerely desire to understand as much as we can of the revealed will of God concerning us. If any unknown sin still lodges in our heart, if there is anything wrong in our conduct or that lies hidden in us without our knowledge, we must desire with utmost sincerity to have it revealed and made known to us in one way or another so that we may correct it. Such was the mind of godly David, who always prayed to his God this way: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23–24). Such was also the mind of godly Job, who inquired of his God, "How many are mine iniquities and sins? Make me to know my transgression and my sin" (Job 13:23).

This deserves careful attention. One meets with people who are "willingly ignorant" and don't want to know God's righteous will for their lives. In ignorance, they willingly continue in a particular sin from which they derive some profit or comfort. It grieves them if a man of God comes to testify against them from the Word of the Lord, as John to Herod, that "it is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6:18). That means they should not persist in this or that sin (which they love, even as Herod loved his Herodias) but should break off from and forsake it if they would please God with their conduct.

Yes, some become very angry when told that they are not godly people. When they are chastened in this manner, they become downright irate. They begin to resist with all their cleverness and intelligence. With a thousand contrived and dim-witted evasions, they try to get out from under this yoke and put matters in a good light, saying that their conduct, if it is not especially virtuous, is at least unobjectionable. When they are confronted even more strongly, and they begin to realize to some extent that their behavior is not quite right, still they are far from hating their sins and from thanking those who take the trouble to warn them.

They are more likely to hate the man of God in their heart and to slander him. And what does this prove but that these people do not esteem godliness to be great gain! If they did, they would regard as profit and gain whatever is revealed and made known more clearly to them regarding the things that inhibit godliness. All this shows that such people are no champions of godliness! Who cannot see that the conduct of these people fully agrees with the thoughts of the ungodly, who say to God, "Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways" (Job 21:14)?

These ungodly thoughts should be far removed from the defenders of godliness. Together with David, we should all say to God, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end" (Ps. 119:33).

# One Does His Utmost to Carry Out His Hearty Resolve to Live a Godly Life

The second holy exercise by which the practice of true godliness shows itself is this, that having made the resolve, one does his utmost to put that holy resolve into effect. This was the practice of godly Paul, who speaks on behalf of all the godly as follows: "Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him" (2 Cor. 5:9). Furthermore, he testifies of himself, "Herein do I exercise myself," making it his whole endeavor "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16).

Surely, it is only mocking God when someone insists that he has a sincere and wholehearted intention to live a godly life and a determination to do so yet at the same time does not take any trouble and is not zealous to live a godly life here and now! If someone announced that from this moment on he will take up surgery or the sale of goods and yet day after day you see him do nothing about it, would anyone put stock in his words? Similarly, whoever wants to be regarded as a godly person must not only resolve to live a godly life but must do his utmost to demonstrate that he esteems godliness as his greatest gain. Now this exercise consists of three parts:

1. We must abstain from and avoid everything that can impede us in the practice of godliness. This was godly David's practice: "I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word" (Ps. 119:101). By nature, man is so constituted that he will, to the best of his ability, endeavor to avoid anything that hinders his reaching a desired goal. We see this clearly in misers, lovers, glory seekers, and all worldly people, once they earnestly set their minds on something. The weightier and more important the matter is, the more zeal and foresight they use to preclude or avoid whatever may hinder them. Since to the godly, godliness means the greatest gain and the most important work, they try most diligently to anticipate and to ward off every hindrance and obstacle in their path.

The man who boasts that he earnestly intends to practice godliness, while at the same time gives no evidence that he abstains from or avoids the hindrances and obstacles to godliness, clearly shows that his intentions are not genuine and indeed that his resolves are merely feigned. Therefore, everyone who wants to demonstrate that he is a godly person should abstain as much as possible from and avoid all hindrances and obstacles to godliness. The chief obstacles and hindrances to true godliness will be discussed in detail as this work continues, for we are obliged to investigate this further in its due place.

2. We must also make use of and strive after everything that can be useful in the practice of godliness. Godly David exerted himself greatly in every respect and availed himself of all known means and tried to add to these, thus enabling him to take hold of and advance in true godliness (see Psalm 119). Human nature is like that. We see that newborn babies by nature clamor for milk that can feed and strengthen them. Every day we see the same thing with worldly men: When they have set their minds on something, they leave no stone unturned and use every means to achieve their goal. If they do not succeed with one technique, they try another. If it happens that many means are needed, they take hold of them all in order that they may reach their goal. If worldly men do this now to obtain some puny thing in the world that perishes with use, should not God's children make much more use of every means to advance in true godliness, which brings great gain and eternal satisfaction?

In just this way, does not he who makes no effort and neglects the zealous use of the means that can strengthen him in true godliness show openly that he does not genuinely hold godliness as his greatest gain? Therefore, everyone who would pass for a truly godly person should make diligent use of every means that can promote godliness. The chief means to that end are shown in detail in books 4 and 5, to which the reader is referred.

3. We must therefore begin to practice all this, not in our own strength, which means absolutely nothing, but in the power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the strength of our life and by whom we can do all things. See how the godly Paul counsels us: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10). This was his own practice, as it was of all the godly in his time. He therefore says, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). Take note that before we believed we were powerless and totally unable to do good, and after we believe we are not "sufficient [able] of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency [ability] is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5). Therefore, the good that is in us through regeneration serves only to make us more and more inclined to expect and to cultivate the good help and power of God. He strengthens us and works all our works for us, even he who "is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

Take careful note of this, for surely many a man begins the practice of godliness and then gives up in discouragement and withdraws from his work. Since he began it in his own strength, he makes a mess of things. It's exactly the same thing as when a little child, in his own strength, wants to build a big castle. It is a fact that our own strength means nothing in the building up of the Christian life. Unless the power of the Almighty comes upon us, we cannot build anything that will last. That is why we call it godliness; it reminds us that without *God* and his holy help we would never be able to accomplish this work.

How the devil tries to keep this fact hidden from the eyes of men! That is why there are found everywhere so many who now and then put on holy airs as if they henceforth want to be godly, but you see after only a short time that they have returned to the world, having so very quickly lost interest. This happens because they began in their own strength; therefore, they found their work too much for them and quickly tired of it because they found no more joy in it. Therefore, all students of true godliness who wish to begin this work well

and truly wish to bring it to completion must renounce their own strength. They must surrender themselves entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2), that they may be strengthened through him to hold fast their good resolutions, to put them into practice, and, indeed, to bring them to full effect. We will explain in books 3 and 6 how the Lord Jesus brings this about in those who deny themselves and cast themselves upon him. All who wish to practice true godliness thoroughly, to their comfort, are advised to take particular notice of what is written there.

## One Prepares to Be What God Intends Him to Be

The third way that true godliness reveals itself is that in practicing true godliness with heart and mind, we prepare to be all that God wants us to be. We are willing to do this both in temporal and spiritual things. This means letting God's Spirit lead and work in us as he pleases and according to what he considers best. David showed this kind of willingness when he was pursued by Absalom and said to Zadok the priest, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him" (2 Sam. 15:25–26). Joab, David's general, learned from his godly master that when he had done his utmost in the battle against his enemies, he left the outcome of the matter completely in God's hands. He therefore said to his soldiers, "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good" (2 Sam. 10:12).

In the same way, a godly person must be content to be whatever God wants him to be, whether rich, poor, sick, healthy, honored, insulted, rejected, or privileged. He must be willing to be tall or short of stature, strong or weak in faith, free from or full of temptation—all according to what the Lord God considers best. This does not mean that he should not distinguish between sickness and health, or between weakness and strength in faith, for if he could choose, he would clearly decide to be strong rather than weak in faith and to be healthy rather than sick (1 Cor. 7:21). However, this means that we must be willing to do the will of the Lord our God, whatever the circumstances. For example, if God's will is that a godly per-

son be sick rather than healthy and weak rather than strong in faith, then the godliness of that person is also proved by whether he accepts God's will in this, for true godliness is revealed not only in fulfilling what God commands or forbids but also in willingly putting up with those things God sends our way. We are to be content with whatever God arranges for us, for this shows true godliness.

The godly should particularly submit themselves to the holy exercises and activities of the good Spirit of God so that they may be brought to where the Spirit of the Lord leads them, just as his Word decrees (Rom. 8:4). For example, when the Spirit of the Lord strongly admonishes us to slow down in our worldly affairs and gently rebukes our inward hearts for being far too busy with the things of this world, indicating that he grieves over this, we should gladly listen to him. We should humble ourselves and learn to deny our earthly cares and concerns. When the Spirit of the Lord admonishes us to regulate our family better—to read the Word of God with members of our family, to catechize our children, to reinstate family prayers that we may have neglected for a time, and to start praying regularly and perseveringly with our family—then we should gladly comply, for this means that we have freed ourselves from our own activities and are willing to deny ourselves in order to surrender completely to God. to be ruled by him, and to be led by his Holy Spirit in the way that seems right to him. True godliness is clearly shown in this kind of submission as well as in the ways mentioned above.

So we see that true godliness consists of not only doing what we can to serve God but also of exerting ourselves, rousing ourselves, encouraging ourselves, and stirring ourselves to strive to put into practice what we have now learned. We must submit ourselves to the good will of God in whatever way it may be made known to us and let ourselves be ruled by him. Indeed, we should conduct ourselves before the Lord our God as clay in the hand of the potter in order to be completely turned, kneaded, and molded by the Lord, our good God, who knows what is best for us (Isa. 45:9; Jer. 18:6).

We bring this up so often because we have seen how many godly people take no notice of this. Their hearts are thus greatly confused, with the result that they often become depressed. However, they would have been strengthened and would have continued the race had they paid careful attention to the Word of God. Notice that this activity consists of three parts.

- 1. Humbly judging ourselves. Even when we have done all we could do, we should not be satisfied, for we are still unprofitable servants (Luke 17:10). We are still totally unworthy, wanting to have things our own way. Indeed, we deserve and often badly need to have our desires frustrated so that we do not get our own way and do not have the desires of our heart fulfilled but instead are visited by the rod and afflicted by many difficulties. This was the case with the godly apostle Paul. Even when he did everything he could, he wrote, "For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:4). All godly people should think like this.
- 2. Trusting that everything is done for our good. We should often remind ourselves that the Lord our God knows what is best for us. That should assure us that, come what may, everything will be all right in the end, for the Lord God takes it upon himself, whatever may happen to us, to make all things work together for our good (Rom. 8:28). Thus, godly Paul testified in the middle of all his difficulties, "For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). All godly people should have the same attitude when they are surrounded with difficulties. They should try to affirm and experience how God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).
- 3. Availing ourselves of every means. When we experience great suffering and distress, we must submit to God's holy will in the way that we have already explained. We must then diligently avail ourselves of all the means that God has revealed in his Word and has placed at our disposal in this temporal life to help deliver us from our difficulties. The apostle Paul applied every lawful means as much as possible, and these were permitted so that he might be helped and delivered from his difficulties (see 2 Cor. 12:8–10). David and other godly people did likewise. Indeed, Scripture says of the Lord Jesus himself, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5:7), and he prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39).

We need to take careful note of this. It is a praiseworthy Christian quality to commit our ways to the Lord in all our sorrows and to be content to "let patience have her perfect work" (James 1:4). We are to be cheerful about whatever plans God has for us. However, we should not think that it is ungodly to do whatever we can to be delivered from difficulties that sorely press us, as long as we do not resort to the wrong means. This does not contradict godliness at all; rather, it is a sign of true godliness to call upon God in the day of trouble and ask to be delivered (Ps. 50:15), provided we do it in humble submission of ourselves to the will of God in all circumstances. Like the Lord Jesus Christ we may say, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39).

Some people do not pay attention to this. As a result, they become greatly hardened and insensitive in their grief. That is because they have disregarded and neglected this clear command of God. It is also due to the cunning work of Satan, who deceived them into believing that it is actually most exemplary to lie passively under God's rod and let him do his work. All godly people should be on their guard against this deceit and gladly avail themselves of every good means to be delivered. Then they should leave the outcome to God. The spiritual means for deliverance (the physical cannot be counted) are mainly these:

1. Be humble in affliction. We must humble ourselves when we are oppressed under the hand of God and, as it were, kiss the rod with which we are afflicted. This humility is to be shown in various ways:

In wholehearted and public confession that we deserve to suffer all the pain that the Lord has laid upon us because of our sinfulness. We will suffer a thousand times over if he thinks this best for us. Like true people of God we will say, "We have transgressed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned" (Lam. 3:42).

Expectantly believing that we will be delivered from all our sorrows because of Christ's merits and by the mighty hand of God, who has chastised us (Micah 7:8–9). We and all creatures are humbled so we may exalt God alone, for we truly believe that only God can help us without anyone's aid (Ps. 123:3; Hosea 14:4).

With cheerful thanksgiving for all the good that we, such unworthy people, have enjoyed from God in the past and still enjoy today. This is how Jacob acted as he stood in awe before his God (Gen. 32:10; see also 2 Sam. 22:4).

2. Pray for deliverance in our sorrow. If we want to experience God's helping hand, we should lament from a humble heart. We should avail ourselves of prayer to promote a gracious deliverance. To make that prayer most effective, we should pray:

According to God's will (1 John 5:15). That means that in prayer we surrender our will to God's will, bending our will to God's will more than God's will to ours. We should be careful that in praying for deliverance we do not lay down the law to God in the measure of grace, for even if he does not deliver us from suffering, indeed, even if he puts us to death, we still have our hope in him. We should also trust him in the timing of deliverance, for he knows best the most appropriate time to help us (Heb. 4:16). We should trust him, too, in the manner and means of deliverance, for great things can be done by simple means, or without means, or even by means that appear to have the opposite effect. Nothing is impossible for God.

*In faith.* That means we should be firmly convinced that God's will is always the best for us, that God will in time deliver us from our distress, and that he will truly comfort and strengthen us in our distress.

With persistence. Scripture says, "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). That means we should not quit praying, even if it seems that we are not receiving immediate deliverance, strength, or comfort in the things we have prayed for in faith and in accordance with God's will. We should remember that the man who perseveres in all sincerity will prevail (Gen. 32:24–28). So we should pray fervently and frequently and, if necessary, add fasting to our prayer.

3. Seek the face of God in our sorrow (2 Cor. 7:4). This means we should seek assurance of God's favor in our heart and mind, even more than immediate deliverance from our difficulty. Indeed, we should be like the prodigal son, who sought the favor of his father more than food and clothes—even though initially lack of food and clothing drove him to return to his father (Luke 15:21).

Seeking God's face greatly increases when we repent of our evil ways and turn to God. That means abandoning our plotting and scheming and forsaking our wicked sins so we may be completely led and ruled by God from now on. We must practice this if we truly seek deliverance, for the Lord primarily sends oppression so that we will repent. Listen to what he says in Revelation 3:19: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." When affliction brings us to repentance, the Lord will immediately end the oppression, acting as a skillful physician of our souls who sends us oppression to lead us to repentance. This repentance is especially shown in these ways:

With clear understanding of what sins have led to this. We should not be satisfied to say in a general way that we deserve these afflictions because of our sins, as worldly people do. Rather, like David and the church of God, we should meditate on our suffering and our ways, earnestly considering for which specific sins—even calling them by name—God is chastising us and wanting us to repent, for we can turn our feet to the testimonies of the Lord only when we have determined what those sins are and repent of them before the Lord (Ps. 119:59).

Asking forgiveness for specific sins. After we have identified specific sins for which we justly think the Lord is chastising us, we should be more sorrowful for these sins than for the suffering itself. We should diligently strive to forsake the sins that are causing us this grief more than we should strive to be delivered from this oppression. Remember, once the wound of sin has healed and dried up, the scab of distress will soon fall away by itself. We should therefore take care that we transform carnal and worldly sorrow, which we all feel by nature over things that disappoint us, into godly sorrow, for godly sorrow works repentance to salvation and is not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world (namely, a sorrow over worldly things, without having any scruples over sin) works death in us (2 Cor. 7:10). We must thus judge ourselves in order not to be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 4:3–5).

Promising to be more zealous in serving God. When God has delivered us from affliction, we should promise him with a holy vow that from now on we will be more diligent in his service than before. David often made a promise to God when he was afraid or in trouble (see Pss. 50:14–15; 66:13–14). Commitment to a vow will contribute

much to our sanctification. This particularly applies to things that we are not able to accomplish very well because we are hindered by suffering. When we are delivered, especially from illness, we should do the following: thank God in the great congregation of many people (Ps. 35:18), teach sinners and transgressors about our experience (Ps. 51:13), and start hating sin more and more throughout our life because sin has indeed caused us all this grief (Ps. 34:13–15).

If we practice these things faithfully when we are having difficulty, then God will not fail to accomplish the purpose he has for our chastisement. We will enjoy great benefits and be giving a positive witness, which is no small comfort to our soul! For although we experience the same afflictions as worldly people, we are not afflicted in the same way, nor do we endure suffering the same way they do. The oppression of worldly people is clear evidence of their eventual damnation and a foretaste of the pangs of hell they will suffer, whereas oppression for us is evidence of our salvation, which is from God alone (Phil. 1:28).

#### Additional Proofs of Godliness

# A Prompt Forsaking of Sin

In the three holy exercises we have described, we have seen how true godliness powerfully reveals itself. Yet we know that the godliness of the most holy saints in this life is still imperfect. It is very defective, for we all stumble in many ways (James 3:2). Even the best of us are sometimes overcome by a certain sin. However, there are three additional holy exercises in which true godliness further proves and reveals itself.

The first exercise is that when we have been overtaken by a sin, whether great or small, we do not remain or persist in our transgression as ungodly people do, for they feel comfortable living in their sins (1 John 5:19). By contrast, as soon as we discover that we have been overcome by some sin, we must jump back from it as quickly as if we had fallen into a fire or had been taken like a fish out of water (Jude 23). We must consider how awful it is that we have become so ensnared in sin, and we must be reproached by it just as David was

when he fell into sin. When he came to his senses and realized what he had done, he saw the awfulness of it. We read in the Psalms that he was in a sorrowful state from the time he had sinned. His sap changed into summer dryness long before the prophet Nathan approached him. All that time, David had tried to forsake his sins, but he was not able to do so because his fall was so great (Psalm 32).

The godly therefore will gladly make use of these three means to help them more promptly forsake their sins.

- 1. They see the wickedness of sin. They eagerly and earnestly consider what foul and loathsome corruption sin is. They also see how the devil uses sin to defile their hearts and make them more offensive to God. They also understand that the longer they live in sin, the more polluted they will become. When we fall into sin, we are just like someone who falls into a filthy gutter filled with garbage or manure. The longer he rolls around in such filth, the dirtier he will get and the worse he will smell.
- 2. They remember their vow to forsake sin. They gladly consider the holy confession that they received in baptism and in the Lord's Supper and remember that they are committed and obligated to immediately forsake sin as soon as they realize that they have fallen into it. It is bad enough that heathens stay and wallow in their sins, but to find true Christians doing so is inconceivable. It should not be so in Israel. We must do our utmost to forsake our sin immediately (Romans 6).
- 3. They look to God for grace. They realize that by quickly forsaking their sins, they may still find God's grace and be reconciled and restored to his favor. They keep in view that the Lord God, whose Spirit is grieved because of sin, is still ready to have compassion on them because of his great grace. He will have mercy on them, forgetting and forgiving their sins as soon as they wholeheartedly turn to him.

This hope, this trust, this loving-kindness of God affects them so greatly that they immediately and with all their strength tear themselves away from sin and return to the Lord, for they now realize that it is far better to live with him than to live in sin.

### The Search for Reconciliation with God

The second exercise that reveals true godliness is that, when we have sinned, we not only forsake sin and refuse to remain in it but also try above all to be reconciled with God. Ungodly people ignore this matter. Indeed, when they have greatly sinned, they ask defiantly what they have done wrong. That is not so with the godly. When they have been overcome by a great sin, their greatest concern is to find out how they can be reconciled to God. We see this clearly in David, who reveals his ways in Psalm 51. Godly people diligently try to be reconciled to God as soon as they notice that they have fallen into a specific sin. They particularly apply these means:

- 1. They are sorry for their sins. They not only immediately for-sake sin when they have transgressed but also sincerely weep over their sins, just as David did in his sorrowful search for God (Psalm 51). They know they cannot be reconciled to God as long as they do not weep and lament and sincerely grieve over their sins. They also realize that there are more than enough reasons for doing this. They think, "If I had merely been selfish and greatly offended some respectable person, who is also a faithful friend—if I had ignored and insulted and provoked him—would this not greatly concern me? Well, then, should I esteem my great, good, and merciful God so little that I would not feel sad and weep if I had sinned against him?" (see Jer. 30:14; James 4:9). Is this great God just someone we can treat with contempt and pay no attention to? This thought cuts the godly to the heart and makes them weep and lament before God.
- 2. They promise to forsake sin. The godly pray for mercy and forgiveness and solemnly promise the Lord God that they will not repeat that sin (Hosea 14:3), just as good-natured children usually promise their parents to be good after they have done something wrong. The parents expect this of the children before they restore them to favor. In the same way, the godly know very well that it would only be mocking God to seek reconciliation with him because of their sins and yet have no intention to forsake them. Should an adulterous wife achieve anything when she seeks reconciliation with her husband, who knows very well that she has no intention of refraining from adultery? Remember, God knows our thoughts afar off. He knows long before we do what we plan to do (Deut. 31:21).

If we have sinned and want to be reconciled to God, then we must sincerely plan to forsake that sin and pray for mercy and grace.

3. They seek forgiveness in Christ. Like the repentant David, their faith is stirred up when their sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:25). They understand well that the great guilt and awful stain brought upon them as fallen sinners by evil and sin cannot be removed by mere tears, even if they cried both their eyes out (Jer. 2:22). They clearly understand that nothing other than the lifeblood of Christ can accomplish this. Therefore, they will not allow their souls to rest until they have their hearts sprinkled by faith with the blood of God's Son, which alone can cleanse them from dead works (Heb. 9:14). They seek reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, the beloved in whom God is well pleased and who is their propitiation.

Ungodly people know nothing of this experience. Therefore, they generally ignore the matter of reconciliation. If they have suffered a little heartache and perhaps have shed a tear or two for their sins, they think everything is fine; God should now be completely satisfied. But such ungodly thoughts are far removed from the godly. When the godly sin, their souls cannot be comforted until they are reconciled with God, and reconciliation with God is possible only through true faith in the blood of God's Son.

## Obtaining Spiritual Gain from Falling into Sin

The third exercise that reveals true godliness is that, when we are overcome by some transgression, we not only forsake it and reconcile ourselves to God but also try to make an effective antidote out of its venomous poison. We try to use our stumbling as a motivation to stimulate within us the following special virtues because of our fall:

1. More prudence in our conduct. We try to guard ourselves better against that sin and against all sin in the future. That means that now that we have discovered, to our own shame and through restoration, how easily we can fall into sin if we are not on our guard, we avoid opportunities to sin from the start and more diligently use the means to godliness. That is what David did (Ps. 119:37–38).

2. More humility before God and men. Because of our great weakness and sin, we acknowledge that we deserve all punishment, scorn, and contempt. We learn to put our nose in the dust with the rest of the church of God when the Lord visits us with some trial. We patiently bear his chastisement, knowing that we greatly deserve it because we have sinned against God. Moreover, we know that it is necessary for us to be pruned in that way since our carnal nature is responsible for so much destruction. That is how David felt about his sin (Psalm 51). We should therefore be patient with our fellow men when they sin against God or perhaps against us, taking care that we do not rebuke them too sharply. Rather, we should bear with their sin with a spirit of meekness by comparing them to ourselves, for we may also have similarly transgressed in the past. We still stumble in many things and might also unexpectedly be overcome by such a transgression in the future (Gal. 6:1).

We should also get used to thinking, when something happens that is not quite to our liking, that it is no surprise that things do not go according to our own will since we do not always behave according to God's will. Why should we, poor sinful people, be roused to anger because of some mischief or slander committed against us? Surely, we often deserve it. We have earned it and need to be treated poorly to humble ourselves and hate the sins that bring all this upon us.

3. More zeal in building God's church. Our sin ought to inspire more zeal in us to build up God's church and edify our neighbors. We ought to consider that our sins have offended the people of God. We have also selfishly slandered the good name of God. Then, too, if we have committed a secret sin, we have grieved the good Spirit of God. Thus, we should now counter this by magnifying God's name and edifying our fellow men. We should also sincerely walk in godliness so we may please God's Spirit anew. By a more diligent exercise of godliness, we can help restore whatever has been disturbed by our stumbling. This also was David's intention after his fall (Psalm 51).

Godliness is nurtured by these virtues as well as by means of other spiritual exercises. Just as great care and attention helps newborn babies, if they are basically in good health, to grow and develop, so these practices increasingly develop godly life in us and cause it to grow.

#### Three More Excellent Virtues

From the previous discussion, we conclude that when God's will is observed, true godliness possesses three most glorious and excellent virtues. Those are to be steadfast, immovable, and abounding in seeking to do God's will. We will discuss these three attributes in reverse order.

1. It teaches us to abound in doing God's will. True godliness does not strive after God's will for any other reason than that it is God's will. True godliness teaches us that we should not hold on to even one sin, making it our pet sin, but we should refrain from all sin because the Lord loathes and forbids all sin (Ps. 119:101). This kind of godliness also teaches us that we should not neglect even one virtue or Christian duty, making it, so to speak, an outcast. We should honor and observe all virtues because they all please the Holy Spirit and he commands them all.

The godly person will not, like Herod, gladly do many things that John taught and at the same time hold on to one pet sin. Instead, like David, he will keep his feet from every evil way. Unlike the hypocritical Israelite, he will not say to a man of God that he will do everything he has been taught in the name of the Lord and then, after having understood the will of God, refuse to obey it. Like Abraham, he will try to be obedient in all of his duties. That is what the apostle calls abounding in the work of the Lord.

Some choose to do otherwise, embracing some virtue or duty but neglecting or completely ignoring another. For example, some are baptized and have their children baptized but will not go to the Lord's Supper. Or some privately pray but do not teach their households to pray nor pray with them in the fear of the Lord. That kind of person does not submit himself to God's law but makes himself a judge over God's law, as is explained in James 4:11, for he dares to take away from and reject all that the law praises and approves.

On the other hand, those who refrain from some sins or wrong whims while still holding fast to some pet sin that they cherish do not submit to God's Word either. For example, some refrain from prostitution or rolling dice but not from drinking and idle talk at mealtimes or from bitterness or strife. They are not submissive, for God's Word forbids all those sins. Indeed, that kind of person has

begun to judge God's law as being too narrow, therefore making himself a judge over the law. His deeds cannot please God; he is declared guilty of breaking all the commandments because of his attitude.

The godly person, however, is of a different mind. He sincerely tries to refrain from all the sin he can. He continually fights against those sins that cling to him against his will. He laments, deplores, fights, and prunes these sins as much as he can. He practices all the virtues and holy duties that he is able to perform and strives to develop those virtues that may be obtained only by long practice and much effort, making use of the means God offers.

Ungodly people fall miserably short in this. They, like Herod, think that they do well if they repent of many things, but they still hold on to some pet sin like a lover, having no intention of letting it go (Job 20:12–13). They should heed this warning and consider the consequences of their actions. As long as they continue to hold on to this sin, no reconciliation is possible between them and God, for they hold on to the sin that God most hates in them. It is similar to an occurrence of adultery. When there is talk about the reconciliation of a respectable man with his adulterous wife, the husband is most hostile to the lover with whom his wife has most played the harlot and with whom she is still infatuated. If reconciliation between her and her husband is ever going to take place, she should above all else discard and forsake this lover.

2. It teaches us to steadfastly do God's will. We do his will not only when it coincides with bringing us comfort, profit, or reputation and when everything goes well but also when we can expect only great ingratitude, loss, or humiliation from the world—indeed, opposition and hostility from all sides. For in this, true godliness will teach us to place God's will above pleasure, profit, or reputation; we will do whatever pleases God in spite of gratitude or ingratitude, honor or dishonor, profit or loss. The apostle calls this being "stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

True godliness taught the three godly men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to answer King Nebuchadnezzar by saying, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:17–18).

The apostle Paul was of the same mind (see 2 Corinthians 6). So were all those godly people who did not value their lives above martyrdom but kept the faith of Jesus and the commandments of God (Revelation 12:17). It is certainly true that only good soil persistently "bring[s] forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). The righteous and the truly godly are this good soil. Listen to what the prophet says about this: "Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant" (Deut. 33:9).

It is also clear that those who are faithful in God's service and are truly godly people do not merely practice godliness when it pays to do so in a worldly sense but regard godliness itself as great gain. They are steadfast in godliness even when it causes them much worldly loss. They therefore prove that they love godliness for its own sake.

What kind of poor religion does someone practice when he gives up serving God every time opposition comes along? What do we think of a servant who serves his master only when everything suits him but deserts the master as soon as some difficulty arises? Solomon's proverb certainly applies here: "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small" (Prov. 24:10). They are like disloyal soldiers who turn their backs on their commander and sneak away in retreat when they see the enemy approaching.

Those who walk steadily in God's way only as long as great numbers of people go along with them should also take heed. As soon as the crowd wants something different, for example, a big party, a great dinner, a wedding feast, or something similar, then they lack the courage to resist. They allow themselves to drift along with the current flood of disorder. In those circumstances in which the Lord God most needs their service and in which he demands and expects to be honored and served, they desert him. Such people certainly do not produce fruit with patience (Luke 8:15).

3. It teaches us to be steadfast in doing God's will. This means not doing his will just sometimes, when we're spiritually motivated or when we're in the mood, for example. We do God's will then with great earnestness, diligence, and perseverance. But at other times, when we're not in the mood, we often let things slip and slide for a while. True godliness teaches us that it is wise and right to

always be steadfast in the Lord and not to waver. Indeed, true godliness sees to it that we do well in God's service and that we make up our minds to remain with the Lord forever. Like a Hebrew servant, we would gladly have our ears pierced at the doorpost of the house of the Lord in order to remain in God's service.

The godly life is not like the morning dew, which soon disappears (Hosea 6:4). Rather, it is like a fountain from which living water flows (John 7:38). It is indeed a life that never dies; it begins in this life and continues in the life to come, where it continues eternally. As Christ the Lord says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death" (John 8:51). In that spirit, David calls out to the Lord, "So shall I keep thy law continually for ever and ever" (Ps. 119:44).

Those who do not persevere in practicing true godliness but abandon it and become entangled in worldliness again are like a dog that returns to its vomit and as a washed sow that goes back to wallowing in the mire. They have the form but not the power of true godliness. Clearly, they are at best no better than dogs that, only because of the nagging ache in their stomach, temporarily forsake the filth of sins. They are like pigs that have not changed inside but have been washed only outwardly of their filth (2 Peter 2:22). But whoever has truly received the power of godliness perseveres to the end. That person rejoices in the Lord so much that he is able to say what Peter said when asked if he wanted to forsake his God: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).