

Excursus X: An Excerpt from “A Warning Exhortation Against Pietists, Quietists, and all Who in a Similar Manner have Deviated to a Natural and Spiritless Religion under the Guise of Spirituality,” by Wilhelmus à Brakel¹

Among those who espouse blind popery—whose religion does not differ much from paganism—there have always been those who have rejected creature-worship and who have written much about *internal* religion, elevating this as highly as their natural intellect would permit them. These persons are referred to as *mystical writers* (that is, *hidden writers*) since the general public did not achieve such a level of contemplation, such elevation of spirit having been concealed from them. Today many are very fond of the word *mystical*, as if it implies a high level of spirituality. . . . [Such] have little to say about the Lord Jesus as being the ransom and righteousness of sinners—about how He, by a true faith, must be used unto justification and in approaching unto God, beholding in His countenance the glory of God, and practicing true holiness as originating in Him and in union with Him. . . . Numerous imaginations originating in empty minds, natural speculations, deceptions of Satan, dreams, and zealotry go under the name of mysticism . . . [including] the *Quakers*[.] . . .

¹ The text comes from pgs. 639-699 of “A Warning Exhortation Against Pietists, Quietists, and all Who in a Similar Manner have Deviated to a Natural and Spiritless Religion under the Guise of Spirituality,” chapter 43 in vol. 2 of *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, Wilhelmus à Brakel, trans. Bartel Elshout. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993. While Brakel originally wrote his work in 1700 to combat the Satanic pseudo-spirituality and mysticism of his day, the Roman Catholic and Quaker mysticism he spoke against left such a stamp upon later pseudo-spirituality that will be discussed in the following excurses that his penetrating insight is amazing and extremely timely. Nevertheless, the fine discernment expressed by Brakel in this excerpt does not constitute an endorsement of whatever runs contrary to Scripture and Biblical, historic Baptist doctrine and practice in the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie* or Dutch Puritan movement.

Further, concerning Brakel’s assault upon “pietism,” Arie de Reuver notes: Brakel . . . as a writer may without any hesitation be regarded as a representative of pietism when he is measured by contemporary standards. The content that the term “pietism” had for him was different from what it carries today. . . . By “pietism,” à Brakel means “fanaticism,” which he associates with quietists, Quakers, and followers of David Joris, and which is reflected in figures like Böhme, De Molinos, Fénelon and also De Labadie. . . . [T]heir piety gives the pretension of spirituality but rests entirely on the natural mind and is developed through fantasy and imagination. . . . [and the] mediatorship of Christ is disregarded by these “mystics.” . . . [T]he “pietists” . . . proceed[ed] apart from and even against the written word of God. . . . Brakel . . . regards contemplation as completely legitimate. However, he wants to distinguish sharply between natural and spiritual contemplation . . . [the latter of which] contemplates God-for-us as he makes himself known in Christ as a reconciling Father. . . . natural contemplation leaves man as he is naturally, [while] spiritual contemplation lets him share increasingly in the divine nature. . . . [Furthermore,] the Spirit always directs people to Christ as their ransom and righteousness, and . . . he leads the believer in everything according to the word. . . . God . . . satisfies one engaged in spiritual reflection with extraordinary and further . . . revelations of himself, according to his promises in John 14:21 and 23, and he allows [the soul] to see God more closely and experience who God is and what he is to h[im] in Jesus Christ . . . [yet] contemplation is not the result of one’s own activity and effort, but of divine illumination. It is entirely the Spirit who imparts this insight. But the Spirit does not work apart from Christ or from faith in the word. (pgs. 251-254, *Sweet Communion: Trajectories of Spirituality from the Middle Ages through the Further Reformation*, Arie de Reuver, trans. James A. De Jong)

[The Roman Catholic] Michael de Molinos . . . rejected all external exercises of religion and proposed that one need only be in a quiet and introverted frame God-ward in order to be irradiated by Him. . . . [He sought] the elimination of all external activity, including the activity of the intellect and any spiritual elation. This would consist in being totally divorced from self, being elevated above all things, being fully united with God, and in passive reflection to lose one's self fully in God, thus worshiping Him in pure love. This is how far the illusions and vain speculations of the natural man—who is void of the Spirit and ignorant of God—can go. Since he excluded all external and spiritual motions and promoted quietness in both areas, his followers, many of whom are to be found among Papists and various sects, are called *Quietists*, that is, *those who are quiet or at rest*.

Some years after Molinos, François de Salignac de Lamothe Fenelon, [Roman Catholic] Archbishop of Cambrai, published . . . *The Exposition of the Fundamental Propositions of the Saints, or, Inner [Spiritual] Life*. It is truly not a spiritual book. Fabricated spiritual matters—which are neither to be found in Holy Writ, nor in the practice of the saints—are elevated in a natural manner to as high a level as natural reflection can possibly bring them. He is of the same mold as Molinos and the previous mystical writers among the Papists. They teach a love (or lovelessness), a beholding of God and union with God to consist in some nonessential fancy contrary to the Word of God. This Word teaches us to behold God in the face of Christ as He reveals Himself in the work of redemption. As such God is known and believed by the truly regenerate and true believers. This renders them joy in, and love for, God, causing them to glorify God.

The difference between the self-denial, love, beholding of God, etc., of the mystics and of the truly godly consists in this: The mystics comprehend, say, and do everything according to their natural intellect, fantasy, and imagination, doing so without the Spirit. They do not make use of the Lord Jesus (that is, as a ransom, and righteousness unto justification and peace), as being the only way of approach unto God, and unto true and genuine sanctification. Such exercises and this way are hidden from them. Those, however, who are truly godly, regenerate, and who truly believe, live by faith and not by sight. In all things they make use of the Lord Jesus. They come to the Father by Him, accustom themselves to behold God in the face of Jesus Christ, do everything as in the presence of God, and walk before God's countenance in humility, fear, love, and obedience. These are the old paths. From this you can observe that the difference between the mystics and the truly godly is as the difference between imagination and truth; between being natural and without the Spirit and being led by the Spirit; between worldly and heavenly; between seeking an unknown God and serving the true God; and between

being engaged without, and contrary to, the Holy Scriptures (dabbling with invisible things), and living according to the written Word of God. A truly godly person remains humble and serves God in Spirit and truth, and is thus kept from the temptation of entertaining high-minded and fabricated imaginations. . . .

I shall state and defend some propositions whereby the errors will be evident and whereby a believer, holding fast to those truths, will be delivered from their temptations.

PROPOSITION 1: *A Christian must have a great love for the truth; all splendid pretense void of love for the truth is deceit. . . .* [T]his truth is the seed of regeneration; that is, it is the means whereby man is drawn out of darkness into marvelous light. “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth” (James 1:18); “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23). He who therefore neither knows nor has the truth cannot be regenerated. If he is not regenerated, however, all his speaking about spiritual things is but the work of nature and he is entirely devoid of the truth. . . . [T]he truth is the means, fountain, and rule from which holiness issues forth and according to which it must be regulated. Holiness is the loving observance of truth. “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:14-15). The Lord Jesus when praying for holiness for His own, beseeches that it may come about by the truth. “Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). If the heart is to be purified, it must occur by means of the truth. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1 Pet 1:22). He who lives in sin is a slave and servant of sin. He who is set free from sin is set free by the truth—a truth comprehended and known well. “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). To live holily is to walk in the truth. “... even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 3-4). Someone who neither knows nor has the truth cannot be holy. Whatever he manifests is but the natural work of an unconverted person. Every step which deviates from the truth is impure and causes impurity in the way of holiness. . . . If we love the truth, we shall hate all that is opposed to the truth, however insignificant it may be[.] . . . One cannot trifle with the truth. It is too precious a gift from God[,] and God takes notice of how we deal with it. . . . [N]ot only is it contrary to God’s will to have fellowship with error, but also with those who espouse error. . . . Thus, every [church] member must be on guard against intermingling with those who espouse false doctrine. Hear what the command is: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship

hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:14-15,17). If you stand in awe of God’s majesty, if you tremble at His Word, and if the truth is precious to you, be on guard against false doctrine, false teachers, and for men who are mired in error, however attractive they may appear to be. Let your heart be governed by the exhortation of the apostle: “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 1:10); that is, have no fellowship with him and avoid him so that you will not be drawn away from the truth by him in the least. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:17-18).

How necessary it is to carefully heed this proposition! Compare yourself to this. Do you have such a tender love for the truth? Is it that precious to you? Do you joyfully give thanks to God for it? Do you live according to it? Do you engage in battle on its behalf? Do you indeed abhor all error and those who espouse it? Are you fearful and concerned about associating with such persons? If such is the case with you, then you are not in danger of being misled by the elevated language of [false teachers such as mystical quietists], for you will immediately perceive whether they have and promote either the truth or error, and whether they have love for the truth. . . .

PROPOSITION 2: *A Christian must have great love and esteem for the church. . . .* He who . . . view[s] the church from every dimension with a spiritual eye and heart, will not only be ignited with love for the congregation and, with ecstasy, stand in awe of the glory of the church, but he will also be provoked to holy wrath against all those who would dare to undertake anything which is detrimental to the church. The [comments] above will give sufficient reasons to be on guard against the delusions of [mystical quietists]. They exert every effort to ruin the church—if this were possible. They reject the church, church order, the divine commission of ministers, the ministry of the Word . . . [t]hey thus make themselves guilty of the abominable sin of despising the congregation of God. “. . . or despise ye the church of God” (1 Cor 11:22). He who despises the church of God despises God Himself and the riches of His goodness, and will not escape the judgment of God. Even though the one [Quietist] espouses this and another person again different heresies and errors, all of them holding to opinions of their own, they agree in this respect that their religion consists in stripping themselves as being nothing

(in reference to God, that is), and in the contemplation upon an imaginary and fabricated God. They ascend in this as far as their natural perception will enable them, which to such darkened individuals appears as wondrous light and as being wondrously spiritual. Occasionally they come together to listen to someone speak of these matters. Their religion furthermore consists in manifesting an indiscriminate love for people of various sects—even as far as the wallet is concerned. He who has no love for the church has no love for God. He who is engaged in battling the church is battling God and will endure His judgment. . . . [T]hey make a great display of spirituality and thereby gain entrance with the upright. They thus lead them away from the church and from true religion. Therefore you must, first of all, keep in mind what their objective is, and from that perspective judge their fair speeches. However, do not permit yourself to be ensnared by these fair speeches, nor to be tempted to the commission of the dreadful sin of leaving the church and engaging in battle against her. “He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matt 12:30).

PROPOSITION 3: *The Holy Scriptures are the only rule for doctrine and life.* In the first proposition we have demonstrated how precious and lovely the truth is, and that he who loves the truth, hating all who deviate therefrom, will withdraw himself from all who depart from the truth—and thus also from the *Pietists*. In the second proposition we have discussed the esteem and love which all lovers of the church have for the people or congregation of God from which the [quietists] are separated. To this we shall now add the preciousness and loveliness of *the Word of God*, in which all saving truth is comprehended, upon which the church is built, and which God has given to the church for the purpose of preserving and spreading it. This the [quietists] either reject or minimize.

God has caused the way of salvation (there being but one, which is hidden from the natural man) to be recorded so that His people would have a steadfast rule of doctrine and life, and be protected against the deceits of Satan. . . . God has furthermore given such a record in order that the church be protected against the deceits of men who make use of craftiness, causing people to err in a subtle manner. He has also done so in order that everyone would be protected against his own heart which carries within it the seed of all heresy and error. This way of salvation, having thus been recorded, has been entrusted to the church in order that she would preserve it in its purity, transmit it from generation to generation and from nation to nation, proclaiming it everywhere unto the conversion of men, to lead the converted to the church, and to govern the faith and life of the members of the church.

The Word of God is the foundation upon which the church is built (Eph 2:19-20),

the insignia of the true church, the nourishment of the church, the only rule of faith and life, and the sword against the enemies who err and battle against the truth—it is everything to the church. There is no church without the Word and there is no Word without the church. . . . The Spirit who has inspired the Word and causes believers to perceive, taste, and experience those matters contained in the Word, assures them of the divinity of that Word. He does this not only by means of its inherent evidences of divinity, but also by way of immediate operation in their hearts. . . . Even though a natural man reads and hears of the mysteries of the Word of God, he does not understand them unless God by His Spirit makes them known to his soul by immediate revelation. . . . [Quietists] lack this spiritual light. They have natural light concerning God’s majesty and the insignificance of the creature. They perceive that man’s felicity consists in the beholding of God; and by means of the Holy Scriptures their natural light becomes increasingly clear. Since these persons do not understand the spiritual mysteries, they occupy themselves with a natural beholding of God, imagining that their natural perceptions are wondrously spiritual, and far exceed the Word and that of those who are truly illuminated. Yet such perceptions are nothing but fabrications and illusions which deprive them of salvation.

Not only do the Holy Scriptures contain mysteries, but they also contain all mysteries which God wills His children to know, and which are needful for their spiritual functioning here and the enjoyment of felicity hereafter. Therefore, to teach spiritual matters or spiritual exercises which have neither been revealed nor prescribed in God’s Word is deceit. . . . There is nothing lacking in the Word—neither small nor great, low nor high. “The law of the Lord is perfect” (Ps 19:7). He who either adds to or subtracts from it shall have no part in all the promises recorded in the Word. Rather, all the curses which are declared in the Word will come upon them (Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19). . . . The Word of God is “able to make thee wise unto salvation ... and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:15-17). One cannot desire anything beyond this; he who fabricates something else accuses God’s Word of being deficient. God demands nothing beyond this; he who demands, seeks, and does something apart from Scripture cannot please God with his will-worship. . . .

The Holy Scriptures are the only rule for doctrine and life. He who wishes to live godly and desires to be saved must regulate his intellect, will, affections, words, deeds, and entire religion according to this Word. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20); “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments. Wherewithal

shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy Word” (Ps 119:6,9); “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet 4:11). Therefore—whoever you may be—if you love godliness and salvation, if you have esteem and reverence for God, you ought also to have respect and esteem for the revealed will of God which, by the goodness of God, has been given to us unto salvation. Let this Word be your only rule . . . and you will walk surely. . . .

If the Word of God is so precious to you, if you love it so, and if you make it your rule for faith and life, you will be immune to the delusion of the [Quietists]. If you are taken in and shaken by their speech—having the appearance of spirituality—and you turn to the Word of God, you will immediately perceive that it is not according to the Word, that the Word of God does not speak in that fashion, and that God does not lead His children in such a manner; the Word of God will be a shield to you.

When you encounter them, you must investigate first of all what knowledge of, esteem for, and study they make of the Word. You will then perceive that some reject it entirely, ignore it, and will not respond to your investigation. Others will perceive it as a primer, from which little ones and beginners derive benefit; they contend that one must ascend beyond the Word and engage in more elevated contemplations. However, they will either deny or be silent about the fact that the Word has been inspired by God and has been appointed to be the only and eternal rule—which you may interpret as a denial. Others, who do not perceive the spirituality of the Word with their natural eyes, will deem it to be of little value and will view it as a dead letter, having neither spirit nor life. They maintain that those who hold to the Word will never become spiritual. Others, in order not to give the appearance of casting aside the Word, and your being frightened by them, will make use of it in their conversation and will quote such Scripture passages which speak of light, beholding, and spirituality. Investigate them more carefully, however, as to whether they believe the Word of God to be inspired in its entirety, and whether they acknowledge it as the only rule for faith and life. You will then experience that things are not in order here. . . . You thus have sufficient reason to reject them, and to consider all their doings to be but natural (which they truly are), thinking of this passage: “Lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?” (Jer 8:9). . . .

PROPOSITION 4: *Regeneration is the originating cause of spiritual life, and of all spiritual thoughts and deeds.* . . . However, the point in question is this: What is regeneration and what change does it bring about in man? . . . Many pagans have . . . excelled in conquering their corruptions and in practicing virtue . . . [h]e who reads Cicero, Seneca, Marcus Antonius, Epictus, and other pagan writers will stand amazed.

Regeneration does also not consist in losing sight of yourself; it does not consist

in abstaining from aiming at or seeking prosperity and salvation, or your joy and delight for yourself, and instead lose yourself in nothing else but the beholding of God alone. It does not consist in the reflection upon and beholding of God, in sinking away in God, and in continually bringing yourself in the presence of God. All of that can also be the work of nature; pagans, idolatrous Papists, and other proponents of error do likewise.

It does not consist in the increase of natural light and virtuousness, as if man would be regenerated were light to exceed darkness or virtuousness sin. For,

(1) growth is of the same nature as the principle from which it originates. The principle of light and virtuousness is natural, and thus also the increase in both—regardless of how far it may go.

(2) The natural man, however illuminated, virtuous, humble, and exalted he may be in his beholding of God, is and remains a fool (Rom 1:22), without God and without hope (Eph 2:12), and blind (Eph 4:18; 1 Cor 2:14). Thus, regeneration does not consist in the increase of the matters [here] mentioned.

(3) If this were so, man would not need to be regenerated; however, he does stand in need of this. Growth is the continuation of a principle which already exists, and not the receiving of a principle of life which did not exist previously. Regeneration is, however, the generation of a principle of a life which did not exist previously, and thus a translation from one state—death, into another state—life.

(4) Regeneration proceeds from the Holy Spirit by means of the gospel; it causes a person to behold God in the face of Jesus Christ, generates spiritual life by union with Christ, and culminates in felicity. None of these things are true for natural light and virtuousness, and they thus differ in their essential nature.

Regeneration is a complete change of man wrought by the Holy Spirit through the Word. This change is both internal and external. It is from death to life, from natural to spiritual, from an earthly disposition to a heavenly disposition, from self and all creatures to Christ, and through Him to God. Regeneration begins in the heart and in the innermost recesses of the soul. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26). The heart encompasses the intellect, will, and affections.

When someone comes under conviction and receives a desire toward God, he will then initially be in danger of striving for great things. Since natural religion is easier—having the cooperation of nature (true regeneration being contrary to man’s nature)—he will very readily be drawn away to [Quietism], which is nothing else but a natural religion. He will thus be in danger of remaining in a natural state and of perishing. . . . When you are in the company of these people (however, I counsel you to avoid them and

to stay with the church and the godly in the church), do not be taken back by highly elevated matters which have a great appearance of spirituality and thus are very attractive to beginning Christians. If, however, you ask them to speak about regeneration, you will find them to be ignorant in that respect or to be entirely in error. This will be sufficient for you to see that all their activity is but natural and thus draws away from true holiness and communion with God, and consequently from salvation itself. And if there is someone among them who was truly a partaker of the principle of regeneration prior to joining with them, and thus is able to speak soundly about this, do not allow yourself to be deceived along with him who is deceived. The principle of his life is indeed true and he will be saved, but the hay, straw, and stubble which he has built upon it will be burned. Regeneration is imperfect and we must therefore not follow them in all that they do; they also still sin. They, possessing a spiritual principle, can nevertheless yield somewhat to their nature which is yet in them, and thus can practice self-denial and behold God in a natural sense. This will cause them to be a Christian of small stature where true growth is absent. Therefore, take heed.

PROPOSITION 5: *A Christian continually avails himself of faith.* . . . In order for someone to be a partaker of [the] Savior, he must respond to [the] offer [in Scripture], go to Christ, receive Him, and entrust himself entirely to Him. This act of faith is not the cause of a person becoming a partaker of Jesus, but only the means. Therefore, whether faith is weak or strong, whether it is exercised with clarity or be it in darkness, whether it is exercised with much ease or much strife, is not of the essence, but rather, whether it is done in truth with the heart. . . .

Faith is the beginning point of whatever believers undertake. Faith is the soul of their activity and permeates everything. By faith they take hold of His strength and thereby are active as though it were their strength. By faith they overcome the world, are united with the fullness of Christ, and become partakers of all His benefits. . . . If you are upon this way and exercise faith in the manner here delineated, see to it that you persevere in the same way. Do not ever depart from this way, for it will safely bring you to the end of your faith . . . [y]ou will be safeguarded against the errors of . . . all . . . who are in error as far as the practice of godliness is concerned. . . .

There are also those who at one time have received Jesus as their Savior. This task having been accomplished, they might as well proceed to perfection and pursue more lofty things. Poor people—as if it were possible to grow, apart from Christ; as if we could live, except by faith and the continual, actual beholding of Christ and being in union with Him; and as if we could bear fruit without continually drawing sap and nourishment from Christ! He who conducts himself in such (or even stranger) fashion, let him be convinced

of his error and turn to Christ, in order to make use of Him continually unto . . . sanctification[.] . . . If someone is upright in the exercise of faith, but yet small in grace, let that which has been said be as a beacon. Let him flee from all who do not enter upon this way of faith and who with a great show of spirituality fail to encounter Jesus.

PROPOSITION 6: *All of man's felicity, here and hereafter, consists in communion with and the beholding of God.* . . . This is the most excellent promise: "I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:23); "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). Their seeing of God agrees with the manner in which God reveals Himself from His side. "And hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true" (1 John 5:20); "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18); "For God . . . hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). Such is the activity and the exercise of the godly: "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps 16:8); ". . . they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance" (Ps 89:15); "My meditation of Him shall be sweet" (Ps 104:34); "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! . . . when I awake, I am still with Thee" (Ps 139:17-18). This is sufficient to conclude that the beholding of God is reserved for God's children only. . . . God does not reveal Himself to the world; that is, to the unconverted, to natural men, to those who do not have the Spirit. This is evident in John 14:22, 17, "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world . . . the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him." . . . Therefore, whatever the natural man writes or speaks concerning reflecting upon, beholding of, and being united to God in love, is nothing more than an illusion.

Although a natural man cannot ascend to the right knowledge and beholding of God, and since God does not reveal Himself to such, he nevertheless knows from nature that God is, and that his felicity consists in communion with God. This is further reinforced by the natural knowledge of the Word of God. As a result, many have engaged themselves in beholding God, so that the beholding of God and the discussion thereof is no evidence of spirituality.

I repeat, many unconverted do engage themselves in beholding God by means of their natural light, or by means of their knowledge of the Word of God.

(1) This is very evident among the heathen, who speak concerning this in their writings, doing so with such lofty expressions that a Christian must be amazed and astonished about it.

(2) This is also evident among the popish mystics and thinkers. They are obviously idolaters, for they worship a piece of bread as their God. They pray to angels

and deceased persons and render religious honor to images. They destroy the atonement of the Lord Jesus by their abominable mass and in other ways. They wish to be justified by their own works, and thereby merit heaven. They acknowledge the antichrist to be their head and hate true believers. They are persecutors of the church of the Lord Jesus; and they, either by their contribution or by having pleasure in this, are guilty of the blood of the martyrs, and are thus much more abominable than the heathen and others who function only in the realm of the natural. They write and speak much about divine meditations, doing so with expressions which are as lofty as their imagination can devise—yes, their words even exceed imagination, and if they cannot understand them, others may understand them. If they cannot, they may be amazed about these incomprehensible expressions.

(3) This is also evident among many others (not of the popish religion) who also engage themselves in meditation and reflection about divine things. It is evident that they neither have a knowledge of nor a love for the truth. They neither have a love for the Word of God nor do they establish it as their only rule for doctrine, thoughts, and life. There is no love for the church (from which they depart), and there is neither love for nor union with the truly godly. They can unite themselves with all manner of devoted people, but cannot tolerate the truly godly who rebuke them by means of their light. They are unacquainted with the nature of true conversion. This is also true for saving faith, they being total strangers of its exercise. . . . [T]hey speak about great things, about being drawn up, about ascending above themselves and above all creatures—yes, dreadful though it be, above God Himself. The language of Balaam is heard among them: “The man whose eyes are open . . . which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance” (Num 24:3-4).

From that which has been said, it is very evident that unconverted persons also engage themselves in beholding God. You therefore ought not to be immediately inclined to think that those who speak thus—that is, who in a charming manner speak of extraordinary illumination—are true recipients of grace and are truly spiritual. The blind can also speak of light, the unspiritual of the spiritual, and those who are alienated from God about communion with God, and the loveless about love—doing so not feignedly, but from a heart that thinks to have and speak the truth. You must therefore investigate whether that which they say about beholding God is truly spiritual. Follow the advice of the apostle John: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

In order not to be hastily inclined by word or spirit, attentively take note of what has been said thus far: There is a twofold beholding of God—a *natural* and a *spiritual*.

(1) The *natural* beholding of God is practiced by the unconverted; the *spiritual* beholding of God by those who are true recipients of grace, have truly been regenerated, and truly believe.

(2) The *natural* beholding of God occurs by the light of nature and the external illumination of the Word, by one's own spirit, imagination, and mental powers, and by the drawing of rational conclusions; the *spiritual* beholding of God occurs by the illumination of the Holy Spirit who has drawn believers out of darkness into His marvelous light.

(3) The *natural* beholding of God *has God as its object as He reveals Himself in nature* as the eternal, exalted, and glorious One, etc. In the *spiritual* beholding of God a person *beholds Him in the face of Jesus Christ*; that is, in the manifestation of all the perfections of God in the work of redemption. In such spiritual beholding He reveals Himself at times in an immediate sense as their reconciled God and Father, doing so occasionally with such light, glory, sweetness, and bliss that it cannot be expressed, and at other times with such expressions as: "I, God, am your God; I am your salvation; I have loved thee with an everlasting love; thou art Mine."

(4) The *natural* beholding of God leaves a man alienated from God; the separation remains. The illusion of being united with God is but a union according to their own imagination, for true union occurs only by way of faith—something they do not possess. The *spiritual* beholding of God brings the soul near to God—yes, unites her with God as belonging to Him. ". . . that they also may be one in *us*" (John 17:21). Oh, blessed unity! Oh, blessed appropriation!

(5) The *natural* beholding of God leaves man unchanged, that is, in the state of nature—even though through the knowledge of God they may flee from the excessive pollutions of the world. The *spiritual* beholding of God causes the soul to become increasingly a partaker of the divine nature, and to become holy as He is holy. By the Spirit of the Lord, the soul is transformed through such beholding—in harmony with the object being beheld—from glory to glory. See to it that you do not immediately deem all beholding of God to be spiritual in nature.

It is evident from the nature of their reflection, that the beholding by God of such persons—which in reality consists more in elevated words than in substance—is the result of natural illumination and imagination. Such beholding varies greatly according to everyone's physical constitution, inclinations, and power of imagination. What follows represents the common manner in which this transpires; if someone is not exercised in the manner as we shall now delineate, he should know that we do not have him in view.

(1) Some, as they undertake such reflection, meditate upon what they know about

God in a natural sense, and have read or heard of God. They do not consider at that moment that they have read or heard this. While thus meditating, they ascend from one thing to the next, having conceptions about God in accordance with what their heart and imagination suggest. They then think about what they imagine, and all that is engendered by such thoughts. God must then be as such reflections project Him to be, and in this manner God has then revealed Himself to the soul. It is immaterial whether such thoughts of God are suitable and in harmony with the Holy Scriptures; this revelation is sufficient assurance for them that it is true and spiritual.

(2) Some will mentally withdraw from all creatures, themselves, and God. They are occupied with nothing except with expelling those mental objects which present themselves time and again. They thus endeavor to be without thoughts, as if nothing existed, and they thus enter and sink away into thick darkness. If a ray of light then falls upon their mind in this thick darkness, without the discovery of anything objective, they consider this to be of the Spirit. They allow themselves to be illuminated and guided by this light, and as this light increases, God is unveiled to them as being such and such. This they observe passively—as being the recipient of it, allowing themselves to be illuminated thereby. The soul is thus ignited in love and receives such motions and stirrings, until they again come to themselves and desist for the time being.

(3) Some, having a desire to approach unto God and to behold Him, divest themselves of all reason, memory, affections, and even of those thoughts which initially ignited the inclination to contemplate upon God as having served their purpose. Having thus been emptied of everything, the soul turns to God, considering Him to be her God, and continually thinks: “Oh God, Thou art my God, and I am Thine.” The soul then listens to what God will subsequently reveal of Himself, and thus, in an infatuated manner, focuses upon God as being present. Here she reposes, tastes more than she sees, worships, exults, is in subjection, and exercises love. The only things missing here are the Spirit, spiritual life, the exercises of faith, the going to God through Christ, and the beholding of God in the face of Christ. Since these things are absent, they are all the work and imaginations of a person’s own doing. They are but natural exercises and thus of no value.

(4) Some remain quiet and in a disposition wherein which they are turned unto God, and do nothing but wait upon the Spirit. If nothing comes to mind, then they again proceed, being well satisfied. If something occurs to them, they deem this to be of the Spirit; then this is truth, and is more certain and infallible than the Word of God which they consider to be but a dead letter, a primer for beginners, and of no benefit whatsoever. If the thought which occurs to them gives direction to do or not to do

something, it is considered to be the leading of the Spirit and they give heed to it. They do not pray, speak, or do anything unless they are motivated by such an idea coming to mind; they thus, quietly and with delight, live on. When they are stirred up by an idea which occurred to them, they depend on this, irrespective of whether it either agrees with or is contrary to God's Word. This they do not investigate; it is a matter of indifference to them. They are thus carried away by their own spirit to abominable practices from which even the natural man recoils. This is borne out by the witness of those whom God in His goodness has converted from the error of their ways, and is also taught by daily experience. Some go further than that and play prophet. When thoughts about future events occur to their empty minds, they are deemed to be revelations which will either occur or not occur. Poor, misguided people! They desire to seek God and to do His pleasure, but completely miss the way itself. With all their ideas and the adamant passion of their own spirit they perish.

It behooves all Christians to live in the presence of God, to examine themselves as to what is the good will of God in which He delights, to esteem the Word of God as the revealed will of God and as an infallible rule, and continually to give heed to the leading of the Spirit. It behooves them to give careful heed to their well-illuminated conscience and to be desirous not to act contrary to it. To follow one's own spirit and ideas, however, as if they were from the Holy Spirit, is to run to one's own destruction.

In order to be safeguarded against such fanaticism, we must keep the following in mind:

(1) Man has his own spirit; there are many seducing spirits, and the evil spirit can transform himself into an angel of light. He, with the intent to deceive, can give thoughts which are essentially good, but stir man up to use them in an erroneous manner. We must therefore give heed and know by which spirit we are being moved.

(2) The Holy Spirit convinces man of sin and causes him to grieve, be perplexed, and in many ways be troubled about his sin.

(3) The man who is conquered by the Holy Spirit will be regenerated and translated from darkness to light, from death to life, and from being earthly minded to being heavenly minded.

(4) The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of faith who brings God's children to Christ, causing them to receive Jesus by a true faith as their ransom and righteousness.

(5) The Holy Spirit unites His children and keeps them united to the church, for by one Spirit are they all baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13).

(6) The Holy Spirit leads believers in all things according to the Word of God; He leads them into all truth. The Word of God is truth, however, and the only rule by which

we shall not err. By that Word He regenerates, sanctifies, leads, and comforts them. Know then with certainty that where these matters are not found, there God's Spirit is not present. Be assured that whatever is deemed to be spiritual but which does not harmonize with the above, is nothing but illusionary and are seductions of a man's own spirit. Regardless of how greatly one may boast of spirituality, be instructed and warned. Know that the Holy Spirit is given only to the children of God and that only those who are led by the Spirit do indeed have the Spirit of Christ. The natural man, however, does not have the Spirit (Jude 19); the world cannot receive the Spirit; it neither sees nor knows Him.

It is evident to the truly godly, when considering these ways of beholding God, that they are all but a natural work. This can especially be concluded from the fact that such persons consider the greatest mark of spirituality to be the measure by which a person is stripped of himself and loses sight of himself so completely as if he did not exist. This is not due to a shameful view of their sins, but the result of comparing themselves to God, or it is without reason, or because of the opinion that thus it must be. This is foolish spirituality, which is nothing but the fruit of nature! Why do you delight yourself in such contemplation wherein you utterly lose sight of yourself and do not think about yourself? Is not self your focus in this and do you not deem this to be your salvation? Why then do you engage in this? You neither need to nor are able to do it by virtue of it being God's will, as it is certainly of no benefit to Him. You thus do it for your own sake, since this reflection upon your nothingness is your delight. Therefore, while thinking that you do not have yourself in view at all, and to be rid of self completely, you are nevertheless seeking yourself. Only if such exclusion and deprecation of self were spiritual in nature (while in reality it is natural and sinful), it would not be a sinful seeking of self, but rather a holy seeking of self.

There can be either a sinful or a holy seeking of self. A sinful seeking of self is when one seeks honor, esteem, love, respect, advantage, etc. in order that all men and everything would end in them. A *holy* seeking of self is to promote one's own physical welfare for the purpose of being fit to serve God in whatever capacity that may be. In our seeking after God, it is not sinful to have the welfare of your soul, and thus light, life, love, joy, delight, and salvation in view. Rather, it is evidence of being engaged spiritually in the right way. This is a holy seeking of self, for:

First, God has created this spiritual seeking of self within man. Did not Adam need to be careful to refrain from eating of the forbidden tree in view of the threat, "The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die"? Did he not have to be in fear of losing his blessed state? Was he not obligated to seek his felicity in communion with God?

Secondly, God commands His children to work out their own salvation with fear

and trembling (Phil 2:12). This they must therefore strive for.

Thirdly, God continually confronts man with threats in order to save him with fear (Jude 23). Observe this in Luke 13:3, "... except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Fourthly, God uses many inducements to persuade man to seek his own salvation. "Come unto Me ... and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you. . . . For My yoke is easy" (Matt 11:28-30).

Fifthly, if man should not seek himself and his own well-being, it would be a matter of indifference to him how he fared according to body and soul; and being thus indifferent, all prayers would cease. Then there would be nothing for him to desire or request. God, however, wills that "in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil 4:6). Then all thanksgiving for received benefits would also cease; God, however, wills that we give thanks in everything (1 Thess 5:18). "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12).

It is evident from all this that spirituality does not consist in disregarding our welfare, utterly deprecating ourself, utterly losing sight of ourself as far as salvation is concerned, and excluding ourself from everything. Rather, this is a fabricated religion which is contrary to God's commandment, serving no other purpose but the satisfaction of the flesh and our own imagination.

Objection #1: Ought not God be the focus of all things and ought not all things end in God? By seeking self, however, man makes himself the focus and ends in self.

Answer: When a godly person focuses upon himself in spiritual matters, he acts according to the command and will of God. It would be impossible for him to end in himself and to remain focused on his felicity only, for that is not the highest level of his felicity. Being a recipient of grace, however, and while enjoying the goodness of God, he will time and again turn to God as the cause of his salvation. He will thus end in Him, thank Him, give honor and glory to Him, and praise Him, because by reason of His essence, all praise must be unto Him, He being worthy thereof. The more pure the manner is in which a spiritual person ends in glorifying God, the more felicity he will enjoy; and the more felicity he enjoys, the more he will end in God. This is not to suggest that he contributes something to God, but rather, that the benefit is man's. Thus, having his felicity in view and ending in God must go together; the godly person cannot seek the one without exercising the other. As all the godly end in God upon receiving and enjoying the benefits of God, they (especially the fathers in Christ) likewise have the glory of God in view when they begin to undertake something.

Objection #2: A Christian must deny himself (Matt 16:24), not seek himself (1

Cor 10:24), is nothing (Gal 6:3), and must be lowly of heart (Matt 11:29). Therefore, man must remain outside of everything and neither seek nor have himself in mind in anything.

Answer: There is a threefold self. First, there is a *sinful self*, that is, pride, maliciousness, vengefulness, envy, miserliness, immorality, and all the sinful lusts of the heart, along with the deeds which issue forth therefrom, whereby he seeks to satisfy his lusts and to attain to the fulfillment of his desire. These a Christian must not seek, but he must abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. He must mortify . . . them.

Secondly, there is also a *natural self*, that is, to desire and seek all that pertains to the welfare of the body, such as food, drink, sleep, clothing, housing, goods, peaceful association with people, and whatever else pertains to human existence. One may and must seek these things, for no one has ever hated his flesh, but rather, cherishes it. However, a Christian does not set his heart upon them, and it is his objective to serve God in the use of these things. He is resigned to the divine dispensation, and he must be satisfied with either much or little, since these are not his portion. If, however, these matters run counter to the Lord Jesus, His cause, the truth, and godliness, and one is obligated to abstain from one or the other thing, then a Christian will readily deny himself, willingly let go of everything, view the disappearance of his goods with joy, and not even hold his life dear. This is the denial which Christ requires.

Thirdly, there is a *spiritual self*, that is, the desire for the salvation and welfare of our soul, consisting in reconciliation with God through the blood of Christ, union with God, and a life in the enjoyment of His fellowship, love, light, and holiness—and thus eternal glory. A Christian may not deny himself these spiritual things. He must always seek them with all his might. It is the life of the soul, the will of God, the command of God, and it pleases God. To neither seek nor pursue this is sin. Man, in having fellowship with and beholding God, may not utterly put self aside and keep himself entirely outside of this. Rather, he must strive for and seek to find pleasure in spiritual delight, joy, love, and holiness.

Matt 16:24 refers to the natural self; 1 Cor 10:24 refers to the sinful self; Gal 6:3 speaks of such people who have great thoughts of themselves, despise others, and who in the meantime have no grace, or have but a very small measure.

Let us consider Matt 11:29. Humility does not exclude self; instead, it does relate to self, for it acknowledges what a person is and what graces and benefits are his. He does not boast of this, since he acknowledges that he does not have them of himself, but that they have been granted to him of God by reason of His goodness alone. He sees his sinfulness and that he is therefore not worthy of anything. He sees virtues and capabilities in other persons which he does not have, and thus exalts them above himself. Having the

Lord Jesus as his example, he knows that this lowly and yet noble disposition as a Christian, is pleasing to God. He therefore seeks to walk humbly with his God as a weaned child and in a becoming disposition-one of submission and being obliged toward man. It is hereby very evident that the exclusion of self in beholding God is a sign of something that purely proceeds from nature, is of one's own choosing, and is a sinful act toward the majestic and holy God.

There are three things which cause the godly to be troubled more than anything else. It first of all troubles them that [certain mystics and quietists] speak of these lofty contemplations also speak of their union with God, of belonging to God, and that in such contemplation they view God as their God. Secondly, such persons, in an exceptional manner, are able to speak of love for God and of sinking away in the love of God, and, so to speak, being consumed by it. Thirdly, there are some who speak of the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus in a most extraordinary manner. These three matters, they think, are indeed spiritual and evidences of extraordinary grace. Who would not be enamored by these matters? Who would not desire always to hear this discussed? My response to this is that it cannot but be that truly gracious persons, when hearing others speak of beholding God, of belonging to God, of love to God, and of the beauty and glory of the Lord Jesus, will find love and desire stirring within to be in such a condition. This is due to their acquaintance with these matters in their spiritual nature, and they thus perceive them as such when they hear them being discussed. If those who speak thus would know and possess these matters in their true, spiritual nature, far be it from us to warn them in any way; rather, we would embrace them in love. Since we know, however, that these three matters can issue forth from natural illumination and can be expressed by persons who neither possess true grace nor derive these lofty views from a love for the truth, the Word, the church of the Lord Jesus, conversion, and the exercise of true saving faith, we must of necessity demonstrate how the unconverted can be occupied with these three matters.

As far as the first matter is concerned, it is common knowledge that temporal believers, those who are externally religious in the state of nature-yes, even heathens-view God as their God and call Him their God. Everyone knows this. Why is it that those who occupy themselves in contemplating God would also not be able to do so? However, just because they imagine this to be so, does not therefore imply that this is indeed the case. God is only the God of true believers who, through Christ, having received His ransom and righteousness, come to God for reconciliation. Those who are therefore strangers of this way, and do not come in truth unto God in this way, do not have God as their portion. God is not their God, and their imaginations are vain and without

foundation. . . . In this illusion they proceed to be amazed, to be delighted in, and to rejoice in God as He is, in the fact that this God is their God, and in all that this God is for them. These are great matters indeed. Many who thus contemplate upon God, however, endeavor to rid themselves of all spiritual motions which pertain to themselves, be divorced from self, and neither think of self nor reflect upon themselves. They only wish to contemplate God, be illuminated by Him, and be drawn up on high, into glory, and into eternity. Yes, though it be dreadful to say, they even endeavor to ascend to God in their reflections. Who would then be offended by the claim of such persons that God is their portion and that He is their God?

Secondly, their love for God is consistent with the manner in which He is their portion. Man has a loving nature, and if he finds or imagines a desirable object, his love goes out toward it. The imagination can have a remarkable effect here, for vain man can imagine something or somebody which or whom he has never seen. He dwells upon this with his thoughts; he delights himself in imaginary conversation, and rejoices in love, as if it were in truth. When a natural man focuses his thoughts upon God, he can also have natural inclinations of love toward God. When in addition he reflects upon the perfections of God—be it through the light of nature or external illumination of the Word—a love issues forth which is not of a spiritual, but of a natural sort. This love is commensurate with their knowledge. It is thus that the heathen delight in God. It is in this manner that idolaters and those who have strayed from saving truth speak of the love of God, the wondrous motions of love, and the kiss of love upon awakening. And thus, by all the motions of natural love which one man can have toward another, they ascend unto God, so that the nature of love does not change, but only the object. They thus dishonor God with their so-called love for Him.

Objection: Are not all natural men haters of God? “Let them also that hate Him flee before Him” (Ps 68:1); “. . . haters of God” (Rom 1:30); “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). Since many who meditate upon God delight in Him in doing so, is this not proof that they are spiritually illuminated and truly regenerate? “We love Him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19); “But if any man love God, the same is known of Him” (1 Cor 8:3).

Answer: Not all that bears the name of love is love. There is a love which is natural and a love which is holy. Natural men—such as the heathen and all the unconverted—have natural love, this being of the same nature as he from whom it proceeds; however, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8). From this natural love we can only conclude that such people are in the state of nature, and not at all that they are spiritual and regenerate. We completely agree that a natural man in

beholding the perfections of God as He reveals Himself in nature in His majesty, glory, power, and goodness, etc., can with his natural heart love God in a natural manner. Pagans and other unconverted men have loved Him in this manner. Those who love God in such situations, can hate Him in other respects, demonstrating this by the rejection of His Word, by not receiving His Son, and in hating and persecuting His children. Those who thus meditate upon God in a natural sense are able to associate with all manner of men, but they detest God's children who truly manifest the image of God. They hate the light because it exposes them, and because they are rebuked by the light in true believers. They show that they hate God by being unwilling to live according to His laws, instead desiring to live according to their own imaginations. They hate His rebukes, and their entire life demonstrates that they do not delight in God.

If we compare this natural love with the purely spiritual love of God in Christ Jesus—which we shall briefly discuss further on—then we shall perceive that the smallest spark and the tiniest ray of this love is incomparably superior and more pure than all the pretended love of such who meditate upon God, regardless of how they adorn it with beautiful words. The difference is not only one of degree, but of very essence. Oh, how far does this divine spark—that heavenly fire—excel all those dead coals!

The third matter pertains to the extraordinary manner in which they speak of the glory and beauty of the Lord Jesus. Should it come as a surprise that someone who has the Scriptures, who reads godly literature describing the Lord Jesus in His beauty and glory, and who furthermore has an eloquent tongue, can speak in a most excellent manner about Jesus? Does someone therefore know Jesus Himself? Is this proof that he himself experientially beholds and relishes the Lord Jesus? He who draws conclusions merely on the basis of such eloquent speech is naive, and too little skilled in the matters of Christianity. Take time to observe a person who speaks thus as far as his sentiments are concerned, the company he keeps, his love to the godly in the church, and in reference to the first five propositions of this chapter. You will readily perceive how you must judge such a person. Take particular note, however, of how he speaks concerning the manner in which the soul is led to Jesus as Surety, how the soul is exercised in receiving the Lord Jesus as his ransom and righteousness, as well as its engagement in spiritual wrestlings. You will then perceive that all this lofty speech only relates to the Lord Jesus as King, or as an example for imitation, but not as High Priest in order to find reconciliation and peace with God in His atonement, doing so by a continual and frequently repeated exercise of faith, which is the marrow and essence of true Christianity.

Some little children in Christ, who are easily driven about by every wind of doctrine, hearing someone speak eloquently about lofty reflections and not being

conscious of the thorn hidden in it, become enamored with such a condition as a result of the spiritual life and light which is within them. They may also engage in meditation upon God as the [quietists] do; that is, in a natural manner—however, with different results.

(1) Some, when they begin, perceive inner strife and have an aversion for this way, although a heartfelt desire for the matter itself remains. They condemn themselves for such resistance and aversion, being of the opinion that this is engendered by their corrupt nature—thinking that it is but laziness and a lack of spirituality. They resume and strive all the more earnestly, but the resistance and aversion remain and increase. Having thus wrestled for some time, they begin to see that their objective—to behold God—is indeed good and spiritual, but that the method is but a natural one, so that this resistance and aversion were not sinful, but an activity of the regenerated nature. They perceive that there is a spiritual way to walk in the light of God’s countenance. They thus escape this snare and desist from pursuing this natural method.

(2) Others, having the principle of spiritual life, are careless as far as preserving and strengthening it. They are inclined to err in seeking to be someone special. They, when perceiving the appearance of spirituality in such lofty reflections, pursue this method recklessly. When God gives them over to themselves, they err by pursuing their fantasy and natural imaginations—and thus, upon that good foundation which is within them they build wood, hay, and stubble, which will be burned. They will nevertheless be saved since the gifts of God’s grace are without repentance. In the meantime, they make themselves guilty of giving offense and are at times the cause of the damnation of other people who, not possessing grace, have followed them in this work of nature due to the esteem they have for them. It only occurs very rarely that such persons are exercised again in a unadulterated manner and come to the simplicity which is in Christ, since pride—which comes naturally to those who pretend to have such lofty reflections—has also overtaken their heart. Since those that are truly converted can fall and err greatly, we must therefore be careful in judging the deeds of the godly, as not all that they do is good. We may not imitate them just because they are godly, but only inasmuch as they are followers of Christ and walk according to the Word of God. “Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments” (Ps 119:6). . . .

Truly spiritual persons do not make a distinction between meditation and beholding: they are both considered to be human activities. He does make a distinction, however, between the activity of the soul in meditating upon divine things, and the extraordinary revelations of God to the soul engaged in such meditation upon divine things, which the soul—upon receiving them—acknowledges, feels and tastes.

A believer, however much he may humble himself, will never arrive at beholding God as a result of the measure in which he waits, longs, exerts himself, and lifts up his heart. His duty is to meditate so that he may gain more and more insight into what he knows of God by means of the Word, faith, and experience—in order that he may delight himself in, rejoice in, and adore God, while bowing down before Him to worship Him reverently. He must endeavor to acquaint himself with God, become holier by virtue of having fellowship with Him, and serve God in a manner more pleasing to Him.

Objection: All of this is self-love and therefore must be rejected.

Answer: This sort of self-love is holy, commanded by God, pleasing to Him, and a proof of the spirituality of the meditation. Sinful self-love—which manifests itself in the seeking of esteem, honor, love, respect, to be served by others, and to cause all things to end in self—is hated, despised, and avoided by the person who meditates in a godly manner. In seeking his own spiritual welfare in spiritual meditation, he does not end in self, but rather acknowledges all things to be from God and through God. In love and joy he returns all this again to God, giving Him the honor and glory.

Occasionally God, according to His promise (John 14:21,23), meets such who meditate spiritually with extraordinary and more immediate revelations of Himself, and causes them to behold God in more immediate proximity, and to taste who He is and what He is to them in Christ Jesus. . . . Since God does not reveal Himself to the world and the unconverted, and since they cannot attain to a seeing and beholding of God by their own activity, all their speaking of such beholding, and all their beholding of God is nothing but fantasy, is not in truth, and only a reflection of their thoughts upon the illusions of their own making. . . .

A believer, who engages himself in meditation upon divine things and seeking fellowship with God, withdraws himself from all things and considers there to be no one but God and himself. He acknowledges himself as a creature of God, as having an immortal soul, and as having been created with a human nature in Adam, excelling in holiness and glory. He also acknowledges that in all things he is miserably distorted, deformed, and abominable—being sinful within and without. He occasionally will focus upon his condition in order to gain a deeper insight about himself and thus acknowledge himself to be unworthy that God would look upon him, or would bestow any grace or benefits upon him. He acknowledges himself to be entirely unfit and unworthy to approach unto this majestic and holy God, although he cannot enjoy light, life, peace, rest, satisfaction, and felicity except in communion with God.

While thus maintaining this humble frame, he turns his eye to the Mediator, wholeheartedly approving of this holy way to come and to be permitted to approach unto

God through Him. . . .

The soul may also be in a sinful condition. The corruption of the heart may manifest itself; she cannot resist vain thoughts; the lusts of the flesh are exceptionally strong and hold her captive; besetting sins are lively—be it due to disposition, physical condition, or incidents which she either desires, cannot avoid, or may not avoid—and she has little strength against them. She is then perplexed by this; sin is a heavy burden and she is bowed down by it. There is no peace; communion with God has been disturbed, God hides Himself, and faith is assaulted. What now? Any personal initiative does not result in progress; to stay away from God causes more regression. The soul dares not approach unto God due to being too sinful; and to remain in this condition is equivalent to dying continually, whereas there is life and faith in the soul. She makes the resolution to approach unto God, being convinced of her sincerity—not only to be delivered from guilt and punishment, but also from corruption and all the sin which proceeds from this. Such a soul then presents herself to the Lord as sinful and as miserable as she is, together with her grief related to this and her desire to be delivered from it. She meditates upon the free grace of God, that God neither considers anyone’s virtue (which is not naturally present anyway), nor sin, but is gracious because He wills to be gracious to her, and is merciful to whomever He wills. While meditating, she will focus upon the depth of this free grace, approve of it with her whole heart, be enamored with it, and adore it. From this she proceeds to eternal and sovereign election, to eternal love, and while reflecting upon herself and the grace which the soul perceives to be in herself, she is astonished and sinks away in adoration. “I, I sinful man have been known! I have been loved by Thee! I have been eternally appointed to be a recipient of salvation! To Thee, to Thee alone, oh Lord, be the glory for Thy free grace and for Thy unsearchable love for humanity.” From this she proceeds to the Mediator Jesus Christ. In meditating upon Him she can find neither beginning nor end due to the manifestation of all the perfections of God, such as love, righteousness, wisdom, omnipotence, mercy, etc. She acknowledges this holy way as the way whereby the sinner is reconciled with God and which gives her liberty to approach unto God. This way she approves of. She becomes enamored with it and chooses it for herself. She observes in this way the fullness of the satisfaction and is absorbed by the unsearchableness of this way. She meditates upon the immutability of God, that God remains the same in His purpose and love toward the elect, even though they, time and again, spoil everything before Him. Christ’s satisfaction cannot be abolished; the covenant of grace is unbreakable; God remains faithful, and always restores His own. When the soul in a negative frame occupies herself with such meditations, she will experience a wondrous change. The conscience perceives peace

with God through the blood of Jesus, the estrangement is transformed into intimacy, and the soul—being washed and cleansed—goes her way rejoicing.

Occasionally the soul of a godly person has a desire for holiness which is more than ordinary. She is enamored with self-denial as far as honor, esteem, the love of men, comfort, earthly delight, and the riches or goods of this world are concerned. She does this neither for self nor for the rest and welfare of the soul, but for the Lord's sake, doing so to the degree and in those circumstances in which the Lord requires such from her. She is enamored with being continually in the presence of God, as well as with obeying, fearing, loving, and walking humbly with God. She greatly desires humility and meekness of heart, as well as wisdom, love, forbearance, and friendly dignity. She furthermore yearns for the image of her Jesus, and to give expression to His life in her life. She does not desire this in an earthly, lifeless, and natural manner as the unconverted do. Rather, she desires that this be so in a living and truly spiritual manner in union with the Lord Jesus by faith—and through Him with God—and by the influence of the Lord's Spirit to the glory of her God, the honor of the church, and the salvation and stirring up of other people. With this desire she comes before the Lord and continues to focus upon His holiness. While continually cleaving to Christ, however, a view of God's holiness causes her to sink away in shame due to her insignificance and sinfulness, saying with Job, "Now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). With Isaiah she may cry out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa 6:5). She nevertheless, being in Christ, continues in her beholding of this pure holiness, and allows herself to be illuminated and enlivened by this holiness; in that respect she becomes holier and holier. This is according to the testimony of the apostle: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). Thus, the soul who is enamored with holiness acquaints herself with the Lord, cleaves to Him as seeing the invisible, and continually focuses upon the exhortation: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." . . .

At times the soul beholds the Lord's perfections in the work of creation and meditates upon them in an orderly and attentive fashion. Sometimes she occupies herself by meditating upon the providence of the Lord, and learns from this to rightly know God's sovereignty, wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, so that all the power, evil, and goodness of the creature disappears. She views God as being the only one who is operative, executing all things irresistibly according to His purpose and good pleasure. Then again, the soul who attentively meditates selects other matter for reflection and thus acquaints herself with the Lord. The heart thus increases its steadfast confidence in the

Lord, loves Him, fears Him, serves Him, and due to continual fellowship with God, the soul begins to shine forth as the countenance of Moses did when he had communed with God for forty days upon the mountain.

The Lord can also lead a longing soul to a more immediate beholding of Himself, at which time she neither brings before the Lord her conditions, nor is occupied with the works of God—be it in nature or in grace. Instead, she immediately approaches unto God, be it in a general sense or as far as each individual perfection is concerned. This is not done in a barren and lifeless manner by merely beholding and acknowledging them. Rather, the Lord occasionally permits her to taste the efficacy and salvation to be found, and at times gives her a foretaste of the beholding of God in heaven. The soul who beholds God in a lively and spiritual manner always cleaves to Christ, and in that frame she beholds God's all-sufficiency, goodness, love, holiness, sovereignty, majesty, glory, and omnipotence, doing all this while considering that this God is her God and that He is her all. This brings forth adoration, joy, love, and praise. In thus beholding God, the soul maintains a humble, quiet, and approving frame that is void of earthly concerns—and also is believing, meditating, going out in love, characterized by intimate communion, dependent, desirous for counsel, and making use of His strength and benefits as her own.

...

The conclusion of all that we have stated as a warning against the [Quietists] is as follows: There is *natural* and *spiritual* religion, a natural and spiritual *denial of self*, a natural *belonging to* God as Creator and Preserver and a spiritual and true belonging to God as a reconciled Father in Christ, a natural and spiritual *love to God and to man*, and a natural and spiritual *reflection upon and beholding of God*. This is the crux of the matter; everything depends upon this, and salvation or condemnation is contingent upon this. We have made as clear a distinction as possible between the natural and the spiritual, and wish that every one to whom salvation is dear would know this distinction, reject that which is natural, and practice what is spiritual, rather than embrace immediately whatever has the appearance of spirituality.

Objection: Religion, self-denial, belonging to God, love for God and man, the beholding of God, etc., are indeed good things, and if a person is engaged in that which is good, we ought to love such a person. Is it necessary to be so careful in investigating the difference between the natural and the spiritual, and to weigh it upon the scale of a goldsmith? We ought not to judge each other in these matters, but tolerate one another. The one may do it in this manner and the other in that manner, but we must overlook the manner itself, considering it to be insignificant.

Answer: However, must we not have a heartfelt love for our fellow man? Is it love

if we, in order to maintain peace and unity, allow our neighbor to run to his destruction in hell? Is it not love if we wish to lead him by the hand unto salvation and warn him about the way which leads to hell? And even if he becomes difficult and views you as dealing lovelessly with him and as being desirous to lord over him, is it therefore not love if we nevertheless wish to pull him away from his destruction? What I did in this chapter I have done out of love, in order to deliver souls from destruction and to direct them in the holy way unto salvation. If you do not wish to hear me, it will grieve me that you are intent on running to your destruction.

You are saying that the actions of all parties are one and the same; the manner in which they are done is a matter of insignificance, and therefore, we must allow everyone to proceed according to his own opinion. If, however, everything depends on the manner in which one proceeds, and if this determines whether something is either natural or spiritual, and leads either to damnation or salvation, then this is not a matter of insignificance. Love demands that we point this out to each other, and warn, protect, and correct each other. For example, in the realm of the natural, is it a matter of indifference to you whether you have a clear diamond in your ring or a piece of glass of the same size and appearance? It also glitters. Is it a matter of indifference to you if a coin has but the proper imprint, regardless of whether it is copper or gold—as long as it is red? You do search out the difference in the natural realm—either choosing or rejecting it—and will not allow yourself to be fooled by external appearance, and would you yet be careless in the spiritual realm upon which everything depends? If there are two rich persons, the one owning his goods righteously and the other unrighteously, will you consider them to be of equal status and say, “Rich is rich, and the matter of ‘how’ is not important; that should not be so strictly investigated or distinguished”? Should one not give consideration as to the “how” in spiritual matters, since everything depends on it? If there are two horses and the one is clean, vigorous, and fast, whereas the other is full of stinking abscesses, stiff, and halting miserably, would you then say, “A horse is a horse, life is life, and progress is progress”? Are there differences in the physical realm and must we yet approve of everything in the spiritual realm? Is it the same to you whether a dead horse teems with living worms, or whether it is alive? Is it the same to you whether you have your father, child, husband, or wife represented on a painting, or whether they are present in very person? Would you say, “It is all the same”? This is likewise true in the spiritual realm. Is it a matter of indifference as to whether a clock indicates the hour by her chime or whether this is indicated by a human voice? If some people wish to go to the same city and some travel upon the right way, whereas others enter upon a way which does not lead to the city, but to the land of the enemy, would you then say that they all

have good intentions, and one must thus leave them alone in their choice of direction? Must we not warn those who have strayed?

I have presented an abundance of examples to convince everyone forcefully that everything does depend upon the “how” or the *manner*, and that primary attention must be given to this. Scripture says that we must take heed *how* we hear, and we must speak and act accordingly. Natural men who behold spiritual matters in a natural sense remain natural and unregenerate in the flesh, and the light they have only changes them as far as the degree of virtuousness is concerned—with which they cannot please God (Rom 8:8). They remain without Christ, without true saving faith, and therefore without spiritual life; all their reflections, self-denial, and love for God and men are but dead works. With all their illusions, spirituality (as they call it), and delightful daydreaming they will perish if they do not repent. Be warned, and may the Lord convict such persons and bring them to the right place. Take note of the following texts: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24), since they are not upon the right way and do not seek to enter in the right manner. “There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov 16:25). Since they are of the opinion that they are correct, believing that the hidden and spiritual way to heaven has been found by them, there is but little possibility that they can be convinced of their error. “Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you ... but the publicans and the harlots believed Him” (Matt 21:31-32). Therefore, I warn you in love; do not stray any further, lest you perish. And you who are beginners in grace, and have been enticed by such natural beholding of God, self-denial, and love, I call out after you, “Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee” (Song 6:13). May the Lord hear my prayer on your behalf. **bbb**

I have indeed anticipated that some of the godly in reading this warning would become concerned and doubt their state, thinking as follows: “If the unconverted also can come this far—that is, live in the beholding of God, in the denial of self, loving God and man, are determined to have God as their portion, and to commune with God as their God—do I even resemble them? How can I think to possess grace if I do not, so to speak, resemble them at all—neither in their activity, nor in their ecstatic speaking about those matters and about the Lord Jesus? I truly ask myself: “Do I have grace indeed?”

To this I answer that whatever they do in a natural manner, you do in a spiritual manner by the principle of spiritual knowledge and life which is within you. Even if they acted and spoke as you perceive they do (although they do not do so), you nevertheless have no reason to doubt your spiritual state, for a small, weak child is just as much a human being as the strongest man. In the church there are indeed men and fathers in

Christ, and there are also weak children. Due to the faint resemblance to others, one may not draw the conclusion that one is neither gracious nor possessing grace. Rather, one must acknowledge that which he possesses and be desirous for growth.

Furthermore, your understanding of God and Christ, your prayers, your desires after God, your seeking after the Lord Jesus, your focusing upon God, and your deeds and exercises—all proceeding from this principle of life—exceed all their beholding of God, reflections, sinking away in God, losing themselves in God, and similar expressions. The difference is as great as the difference between a dead and a living person; it is incomparable. The difference is not one of degree but of very essence. The one is natural and the other spiritual; the one is but an illusion, a fabrication. They are but self-made images which you can observe as frequently as you wish, whereas the other is truth, Spirit, and a life emanating from the Holy Spirit. If you were familiar with their activity and the manner in which they behold God—however, they do not come to God, but imagine a God who is according to their wishes—and the manner in which they deny themselves, love, and speak, you would not desire such spirituality, but would reject it. You are also able to create natural images of God and mentally ascend higher and higher. If you yield to such natural imagination, however, you will readily perceive that this cannot delight you; it makes you colder and you will reject it. However, the least ray of God in the face of Christ, the least fleeing to Jesus and leaning upon Him will be incomparably sweeter to you than all that lifeless meditation. Therefore, rejoice quietly in your portion—however small it may seem to you—since it consists in light, life, truth, union with Christ, and love, and allow all those who have such elevated natural notions to go their way. Out of love for communion with Jesus and for His children, continue to be exercised with that spiritual principle which is according to the Word of God, and thank the Lord for your portion, which incomparably exceeds all their natural motions. Your spiritual principle cannot coalesce with theirs, since they are the very opposite of each other. To be but acquainted with their activities is sufficient to reject their principle and to flee from it. Consider but this one example: You love the godly because they love the Lord Jesus and are loved by Him, whereas you love other people in an entirely different manner from the children of God. You cannot be in agreement with all manner of false doctrine. They love indiscriminately, regardless of which religion a person may belong to. It is only the truly godly who stand firm in the faith, who are established in the truth, and who have intimate fellowship with God in the Spirit, whom they do not love. Rather, they abhor them and flee from them since their works, which are not upright but only of a natural disposition, are made manifest by the light of such. By this you can discern the rest of their doings. Be on your guard against this, and let your dealings between God and

your soul be in simplicity and in truth. Let your eye continually be focused upon the Word of God whereby you have received spiritual light and life, which is also your continual nourishment and the rule for your life. Then you will proceed safely.

We have thus presented to you the fundamentals to which you must adhere in order to be safeguarded against the temptation of the [Quietists], which simultaneously serve as marks whereby they are discovered. We have therefore considered the following from two perspectives: love to God and man, the denial of self, belonging and being united to God, and the beholding of God. We have done so both from the side of the [Quietists] and the side of the godly, having demonstrated from the Word of God that their activity is but the natural activity of the unconverted by which they will perish; and that the activity in which the godly engage is rooted in God, is by the Holy Spirit, is according to the Word of God, and leads them to salvation.

That which has been said is sufficient to convince those poor misguided people who, desiring to approach unto God and become partakers of salvation, instead depart from God and enter upon the broad way of destruction. Oh, that the Lord would open their eyes and change their hearts so that they would forsake their foolishness and walk in the way of understanding!

That which has been said ought also to suffice as a warning for those who are inclined toward the ways of the [Quietists]. That is an easy way which agrees with man's nature and in which Satan leaves them alone, being able to safely lead them to hell in this way—for the truly godly have both their nature and the devil against them. Therefore, withdraw your foot from them, depart from them, and remove yourself from their snares. If you desire pure light and true godliness, remain with the church, follow the Word, and walk in straight paths.

It also ought to suffice to stir up the truly godly to walk in the way of the Lord with new courage and lifting up of the heart, and to let their light shine—to let it shine in demonstration of what truth is, what the efficacy of truth is, and what is the way of uprightness and holiness, so that the [Quietists] and their illusions may be put to shame. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). May the Lord send out His light and truth; may they lead and bring you unto His holy hill, and to His tabernacles (Ps 43:3).