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QUESTIONS & COUNSEL | *By the Rev. Ashbel Green, D.D.*<sup>1</sup>

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*For Those Who Hope That a Work of Saving Grace Has Been Wrought Upon Their Hearts.*<sup>2</sup>

QUESTIONS

1. Have you seen yourself to be, by nature and by practice, a lost and helpless sinner? Have you not only seen the sinfulness of particular acts of transgression, but also that your heart is the seat and fountain of sin?—That in you, naturally, there is no good thing? Has a view of this led you to despair of help from yourself?—To see that you must be altogether indebted to Christ for salvation, and to the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit for strength and ability rightly to perform any duty?

2. On what has your hope of acceptance with God been founded? On your reformation? on your sorrow for your sin? on your prayers? on your tears? on your good works and religious observances? or has it been on Christ alone, as your all in all? Has Christ ever appeared very precious to you? Do you mourn that he does not appear more so? Have you sometimes felt great freedom to commit your soul to him? In doing this, (if you have done it) has it been, not only to be delivered from the punishment due to your sins, but also from the power, pollution, dominion, and existence of sin in your soul?

3. As far as you know yourself, do you hate, and desire to be delivered from all sin—without any exception of a favorite lust? Do you pray much to be delivered from sin? Do you watch against it, and against temptation to it? Do you strive against it, and in some good degree get the victory over it? Have you so repented of it as to have your soul really set against it?

4. Have you counted the cost of following Christ, or of being truly religious? that it will cut you off from vain amusements, from the indulgence of your lusts, and from a sinful conformity to the world? that it may expose you to ridicule and contempt; possibly to more serious persecution? In the view of all these things, are you willing to take up the cross, and to follow Christ, whithersoever he shall lead you? Is it your solemn purpose, in reliance on his grace and aid, to cleave to him, and to his cause and people, to the end of life?

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<sup>1</sup> 1762-1848. Old School theologian, pastor, churchman, educator. Born at Hanover, Morris County, NJ; graduate of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) with highest honors. Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at Princeton, then, upon entering the ministry, pastor of 2nd Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia. From 1792-1800, Chaplain to Congress; 1812-1822, President of Princeton. In 1815, under Green's ministry there was a revival of religion at Princeton, touching some 30 students, including Charles Hodge. Upon retirement, from 1822-1834, Green edited the *Christian Advocate*. In 1824, Green served as Moderator of the General Assembly. On May 19, 1848, he was found dead in the posture of prayer.

<sup>2</sup> From *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America Addressed to Youth*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Work, 1841), 2:470-472. Footnotes added by the editor of this excerpt.

5. Do you love holiness? Do you earnestly desire to be more and more conformed to a holy God, and to his holy law? to bear more and more the likeness of your Redeemer? Do you seek, and sometimes find communion with your God and Saviour?

6. Are you resolved, in God's strength, to endeavour conscientiously to perform your whole duty—to God, to your neighbour, and to yourself? Do you perform common and relative duties conscientiously, as a part of the duty which you owe to God?

7. Do you make conscience of secret prayer daily? Do you not sometimes feel a backwardness to this duty? Do you at other times feel a great delight in it? Have you a set time, and place, and order of exercises, for performing this duty?

8. Do you daily read a portion of the Holy Scriptures in a devout manner? Do you love to read the Bible? Do you ever perceive a sweetness in the truths of the Holy Scriptures? Do you find them adapted to your necessities, and see, at times, a wonderful beauty, excellence, and glory, in God's word? Do you make it the man of your counsel, and endeavour to have both your heart and life conformed to its doctrines and requisitions?

9. Have you ever attempted to covenant with God? To give yourself away to him, solemnly and irrevocably, hoping for acceptance through Christ alone; and taking God, in Christ, as the covenant God, and satisfying portion of your soul?

10. Does the glory of God ever appear to you as the first, greatest, and best of all objects? Do you desire to promote the glory of God, as the chief object of life?

11. Do you feel a love to mankind, such as you did not formerly feel? Have you a great desire that the souls of men should be saved, by being brought to a genuine faith and trust in the Redeemer? Do you love God's people with a peculiar attachment, because they bear their Saviour's image, and because they love and pursue the objects, and delight in the exercises, which are most pleasing and delightful to yourself? Do you from your heart forgive all your personal enemies, and refuse to cherish or entertain any sentiment of hatred or revenge? If you have injured any person, have you made reparation, or are you ready and willing to make it?

12. Do you feel it to be very important to adorn religion by a holy, exemplary, amiable, and blameless walk and conversation? Do you fear to bring a reproach on the cause of Christ? Does this appear to you extremely dreadful? Are you afraid of backsliding, and of being left to return to a state of carelessness and indifference to religion?

13. Do you desire and endeavour to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ your Saviour, more and more? Are you willing to sit at his feet as a little child, and to submit your reason and understanding implicitly to his teaching; imploring his Spirit to guide you into all necessary truth, to save you from all fatal errors, to enable you to receive the truth in the love of it, and to transform you more and more, into a likeness to himself?

## COUNSEL

1. Remember that these questions are intended to point your attention to subjects of inquiry the most important. Do not, therefore, content yourself with a careless or cursory reading of them. Read and deliberate, and examine yourself closely on the questions under each head; and let your heart be lifted up to God, while you are considering each particular question, in earnest desire that he may show you the very truth. You cannot ordinarily go over all these questions at one time. Divide them, therefore, and take one part at one time, and another at another. But try to get over the whole in the course of a week; and do this every week for some months. When you find yourself doubtful or deficient in any point, let it not discourage you; but note down that point in writing, and bend the attention of our mind to it, and labour and pray till you shall have made the

attainment which will enable you to answer clearly. It is believed that you cannot fail to see how each question ought to be answered.

2. Remember that secret prayer, reading the word of God, watchfulness, and self-examination, are the great means of preserving comfort in religion, and of growing in grace. In proportion as you are exact and faithful in these, such, usually will be your inward peace, and the safety of your state. Unite them all together, and never cease to practice them while you live. Think often of the character of Enoch,<sup>3</sup> and try to walk with God. Read Mason's little book on Self-knowledge;<sup>4</sup> I recommend it as excellent.

3. Besides the Bible, have constantly in reading, at your leisure hours, some author of known piety and excellence. I particularly recommend Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul."<sup>5</sup> Also select pieces of Owen,<sup>6</sup> Baxter,<sup>7</sup> Watts,<sup>8</sup> and Witherspoon's Essays on Regeneration and Justification, and his sermons generally.<sup>9</sup>

4. Do not suppose that any evidence of a gracious state, which at present you may think you possess, will release you from the necessity of maintaining a constant vigilance in time to come; nor from repeated examinations and trials of yourself even to the end of life. Many marks and evidences of a gracious state are set down by pious writers.<sup>10</sup> But they must all come to this: to ascertain what is your *prevalent* temper and character: whether, on the whole, you are increasing in sanctification, or not. If you are, you may be comforted; if not, you have cause to be alarmed. It is only he that endureth to the end that shall be saved.<sup>11</sup>

5. I think it of very great importance to warn you not to imagine that true religion is confined to the closet, or to the church; even though you apprehend that you have great comfort and freedom there. Freedom and comfort there, are, indeed, most desirable; but true religion reaches to every thing. It alters and sweetens the temper. It improves the manners.<sup>12</sup> It goes into every duty, relation, station, and situation of life. If you have true religion, you will have a better spirit, you will be better sons, or daughters, better husbands or wives, better friends, better members of general society, and more exemplary in the discharge of every duty; as the sure consequence of this invaluable possession. And if your religion does not produce these effects, although you may talk

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<sup>3</sup>Gen. 5:22, "Then Enoch walked with God. . ."; Heb. 11:5, "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God."

<sup>4</sup>John Mason, 1706-1763, *Self Knowledge: A Treatise Showing the Nature and Benefit of That Important Science and the Way to Attain It* (London, 1828).

<sup>5</sup>Philip Doddridge, 1702-1751, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul: Illustrated in a Course of Serious and Practical Addresses, Suited to Persons of Every Character and Circumstance; With a Devout Meditation or Prayer Added to Each Chapter* (London, 1745).

<sup>6</sup>John Owen, 1616-1683. E.g., *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (London, 1656); *Of Temptation: the Nature and Power of It* (London, 1658).

<sup>7</sup>Richard Baxter, 1615-1691. E.g., *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (London, 1650); *The Character of a Sound, Confirmed Christian* (London, 1669).

<sup>8</sup>Isaac Watts, 1674-1748. E.g., *A Guide To Prayer* (London, 1615); *The Improvement of the Mind* (London, 1741).

<sup>9</sup>John Witherspoon, 1723-1794, *Practical Treatise on Regeneration* (London, 1743); *Essay on Justification* (London, 1756); *Sermons On Practical Subjects* (London, 1768).

<sup>10</sup>E.g., Jonathan Edwards, *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741); *Religious Affections* (1746); Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, 1844.

<sup>11</sup>Matt. 10:22.

<sup>12</sup>I.e., characteristic behavior.

of inward comforts, and even of raptures, you have great reason to fear that the whole is a delusion, and that the root of the matter is not in you. “Herein,” said the Saviour, “is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”<sup>13</sup>

6. Be careful to avoid a gloomy, and to cherish a cheerful temper. Be habitually cheerful; but avoid levity. Mirth and laughter are not always sinful; but let your indulgence in them be clearly innocent, not very frequent, and never of long continuance. Be very humble. Be not talkative. Before experienced Christians be a hearer, rather than a talker. Try, in every way, however, to promote religion among your relatives and friends. Win them to it by your amiable temper and exemplary deportment. “Flee youthful lusts.”<sup>14</sup> Shun every excitement to them. Guard against dissipation: it extinguishes piety.<sup>15</sup> Be not disconcerted by ridicule and reproach.<sup>16</sup> Your Saviour bore much of these for you. Think of this, and be ashamed of nothing so much as of being ashamed of him. Trust in his protection, live to his praise, and you will spend an eternity in his blissful presence.

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<sup>13</sup>John 15:8.

<sup>14</sup>2 Tim. 2:22.

<sup>15</sup>Eph. 5:18.

<sup>16</sup>1 Pet. 4:4.