THE DOCTRINE OF MAN AND GRACE AS
HELD BY THE REVEREND JOHN FLAVEL

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PREFACE

In this paper I propose to set forth the conception of man as held by John Flavel, the 17th century Puritan divine. The greater portion of the material presented here was taken from his, "Treatise on the Soul of Man," and his work on, "The Method of Grace." Other information was gained from a study of his complete works. The information about the life of Flavel, though inadequate in respect to dates about important events in his life, was found in the beginning of the compiled volumes used in this study, The Whole Works of one Reverend Mr. John Flavel, Late Minister at Dartmouth in Devon, In Two Volumes.

The complete works was published in London, 1716.

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LIFE OF JOHN FLAVEL

John Flavel was born the son of a minister in Worcestershire, England, in the year 1627. He was educated by his father both in religious and secular studies. He did well in his studies in the grammar schools. He was sent early to Oxford. At Oxford he pursued his studies with diligence and exceeded many of his fellow-students.

Soon after receiving his A.B. Degree he went to the Diftord Church in Devon County, in the year 1650, to assist the ailing pastor of the church. He applied himself to his study and work and soon won for himself a good reputation. In October of the same year he was ordained.

At the death of the elder minister, he became rector. He married Mrs. Joan Randall, who died in travail before her first child was delivered. Little more than a year later he married Elisabeth Morris. Soon after his second marriage he was called to Dartmouth. He moved to Dartmouth December 19, 1636. At Dartmouth he shared the work with Allen Geer, who was a sickly man.

At Dartmouth God crowned his labors with many conversions. One of his hearers wrote of him: "I could say much, though not enough, of his excellency in preaching, of his seasonable, suitable, and spiritual matter, of his plain expositions of Scripture, his taking method, his genuine and natural deductions, his convincing arguments, his clear and powerful demonstrations, his heart-searching applications, and his comfortable supports to those that were afflicted in conscience. In short, that person
must have a very soft head, or a very hard heart, or both, that could sit under his ministry unaffected."

He was a master of the controversy between the Jews and Christians, papists and Protestants, Lutherans and Calvinists, and between the Orthodox and the Arminians and Socinians. He knew the church discipline well, and the controversies of infant baptism, and antinomianism. He drew up a theology in good Latin, although it was never published. He was well versed in the Oriental languages.

Flavel had an excellent gift of prayer and was never at loss for suitable words on any occasion.

When the Act of Uniformity was passed in 1662, he and his friends who were non-conformists were turned out of the church. He continued in private meetings to preach and administer the sacraments.

But when the Oxford Act was executed in 1665, which banished all non-conformist ministers five miles from any town, he was forced to leave Dartmouth. Many times he preached to people gathered in the woods. From Dartmouth he moved to Slapton and preached twice on every Sunday. Although at great danger he often went back and preached to the people at Dartmouth.

When Charles II permitted Flavel to return to Dartmouth he preached to people who came to his home. During this period his second wife died. In convenient time he married a third wife, Mrs. Thomas Downe, who lived with him eleven years and bore him two sons.

The persecution of the non-conformists was renewed and Flavel
moved to London hoping to find religious liberty, which he did not. However, during his stay in London he married his fourth wife.

Flavel returned to Dartmouth again. In 1687, James II dispensed the Penal Laws against the ministers and John Flavel began his work with great energy. He published a volume of sermons entitled England's Duty. He worked diligently making the most of his liberty and time. He wrote the Reasonableness of Personal Reformation, and also Sacramental Meditations.

The last sermon he preached at Dartmouth the people said of him that he seemed to be in a state of ecstasy. The last sermon Flavel ever preached was on June 21, 1691, at Ashburton. From there he went to preside at an assembly of non-conformists. And on June 26, 1691, he died rather suddenly at the age of sixty-four.

Flavel was a man of middle stature, full of life and activity. He was very thoughtful, and when not reading, preaching, or writing, spent much time in prayer and meditation.

He was ready to learn from everyone, and freely taught what he knew. He was good to his family, charitable to the poor. He freely taught four young men whom he interested in the ministry and paid the charges for one of them. He was affectionate to all.
ON THE SOUL OF MAN

Flavel maintains that of all the creatures of the world, none deserves to be called great but man, and that because of his soul. The study and knowledge of Jesus Christ is the most excellent and necessary knowledge. But the worth and necessity of Christ is unknown to men, until the value, wants, and dangers of their own soul be first learned. ¹ No study is more revealing than the study of man himself. To know what he is, and what he may become in the world beyond death is the greatest study of all.

The study and knowledge of the soul has always been considered a rich and necessary study. All ages have magnified these words: "Know thyself." No knowledge, said Bernard, is better than that by which we know ourselves. Leave other matters and search yourself. ²

Man is a creature conscious to himself of an immortal nature. He has something about him which lives beyond the mortal flesh, and is always in some way or other hinting and intimating to him its expectations of, and designation for a better life than now it lives in the body, and that he will not cease to be when he dies.

There are some doubts and difficulties relating to this subject, which will never fully be solved until man reaches

² I. 394.
³ I. 394.
heaven. For man by the fall being less than himself does not understand himself, nor will ever perfectly do so until he is fully restored. This will not be done while he lives in a body of sin and death. And yet this subject should be clearer than it is, and would be if all had peaceably and humbly applied themselves to the impartial search of truth. Then follows a figure of speech by which Flavel wishes to make his meaning clear. Truth, like a pearl in the bottom of a river would have revealed itself by its native lustre and radiancy, had not the feet of heathen philosophers, cunning atheists, and daring school divines, disturbed and fouled the stream.

Man is here in a state of trial. Man is one in whom both worlds meet. His body participates in the lower and his soul in the upper world. Hence it is that he finds such pulling and tugging, this way, that way; upward and downward; both worlds are competing for his soul.

Among many other qualities of the soul bestowed by the Creator are the sentiments and impressions of the world to come, and the ability of reflection and self-intuition—these are peculiar, invaluable gifts from God. By the former we have evidence of our immortality and designation for nobler works and enjoyments than this im-bodied state allows. By the latter we may
learn the agreeableness of our hearts, and therein the validity of our title to that expected blessedness.

Philosophy helps some in this discourse, too much to be despised and too little to be admired. Flavel says that he read definitions of the soul given by the ancient philosophers, "with a compassionate smile." Thales calls it a nature without repose; Asclepiades, an exertication of sense; Hosiad, a thing composed of earth and fire; Galen, said heat; Hippocrates, a spirit diffused through the body; Plato, a self-moving substance; Aristotle, calls it Entelechiae, that by which the body is moved. If my opinion, says Flavel, should be asked of which of these I like best, I should give the same answer which Theocritius gave an ill poet. After repeating many of his verses the poet asked Theocritus which he liked best. "Those," said he, "which you have omitted.

Three things said Athenasius are unknown to men according to their essence, God, Angels, and the souls of men. Of the nature of the soul it is easier sought than understood, and better understood than explained. As for the nature of the soul the most learned among the ancient philosophers did not understand it. Even those reputed to have mastered the sum of knowledge did not understand the nature of the soul. The schools of Epicurus and Aristotle, the Cartesians, and others stirred the world with their views about the nature of the soul. But they were wrong.
When all is said, three words of God by the pen of his inspired writer, enlightens more than the ancient philosophers. Flavel writes: "...three words of God enlightens more than all their notions of the accidental concentration of atoms, their 'materia subtilis,' and 'anima mundi,' and the rest of their unintelligible fancies could ever do.

The account in Genesis for the origin of the world, and of man is full of sense, reason, congruity and clearness. Therefore, the ancient philosophers set forth their theories in vain.

'The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' The body was made out of dust, and to dust the body will return. This verse, above quoted, plainly speaks of the soul as the immediate effect of God's creating power. Not a product of matter, but a production of the inspiration of God. The soul is a spirit from the Father of Spirits. God formed the soul out of nothing. It is a divine-born creature, but no part of the Deity. The nature of God is repugnant to such an idea. They speak falsely who say that the soul is a "ray or emanation" from God. The soul is a spirit, a creation from God's power, but a spirit inferior to God.

Flavel here is in agreement with Augustine who says: "The soul was made by God, but not a portion of God or of the nature

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11 401.
12 401.
13 402-403.
of God... God made the soul out of nothing, that is, no existing thing. ...For the soul is either so made out of the breath, or God's breath is so made into it, that it was not created out of Himself, but by Himself out of nothing."

We have also the account of the way and manner of its infusion into the body--by the same breath of God which gave it its being. "It is therefore a rational, Scriptural, and justifiable expression of St. Augustine, 'Creando infunditur, and infundendo Creatur,' it is infused in creating, and created in infusing.

The soul, it is clear, came not by way of natural generation of the body, not from matter, but from the breath of God. We cannot tell how the soul was united to the body. But it is enough that He who formed it, did also unite it to the body.

The body and the soul are held together by breathing. The soul came in with the breath and while breath stays it remains. When breath leaves it departs also.

I. Flavel says of the nature of the soul that it is a substance. It is not a quality or an accident inhering in another Being, or subject; as whiteness does in snow, but a being by itself. Qualities and accidents have no existence of their own, but require another being or subject to their existence. The soul of man is a substantial being of itself, which is proved by the

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15 I, 403.
16 I, 403.
following evidence. (1) Because it is created by God. God created the spirit in man. The soul was created out of nothing, and infused into the body after it was formed and organized, which proves it a substantial being. (2) Because it can and does exist separated from the body by death. Were the soul but an accident, or a quality, he who kills the body would also kill the soul. Like a snowball cast into the fire, the whiteness is destroyed with the snow. Accidents die with their subjects, but the soul does not die with the body.

(3) The soul is the principal part of man, from which the whole man is. The soul is the man, and only deserves the name of man. The soul is not dependent on the body, nor contained within the body. The body rather depends on the soul and is in it. (4) The soul is a substance because it is the subject of the properties, affections, and habits; which is the very idea of a substance. All the affections and passions of hope, desire, love, delight, fear, sorrow, and the rest are all rooted in the soul and come out of it.

II. The soul is a vital substance because it has an essential principle of life in itself, a living active being. "A living soul." The soul moves itself and the body. "The body without the spirit is dead," (James 2:26). But remember, though the soul has vital power in itself, it is not of itself, but of God who made it.

17 I, 404.
18 I, 404.
19 I, 404.
20 I, 405.
The understanding has a two-fold use. It has a practical as well as a theoretical use. To quote Flavel's words: "The object of its very being, so far as it is true in itself, and apprehensible by man. It hath a two-fold use."

(1) The understanding distinguishes between truth and error. It lights up the soul of man so that he can tell between duty and sin, good and evil. This judgement of discretion every man must be allowed for himself.

(2) The understanding is to direct and guide in practice. This has been called the leading faculty of the soul, "because the will follows its practical dictates." It guides the soul: "Not impelling or rigorously enforcing its dictates upon the will; for the will cannot be so imposed upon; but by giving it a directive light, or pointing as it were with its finger, at what it ought to choose, and what to refuse."

To the understanding belong two other powers of the soul. First, the power of cogitation. Thoughts are the actings of the mind, or any actual operation of the understanding. Thoughts are the musings of the mind which are acted in the speculative part of the understanding. When the mind meditates the things that come into it, that meditation is an inward speaking in the heart.

Secondly, the conscience belongs also to the faculty of
understanding, for it being the judgement of man upon himself, with respect to the judgement of God. "Thoughts are formed in the speculative, but conscience belongs to the practical understanding."

The conscience Flavel calls the immediate officer under God. God says to the conscience of every man, as He said to Moses of Pharaoh in Exodus 7:1, "I have made thee a God to Pharaoh." The conscience observes, records, and bears witness of all our actions, and acquits and condemned in the name of God. Its consolations are sweet, and its condemnations are most terrible. Some have chosen death rather than withstand their conscience. The conscience is eternal being the companion of the soul forever.

II. God has further endowed the soul of man with a will to govern, moderate, and over-rule the actions of this life. The will is a faculty of the rational soul, by which a man either chooses or refuses the things which the understanding discerns and knows.

This is a noble power of the soul. The understanding seems to bear the same relation to the will as a grave counselor does to a great prince. It glories in two excellences: liberty and dominion.

29 I, 407.
30 I, 407.
31 I, 408.
32 I, 409.
The will has freedom and liberty. It cannot be compelled and forced. Co-action is repugnant to its very nature. In this it differs from the understanding, the understanding is wrought upon necessarily, but the will acts spontaneously. The liberty of the will respects the choice or refusal of the means for attaining those ends it prosecutes, according as it finds them more or less conducible to it. The liberty of the will must be understood to be in things "natural," which are within its proper sphere, not in things supernatural. This is limited free-will that amounts to almost no free-will. It can move or not move the body as it pleases, but it cannot move toward Christ in the way of faith as it chooses. No one can come to God, except he be taught of God. But this will be fully discussed in another place. The will can open the hand as it pleases, but not the heart. It is not forced to turn to God by supernatural grace, but in a way suitable to its nature, it is determined and drawn to Christ, drawn by a mighty power, and yet it runs freely. "Draw me, and I will run after Thee."

The will, like an absolute sovereign reigns over the body, that is, its external members by absolute command. It says, "I am in authority and God has put the members of the body under my control." But it becomes evident that the will can only choose that which God allows it to choose. The will has its limitations as is plain to see. The members of the body can obey only when they are rightly disposed. In another way, its sovereignty cannot

33 I, 408.
interfer with the dominion of God over the members of the body. God may decree differently and stop the intended act of the will. God can stop the tongue that would speak evil of a good man, if He chooses. This is God's negative voice.

The will has also a political power over the faculties and passions of the soul, not by way of absolute command, but by way of "persuasion" and insinuation. Hence it can often persuade the understanding and thoughts to lay aside this or that particular subject and apply themselves to the study of another. It can restrain the affections and passions, yet it has no absolute command over the inner as it does over the outer man. Its weakness to govern the inner man appears in two things in particular. It cannot remove thought from some subjects that are set upon the soul with great concern. For example, it cannot remove the thought when God has to do with the soul in conversion. When God convives a man of sin, the will cannot disengage the thought, because sovereignty belongs to God. The will cannot quiet a raging conscience, this is the particular work of God.

III. The third faculty of the soul is its endowment of various affections and passions which are of great value and service to the soul. The purpose of the affections is the happiness of man, promoting and securing its highest good. To this purpose the affections have a natural aptitude. True happiness of the soul is not found in itself, but in God. The affections of the soul

34 I, 409.
35 I, 409.
reach out for God with desire and hope to Him. "Our souls are restless, 'til they rest in Thee." The affections are the arms that reach out to God in a state of absence from Him. "The soul considered at a distance from God, its true rest and happiness, is furnished and provided with 'desire' and 'hope' to Him."  

The affections that yearn after God and reach out for Him are met by obstacles, enemies, and difficulties in its course. In this opposition God has placed fear, grief, indignation, jealousy, anger etc. to grapple with on the way to God. But the soul that is in union with God is accordingly furnished with affections of love, delight, and joy; whereby it rests in Him and enjoys its proper blessedness in His presence forever. By the affections the soul is capable of becoming "marriageable" with Christ.

ON THE SOUL OF MAN: ITS ORIGIN

Our souls do not come to us through generation, but immediately from God in the way of creation. God does not create the soul out of His own Essence or Substance, but out of nothing that has been before. The soul is the effect of God's creating power. The soul of man is a gift of God.

If the question be asked whether souls are pure or impure as they are united with their bodies; the answer is, they are impure as soon as they are united to the body. For the union constitutes a child of Adam, and consequently a sinful impure

36 I, 409.
37 I, 410.
38 I, 412.
creature. But if one asks about the condition in which God created them, the answer is, they are created neither morally pure, nor impure. They receive neither purity nor impurity from God, but only their naked essence, and the natural powers and properties flowing therefrom. God inspires no impurity in them, for He cannot be the author of sin, but the revenger of sin. Nor does God create them in their original purity because the sin of Adam lost that, and God justly holds it from his posterity.

Adam voluntarily and actually deprived himself, and meritoriousaly deprived all his posterity of that original righteousness and purity in which he was created. God cannot inspire any impurity and as a just and righteous God, He may and does withhold, or create them void and destitute of that holiness and righteousness which was once their happiness and glory.

How did the soul come to be defiled and tainted with original sin? Sin comes not by the soul alone, nor by the body alone from the soul, but upon the union of both in one person. It is the union of these two which constitutes a child of Adam, and as such only are they capable of being infected with sin.

Can the body act upon the soul? If not how is it that so many souls become foolish, forgetful, injudicious? Nothing is more sensible than that there is a reciprocal communication

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I, 413-414.

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I, 414.

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I, 414.
between the soul and body. The body does effect the soul (though we do not know how) with its dispositions, as the soul influences it with life and motion. The more excellent any form is, the more intimate is its union and conjunction with matter. The soul of man has a more intimate union with the body than light with air.

The matter of original sin consists of two things. (1) In the privation of the original rectitude which ought to be in man. (2) In that habitual concupiscence which carries nature to inordinate motions. This privation and inordinate inclination make up original sin.

How is it than an infant is guilty of Adam’s sin? It is because he is a child of Adam by natural generation. Why is he deprived of that original rectitude in which Adam was created? Because Adam lost it by sin, and therefore could not transmit what he had lost to his posterity. And how is it that he is inclined to that which is evil? Because he wants original rectitude. Whoever desires original rectitude naturally inclines to that which is evil. And so propension of nature to that which is evil, seems to be by way of concomitancy, with the defect of original righteousness.

Now let me sum up what has been said about the soul. The soul is a real being, with a true self, not dependent on the body. It is the soul that makes man a man.
The soul is not a material substance, but a spiritual substance, a substance that is real, and more excellent than material substances. It cannot be seen, heard, or felt; but by it one sees, hears, and feels.

The soul is also a vital substance. It is the principle of life to the body. It has a life in itself and gives life to the body. Life is originally in the soul, and secondarily in the body by way of communication. Therefore it is a vital as well as a spiritual substance.

The soul is also an immortal substance. It is formed for immortality by the spirituality of its nature. Man cannot destroy it and God will not.

God has provided the soul with an understanding, will, and affections by which it is capable of receiving the grace of God in this world in order to enjoy God in the world to come.

By understanding man is advanced above all other creatures in this world. Man can apprehend, distinguish, and judge other intelligible beings. By the understanding man can discern truth from falsehood, good from evil. The understanding shows the will what to choose and what to refuse.

To this faculty belongs thought and conscience. The first to the speculative and the second to the practical understanding. By thought man can think of things present or absent, visible or invisible; of God or self; of this world or of the world to come. By conscience man judges himself with respect to the judgement of God. Conscience is man's best comfort and worst terror.
The understanding is the director of the will. It freely chooses and refuses as the understanding directs and suggests. The members of the body and the passions of the soul are under its dominion. The members of the body under absolute command and the passions are under its persuasion and insinuations.

Both understanding and will have great influence on the affections. The passions and affections of the soul are of great use and dignity. They are the strong and sensible motions of the soul according to the apprehension of good and evil. The affections enable the soul to have union to the highest good. Through love and delight man enjoys and finds rest in God. This union of the soul to God will be discussed later.

This noble understanding, thoughts, conscience, will, passions, and affections are the principle faculties, acts, and power of the soul. The soul could never rise out of matter or enter the body by way of natural generation. The soul of man is created and infused immediately into his body by God.

"What will a man give in exchange for his soul!"

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45 See Flavel's summary, I, 414-415.
46 I, 415.
ON THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

References to the elect are made frequently throughout the writings of Flavel. Perhaps the best dealing with this doctrine is in an appendix to another work. The appendix is entitled: "Giving a Brief Account of the Rise and Growth of Antinomianism; the Deduction of the Principal Errors of that Sect; With Modest and Seasonable Reflections Upon Them."

The author says that the purpose of the discourse is principally to discharge and free the free-grace of God from the errors of Antinomianism. He exalts the free grace of God in Christ to draw the sinner to Him and to relieve the distressed conscience of sin-burdened Christians.

According to God's eternal decree and purpose grace is given man in Christ before the world began (II Tim. 1:9). Men are said to be predestined to the adoption by Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). The very mercy of justification which God from all eternity purposed and decreed for His elect, was also in time purchased for them by the death of Christ (Rom. 5:9). Man is justified by Christ's blood. Christ died on the cross to reconcile the elect to God. He was raised from the grave for the justification of the elect. God has in the death of Christ a foundation of reconciliation, by which he becomes propitious to His elect, to absolve and justify them.

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47 I, 662.
48 I, 663.
49 I, 666.
The application is made to the elect in this life at the time of a man's effectual calling. When an elect sinner is united to Christ by faith and so passes from death to life, from a state of condemnation into a state of favor and absolution, this is his actual justification.

When a man is received into communion with Christ, and his righteousness is imputed by God, and received by faith, immediately he passes from a state of condemnation and death to a state of life and justification. All the sins already committed are forgiven without exception; Not only that, a remedy is given man in the righteousness of Christ against sins to come. The sins that the elect falls into afterwards do need forgiveness and are forgiven with renewed acts of faith and repentance. By acts of faith and repentance the believer applies to himself the righteousness of Christ, and his sins are forgiven.

Still remembering all this, it is God who decrees salvation and Christ by His death purchased it. At the calling of the elect and the application of Christ's justification for the elect, he is saved. From that time on no sin shall bring that person any more under condemnation.

The elect must either exist from all eternity or be justified in time. It is true that future beings may be considered as in the decree and purpose of God from eternity; or as in the intention of Christ who died "intentionally" for the sins of the

50. I. 666.
51. I. 666.
52. I. 666.
elect, and rose again for their justification. But neither the decree of God, nor the death of Christ, takes place or has efficacy with respect to any man for his actual justification until he personally exists.

In election men are considered without respect to good or evil done by them (Rom. 9:11), but not so in justification. In justification there is a change made in the person, he passes to a state of life. The decree of God in itself makes no such actual change on the state of any person. Man is decreed salvation by God, but there is no change in the person's life until he is brought to God through the application of Jesus Christ.

The elect are justified and saved by the very righteousness of Christ, and no other, but that righteousness is "formally inherent" in Him only and is only "materially" imputed to the elect. It was "actively" His, and "passively" a gift to the elect. Christ wrought it though the elect wear it. It was wrought in the person of the God-Man for the whole church, and is imputed (not transfused) to every single believer for His concernment only.

Two things, says Flavel, belong to the justified state.

1) That which is essential and inseparable, faith uniting the
soul to Christ. (2) That which is contingent and separable, evidence and persuasion of the elect's interest in Christ.

The elect cannot be lost. Sin cannot ruin him though it hurts him. Christ cannot believe for man and so cannot save an unbelieving sinner.

From Scripture Flavel learns that from all eternity God has chosen a certain number in Christ to eternal life and the means by which they shall attain it. God does this out of His good pleasure and for the praise of His grace. This choice of God to save some is immutable. This choice He made in Christ. Christ is not the "cause" of God's choosing, but the purchaser of the mercies decreed for the elect.

No elect person can be a reprobate, no reprobate an elect person. Those who are appointed to salvation are also appointed to sanctification as the way and means by which they shall attain the end. This is the Scriptural account of God's eternal choice.

No man can save himself. "It is not of him that willeth or him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." Having said this Flavel adds that men's endeavors and strivings are not to
be thought altogether vain, needless, and insignificant, though they cannot make God's grace effectual. His grace can make them effectual and bless them to great advantage.

Flavel says that seldom is any soul lost in whom is found deep, serious consideration and a sincere heart doing works of faith and repentance. This is a sign that where these qualifications are found, the person possessing them is an elect of God.

When the heart opens by faith to Christ, all the treasures of Christ are unlocked and opened. When God turns the key of regeneration to open the soul, the key of free-grace is also turned to open to the riches of Christ. Then the righteousness of Christ justifies, the wisdom of Christ guides, the holiness of Christ sanctifies. The opening of the heart to Christ by faith is good assurance that heaven shall be opened to the soul hereafter. Here we must remember that faith is supernatural. No man comes to Christ unless he is drawn by God, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him."

Flavel's idea of free-grace is free, but only to the elect. No one is saved without faith, but faith is supernatural, given to the elect. What a man is to do, Flavel says, "Pray God to give
you a believing and opening heart to Christ." It is God who opens the heart to Christ, not man, and determines the will under the influence of God's Spirit to open to Christ.

Flavel's concept of election seems in agreement with that of Augustine. Here I will give a quotation from Augustine found in his, "On the Grace of Christ." He says, "It is God, then, who makes religious whomever He pleases, in order that he may hasten to the Lord, and desire to be directed by Him, and make his own will depend upon God's, and cleave so closely to the Lord as to become, one spirit with Him. Who, then, ever does so much, unless he be made by God to do it."

65 II, 82.
66 II, 83.
ON TRUE KNOWLEDGE

What is true knowledge? The answer is, the knowledge of Christ. The knowledge of Christ is fundamental to all duties.

Must a Christian believe? That he can never do without the knowledge of Christ. Faith is so much dependent on His knowledge that it is dominated by it. Would a man exercise hope in God? That he can never do without the knowledge of Christ. Man cannot believe, hope, nor pray acceptably without a competent degree of this knowledge. Man must not speak of God without light. The true way by which one communicates with God is by active faith in Him through Christ, the Mediator.

This knowledge is fundamental to the welfare of the soul. Man can perform no duty, enjoy no comfort, nor can he be saved without it. If it is eternal life to know Christ, it is eternal damnation to be ignorant of Christ. As Christ is the door to heaven, knowledge is the key to Christ. Therefore the knowledge of Christ is essentially necessary to all the graces, duties, comforts and happiness of souls.

All other knowledge is natural, but this knowledge is supernatural. Christ cannot be discovered by searching nature. Natural knowledge is unattainable by some men. All the helps at man's disposal would not enable some Christians to know the learned

65 1, 2.
69 1, 2.
70 1, 2.
71 1, 3.
arts and languages. Men that are wise are excellent in these, but here is the mystery of the knowledge of Christ. Men most dull are able through the teaching of the Spirit to attain this true knowledge; while the most learned may miss it. The knowledge of Christ is transcendent knowledge, a saving knowledge to men.

What is this knowledge of Christ that man learns for his salvation? It is this, that God and Christ transacted on covenant terms for man's salvation. God promises to give to Christ the elect, if He will undertake their redemption by pouring out His soul unto death. This is the covenant of redemption. It is required of Christ to shed His blood, and it is necessary that men believe if He is to be saved by this covenant.

As we noticed in his doctrine of election, even a believing heart is the gift of God, and faith is supernatural. It is true knowledge to know Christ, and God makes Him known only to whom He desires.

Man was made in a state of sin and misery, a fallen and forlorn creature. How can he be restored to happiness without prejudice to the honor, justice, and truth of God? The method was that of the covenant. It was by mutual engagement and stipulations, each undertaking to perform His part for the recovery of man. God appointed Christ to a three-fold office to save the elect. Three-fold because if man was to be restored to happiness, the blindness of his mind must be cured, the guilt of

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72 I, 3.
73 I, 10.
sin expiated, and his captivity to sin led captive. Christ must of God be made unto man, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. So Christ is made to man as prophet, priest, and king.

This covenant was made from eternity. Before the world was made and before man was created, but existed only in the Infinite Mind and purpose of God, who had decreed this for man in Jesus Christ. But in the fulness of time Christ became a sacrifice for the elect, he saved all the Old Testament saints, whose faith expected a Christ to come. Man may know without ascending into heaven, or prying into unrevealed secrets, that his name is in that covenant. If he believes indeed he is saved, because the Father has given them to His Son.

Christ assumed the true and perfect nature of man into a personal union with His divine nature, and still remains true God, and true man in one person forever. This is the great mystery which cannot be explained. The human nature was united to Christ miraculously and extraordinarily, being supernaturally formed in the womb of the virgin to escape the sin of Adam. But this being extraordinarily produced was a most pure and human thing. And it was necessary to satisfy God and redeem man. Christ took a
complete and perfect human soul and body, with all and every faculty and member pertaining to it. This was necessary that Christ might heal the whole nature of sin, which had infected every member and faculty. He assumed all to sanctify all. He designed a perfect recovery by sanctifying us wholly in soul and body, and therefore, assumed the whole in order to save man. To know this is to have true knowledge.
ON THE POWER OF THE WORD

The Spirit in the Word awakens man, and this awakening power of the Word is in order both of time and nature antecedent to all its other operations and effects. The law of God has an enlightening efficacy on the mind of man. A light shining into the very heart of man. When the Word comes in power all things change. The sins that were hid and the danger which was concealed by the policy of Satan from the soul, now lie clear and open before him.

The Word of God has a convincing efficacy. It reveals sin to the soul. And his conscience yields to the charge of guilt, and equity of the sentence of the law. The soul is condemned at the bar of conscience. It has nothing to say why the wrath of God should not come upon him. The wounds of the Word of God cannot be healed except by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Word has a heart-turning, soul-converting efficacy in it. It is a regenerating as well as a convincing Word. The law wounds, the gospel cures. The law shows the evil that is in sin, and the misery that follows it. The Spirit of God working in fellowship with the Word effectually turns the heart from sin. This is the work of the Word.

All these acts lie in order to each other. "Til the soul
be awakened it cannot be enlightened (Eph. 5:14). Till it be enlightened it cannot be convinced (Eph. 5:13). Conviction being nothing else, but the application of the light that shines in the mind to the conscience of a sinner; till it be convinced, it cannot be wounded for sin, (Acts 2:37). And until it be wounded for sin, it will never be converted from sin, and brought effectually to Jesus Christ. That is the power of the Word.

Where does the Word of God get this power? It is not a power inherent in itself, nor derived from the instrument by which it is managed, but from the Spirit of God who communicates to it all the power and efficacy it has on the soul of man. Its power is not in or from itself. It does not work in a physical fashion. This spiritual power is in the Word as the healing power was in the waters of Bethesda. "An angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water; whosoever than first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." (John 5:4). It is not a power naturally inherent in it at all times, but communicated to it at special seasons.

The power of the Word is not communicated to it by the instrument that manages it. "Neither is he that planteth anything; neither he that watereth" (1 Cor. 3:7). Ministers are nothing to such a purpose and effect as this. Flavel does not

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35 I, 324.
36 I, 324.
mean that ministers are useless and unnecessary, but insufficient of themselves to produce such results. Ministers may say with Peter at the working of the Spirit: "Ye men of Israel why marvel ye at this, or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?"

The Word derives its power from the Spirit of God. "For this cause thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as the Word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe" (I Thes. 2:13). It is a successful instrument only when it is in the hand of the Spirit, without whose influence it never did, nor can convince, convert, or save any soul.

The Spirit has sovereignty over three things for the conversion of a sinner. (1) The Spirit has sovereignty over the Word itself. The Spirit can make it successful or not as it pleases. The minister may reason, exhort, and reprove, but nothing acts until the Spirit acts. God opens every heart that is opened to receive Christ in the Word. Unless God is in a sermon it is dead. (2) The Spirit has dominion over the time and seasons of conversion. That which may work at one time will be of no effect at another time. Why? Because it was not the time appointed. (3) The Word of God with the Spirit convinces,
humbles, and breaks the heart of sinners. "The Spirit when it cometh shall convince the world of sin" (John 16:9). The Word comes with such power that it convinces man. The soul hears the voice of God in the Word and cannot hide from it. Sin is held before the conscience in its dreadful aggravations and fearful consequences as committed against the holy law.

Salvation is ordinarily denied to men from whom the preaching of the Word is denied. It is called the Word of life (Phil. 1:18). The eternal decree of God's election is executed by it on our souls. As many as are ordained to eternal life shall believe by the preaching of it.

To many the Word of God is never made powerful enough to convince them. Thousands sit under the preaching of the Word, but it never convinces them. Many have heard the voice of man, but not the voice of God. Their understandings have been instructed, but their consciences were never convinced.

To some the Word finds its way to the heart, while others are hardened; while some sleep, others tremble. The eternal decrees both of election and reprobation are executed on the souls of men by the preaching of the Word. Some believe and others are hardened. The hardening of a man's heart is the most terrible stroke God ever inflicts on any man.

89  I, 325.
90  I, 325.
91  I, 325.
92  I, 325.
Therefore, attend every opportunity that God affords, because you know not in which of them God may work upon your heart. Pray for the blessing of God upon the Word, for unless He blesses it, it has no effectual operation. Carefully attend to what your conscience gives under the Word. It is impossible to come to Christ without illumination and instruction from God.

So many as are taught of God, and no more, come to Christ in the way of faith. It is impossible to come without the teachings of God (John 6:44). It is impossible not to come, under the influence of divine teaching. Divine instruction and heavenly illumination are necessary for salvation. This does not mean visional appearances and the immediate voice of God, but the voice of the Spirit in the Scripture. This is a more sure word than any voice from heaven. (II Peter 1:19).

The teachings of God are not opposite to the teachings of man. Paul was taught of God and his conversion had something extraordinarily in it, yet the ministry of Ananias was used and honored in that work. Divine teachings excel, though not exclude the teachings of man. The teachings of man are made effectual by the Spirit.

The teachings of God are nothing else, but the Spirit of God working in the heart of man to give him knowledge of the

93 1, 326.
94 1, 323.
95 1, 329.
glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is the proper work of the Spirit, called the teachings of God because the Spirit who enlightens is sent by God to do so (John 14:26).

These teachings of the Spirit consist in two things.

(1) In His regenerating works upon the soul by which the soul understands spiritual things. Illumination is the first act in conversion. Sanctification gives the soul experience of those mysterious things which are contained in the Scriptures. And that experience explains the deep mysteries of the Scriptures. No knowledge is so clear as that which the heart communicates to the head. "If any man do His will, he shall know the doctrine." He who feels better understands than he who has only heard. Believers experience and understand the mysteries taught in the Scriptures.

(2) The Spirit of God teaches man by His gracious assistances which He gives man as his need requires. He assists both the understanding in due apprehension of truth, and the heart in the spiritual improvements of truth.

These special truths which believers hear and learn of God when they come to Christ are: (a) Sin. Man has a general notion of sin before, but these apprehensions are different when God teaches of sin. There is a three-fold knowledge of sin, traditional, discursive, and intuitive. The first is in the more rude and illiterate multitude. The second in more rational
and knowing men. The third is only found in those that are enlightened and taught of God. There is a great difference between this intuitive knowledge of sin, whereby God makes a soul to discern the nature and evil of it in spiritual light; and the two former, as there is between the sight of a painted lion on the wall, and the sight of a roaring lion that meets us in the road. The intuitive sight of sin is another thing than men imagine it to be. God not only shows a man this or that particular sin, but on the day of conviction He sets all his sins before him. God shows him the sinfulness of his nature as well as practice. Conviction shows the original corruption from which the evils of life come. God reveals to the man He is bringing to Christ, the sinful and miserable state which he is in.

The greatness of God enlarges sin, the holiness of God makes it beyond measure vile, the goodness of God puts unconceivable weight into guilt. To bring a man out of this state to Christ is an example of the riches of free-grace. Thus God teaches the evil of sin.

(b) Wrath. God teaches the soul whom He is bringing to Christ what wrath hangs over him because of sin. Whatever wrath the sinner sees, he realizes that it is just. There is no injustice in God's wrath. The soul sees the justice of God in its eternal damnation, and the wonderful mercy of God in the suspension of it so long. What is it that has kept God from damning a sinner all this time? How is it that he is not

99 1, 330/
100 1, 330.
in hell? These questions the sinner coming to Christ asks himself. The fears and apprehensions of eternity seizes his soul. Never do men tremble at the threatenings of God, nor rightly understand the danger of their condition until sin and wrath, and the wages of death is discovered by the sinner with light from heaven.

(c) God teaches the soul coming to Christ that his deliverance from sin and wrath is the greatest business he has to do in the world. There are a number of things that shows that the man coming to Christ is really concerned about his salvation. He, if diverted for a while, is constantly returning to this solemn business of salvation. His interest is revealed in his careful redeeming of time to use about this work. His fears and tremblings show his heart to be set upon this business. His readiness to receive help from others is a sign of his interest in salvation. The little notice that he takes of other troubles and afflictions show his heart to be taken up about greater things. This is the third lesson that the man coming to Christ is taught by God.

(d) God teaches the soul coming to Christ that his strength is insufficient to obtain salvation. This work is above the power of nature. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." No repentance

161 I, 330.
162 I, 330.
163 I, 330.
can amount to a just satisfaction. No one can purchase his own salvation. Salvation is a gift of God.

(e) God teaches the soul coming to Christ that his state is sad, but not hopeless. There is a way, a door of escape. The troubled soul is in a better condition than the damned are whose hopes are perished. Here the mercy of God is seen in hastening to open the door of hope as soon as the evil of sin is opened. This door of hope keeps the world striving for salvation.

(f) God teaches the soul coming to Christ that He can deliver him from the wrath to come. This is a necessary thing for the soul to learn from the Father. For unless the soul be satisfied of the fulness of Christ's saving power it will never move toward Him. Despair goes in the knowledge of the all-sufficiency of Christ. Christ is able, by His blood, to save all who come to Him.

(g) Every soul coming to Christ is taught that in order to be saved he must have union with Christ. The death of Christ is not all that is necessary, a man must have union with Christ by faith. This is as important in the place of an "applying cause," as the death of Christ is in the place of a "meritorious cause." In the purchase, the elect are redeemed together by the price Christ paid; in the application they are redeemed man by man. A man must be regenerated or united to Christ by saving faith.

104 1, 330.
105 1, 330.
106 1, 331.
(h) The soul coming to Christ is taught, that prayer unites the soul, or union comes through the way of prayer. The soul returns to its God often in the same day. He does not stop praying until Christ comes with complete salvation. 107

(i) God teaches a soul coming to Christ to abandon his former ways and companions if he expects to receive mercy. Nothing now can keep the soul from Christ. He is assured of salvation. 108

(j) The soul is taught that there is such beauty in God's people as is not matched anywhere else. Change of heart is accompanied by change of judgement with respect to the people of God. 109

(k) Every soul that comes to Christ is taught not to be discouraged no matter what difficulties he may face in religion. He must not return to sin again. 110

(l) The soul coming to Christ is taught that whatever guilt and unworthiness he discovers in himself, and whatever doubts and fears he has for pardon and acceptance, he is to venture himself in the way of faith upon Jesus Christ. These are the twelve lessons that God teaches every man that He brings to salvation. 111

107 I, 331.
108 I, 331.
109 I, 331.
110 I, 331.
111 I, 332.
The soul sees an absolute necessity of coming to Christ under God's teachings. This is the only door for the sinner to enter. No one but Christ can save from the wrath to come.

Flavel admonishes believers to bear up against all discouragements. It is the dictate of wisdom, the vote of reason, to exchange a certain for an uncertain ruin. It may be that the appointed time of salvation has not come, but may come at any time.

God not only opens truths to the understanding, but also opens the understanding to perceive them. God makes the soul wise to salvation. Let the most learned, eloquent, and powerful orator be in the pulpit, yet no man's heart is persuaded until it hears the voice of God.

Why is it impossible to come to Christ without God's teachings?

(1) The impossibility of coming without God's teaching will appear because of the power of sin, which has such a strong hold on the heart and affections of all unregenerate men. No human arguments can remove them. Sin is "connatural" with the soul. It is natural for a man to sin. The power of sin has been strengthening itself from birth and makes regeneration "naturally" impossible. Sin is the delight of the sinner and must be cut off by supernatural power. Sin being connatural and delightful bewitches the affections so that only God's teachings can separate a man from sin.

(2) The impossibility of coming to Christ without God's teachings
appears from the "indisposedness" of man; the natural man does not receive the things of God (I Cor. 2:14). Three things must happen to man: his blind understanding must be enlightened; his hard heart must be broken; and his will must be conquered. And all these are the effects of a Supernatural power. The illumination is the particular work of God (II Cor. 4:6). The melting of the heart is the Lord's own work; it is God who gives repentance (Acts 5:31). God also changes the inclination of the will, (Phil. 2:13). These things are done when, and only when, God teaches the soul.

(3) The nature of faith is supernatural, everything in it is supernatural! The implantation of the habit of faith is supernatural. It is not of man, but the gift of God. It is a habit, not acquired, but infused by grace. By faith a man goes to Christ against all the dictates of natural sense and reason. The cutting off of sin is supernatural. The victories and conquests of faith are all supernatural. In other words, no one can come to Christ without God's aid.

It is impossible to believe without supernatural grace. The desire of self-sufficiency was the ruin of Adam, and the conceit of self-sufficiency is the ruin of multitudes of his posterity. Many natural men have acquired a great sum of knowledge, but unless he knows that "true knowledge" taught of God he goes to hell. "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,

I, 334.
I, 334.
I, 334.
but to them it is not given* (Matt. 13:11). Salvation given to men is given by God to whom He pleases.

Flavel says, "If God has taught you the evil of sin, the worth of Christ, the necessity of regeneration, the mystery of faith, the way of communion with God in duties, trouble not yourself because of your ignorance in natural or moral things; you have that which will bring you to heaven. He is truly a wise man who knows the way of salvation, though he is ignorant and unskilful in other things. You know what all the learned doctors and libraries in the world could never teach you, God has revealed them to you....Bless God and be not discouraged."

Then the author proceeds to give six signs that prove a man to be taught of God. (1) The teachings of God are humbling to the soul. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee, therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." (2) The teachings of God are deeply affecting and impressive. When God shows the evil of sin He convinces the soul that it can have no pleasure in them. From this time on outward afflictions cannot make the soul bitter. (3) His teachings are sanctifying and renewing. They reform the heart. All the revelation God makes of Himself in Christ has an assimilating quality, and change the soul into His own likeness. (4) His teachings are practical. Idle notions are not learned from God. When God says to the soul, "be comforted," it is done.

118 I, 334.
119 I, 335.
120 I, 335.
God speaks no word in vain. Everything that man learns of God is of use.

(5) God's teachings are agreeable with the written Word. God speaks to man in the words of Scripture, or speaks to the heart in language agreeable to Scripture. The written Word becomes the standard for trying all divine teachings.

(6) God's teachings are satisfying to the soul of man. "Men can only teach 'objectively' by propounding truth to the understanding, but men can't enlighten the faculty itself as God does... He giveth man understanding, as well as instructions to be understood. He opens the eyes of the understanding, as well as propoundeth the object." By following these six signs the teachings of God may be distinguished from all other teachings.

121
I, 335.
122
I, 336.
ON UNION WITH CHRIST

Man is made sure of union with Christ by the Spirit which is given to him. The effects of the Spirit of God within are a foundation upon which man may build the certainty and assurance of his union with Christ.

The Spirit of Christ is the bond of union between Him and the soul. It does not mean that the very person of Christ dwells in the soul, imparting His essential properties to the soul. It would be blasphemy to say that. But His saving influences are communicated to the soul in the way of sanctifying operations. As the sun is said to come into the house with its beams and comforting influences. These graces and influences do not abide in the soul in the same manner and measure as they do in Christ. Christ is anointed with the Spirit above the measure of man, but there are different proportions of grace communicated to believers by the same Spirit. These graces operating in the heart of man prove the reality of the soul's union with Christ.

Flavel goes further to say and I quote: "There is something in grace which is essential and 'constitutive' of its being; and something that flows from grace, and is 'manifestive' of such a Being. We cannot immediately and intuitively discern the essence of grace, as it is in its simple nature. So God only discerns it, who is the author of it, but we may discern it

123 I, 337.
124 I, 337.
125 I, 337.
'mediately' and 'secondarily' by the effects and operations of it. Could we see the simple essence of grace, or intuitively discern our union with Christ, our knowledge would be 'demonstrative,' 'a priori ad posterius,' by seeing effects, as they are lodged in their cause. But we come to know the Being of grace and the reality of our union with Christ 'a posteriori,' by ascending in our knowledge from the effects and operations, to their true cause and Being."

God has provided man with a power of self-intuition and reflection by which he can examine his own heart and judge himself and his actions. The soul not only has a power to 'project' but also a power to 'reflect' upon its own actions, not only to put forth a 'direct act' of faith upon Christ, but to judge that act also. "I know in whom I have believed." This is the way in which believers attain their certainty and knowledge of union with Christ.

The soul's union with Christ is a supernatural mystery. It is discovered by the effects of union in the believers. The Spirit of God in believers is the bond by which they are united with Christ. God and believers meet in a blessed union. It is Christ's glory to be one with God. It is man's glory to be one with Christ.

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I, 337.

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I, 337.
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