

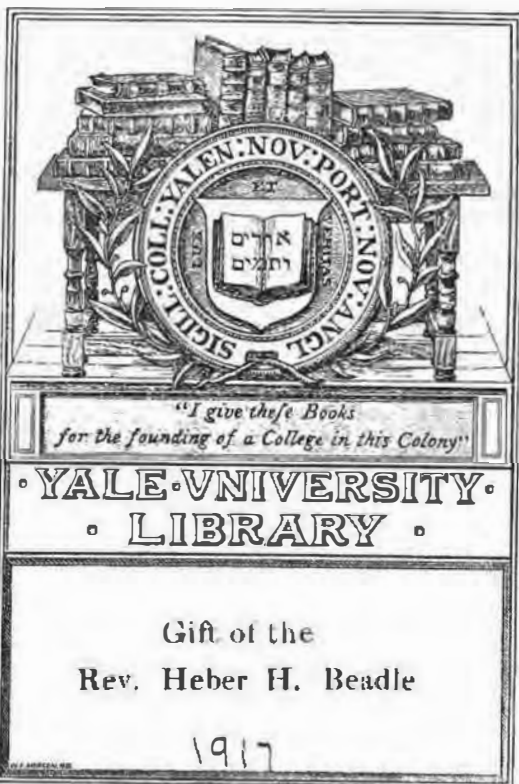
THE  
WORKS  
OF  
JOHN OWEN, D.D.,

EDITED  
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VOL. XIII.  
AN EXPOSITION OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.  
WITH  
PRELIMINARY EXERCITATIONS.  
VOL. IV.

“GRACE BE WITH ALL THEM WHO LOVE THE LORD JESUS  
CHRIST IN SINCERITY.”—EPH. vi. 24.

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It is a waste of time to attempt to give an outline of the Doctor's publications. In the opinion of his biographer, "The Exposition of the Hebrews, had its author written nothing else, forms a pedestal on which John Owen will appear an object of admiration to all future generations."

The passage in view demonstrates that all believers are responsible for oversight in the church - not just elders. This fact is not commonly known. See also his similar remarks [here](#).

Hebrews 3:12 **See to it brothers**, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

“TAKE HEED UNTO THYSELF, AND UNTO THE  
DOCTRINE; CONTINUE IN THEM: FOR IN DOING  
THIS THOU SHALT BOTH SAVE THYSELF, AND  
THEM THAT HEAR THEE.”

1 TIMOTHY, iv. 16.

[3.] It is so to heed them as to endeavour *to avoid them*, and that in all their occasions, causes, and advantages, in their whole work and efficacy. We are not only to consider them when they assault us, but to watch against all ways whereby they may so do. This is the duty of a man that stands armed on his guard. He is very regardless of his enemy who never seeks to avoid him but when he sees him or feels him. Men will consider the lion's walk, so as not without good means of defence to be found in it. The lion is in all the especial oppositions we are exercised with. We had need continually to be "fenced with iron and the staff of a spear," as 2 Sam. xxiii. 7, and yet to avoid them what we are able. God expresseth his great dislike of them that "walk contrary to him," as we have rendered the words, Lev. xxvi. 21, וְאִם תֵּלְכּוּ עִמִּי קָרִי;—'If you walk with me at a peradventure, or at all adventures, carelessly, negligently, without due consideration of your duty and your danger,'—this God will not bear.

[4.] *Consider them so as to oppose them.* And this consisteth in these things:—1st. In being always ready armed and standing on your guard, Eph. vi. 13; Mark xiii. 37; 2 Sam. xxiii. 7. 2dly. In calling in help and assistance, Heb. ii. 18, iv. 16. 3dly. In improving the supplies granted us with faith and diligence, Heb. xii. 1. And these are some of the things that belong unto this duty; and they are but some of them, for it is diffused through the whole course of our profession, and is indispensably required of us, if we would abide in the beauty and glory of it unto the end. And therefore the negligence and sloth of many professors can never enough be bewailed. They walk at all adventure, as if there were no devil to tempt them, no world to seduce, ensnare, or oppose them, no treachery in their own hearts to deceive them. And hence it is that many are sick, and many are weak, and some are fallen asleep in sin. **But what our Saviour said to all of old, he says still to us all, "Watch," Mark xiii. 37.**

(2.) There are the *persons* concerned in this duty, Μὴ ποτε ἔσται ἐν τινι ὑμῶν,—*"Lest there be in any of you."* Μὴ ποτε is somewhat more emphatical than the "lest," where- Μὴ ποτε. by alone we render it. "Ne forte," say some translations,—*"Lest perchance,"* with respect unto a dubious event. Others, *"Ne quando,"*—"Lest there be at any time," *"lest so, that there should be,"* ἐν τινι ὑμῶν, *"in any of you."* The apostle doth not seem in these words strictly to intend every individual person, as if he had said, 'Let every one of you look to himself and his own heart, lest it be so with him;' **but he speaks unto them collectively,** to take care that there be none such amongst them,—that none be found amongst them with such a heart as he cautions them against. **And this, consequently, falls on every in-**

dividual; for where all are spoken unto, every one is concerned. The same kind of expression is used to the same purpose, chap. xii. 15, 16, Ἐπισκοποῦντες ἑαυτοὺς ὡς ὁ Θεὸς ἐπισκοπεῖ,—"Watching," overseeing mutually, "with diligence, lest any" among you "fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau." Here the caution is evidently given unto the whole church, and the duty of the whole is expressed thereon. So is it likewise in this place, as appears from the direction that he gives for the right performance of this duty, in and by mutual watchfulness and exhortation, in the next verse. This, then, is proposed, [1.] To the whole church, to the whole society, and consequentially to every member thereof; so that we may hence observe,—

*Obs. II.* Godly jealousy concerning, and watchfulness over the whole body, that no beginnings of backsliding from Christ and the gospel be found amongst them, is the duty of all churches of believers.

He that first put in an exception to this rule was the first apostate from God, who did it to cover a former sin. הַשָּׂמֶר אֶתִּי אֲנִי, says Cain, Gen. iv. 9, "Am I my brother's keeper?"—"Is it my duty to look after him, to take care of him, or what becomes of him?" God proposed the question so unto him as it was apt in its own nature to lead him to confession and repentance. But he was now hardened in sin, and having quarrelled with God and slain his brother, he now casts off all the remaining dictates of the law of nature, accounting that one brother is not bound to take care of the welfare of another. Mutual watchfulness over one another by persons in any society is a prime dictate of the law of our creation, which was first rejected by this first murderer; and every neglect of it hath something of murder in it, 1 John iii. 11, 12, 15. In a church relation the obligation unto this duty is ratified by institution. Upon the officers of the church it is incumbent by the way of office; on all believers, as members of the church, in a way of love: Lev. xix. 17, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." He that doth not watch over his brother to prevent his sin, or recover him from it, as much as lies in him, he hates him, and is so far a murderer. And the necessity of this duty is expressed in the word used to declare it, and the manner of its usage: הוֹכִיחַ תּוֹכִיחַ,—"rebuking thou shalt rebuke him;" that is, plainly and effectually, and that with such rebukes as consist in arguings, reasonings, and pleadings, to bring on a conviction. So the word signifies, and is used as to the pleadings or reasonings of men with God to prevail with him; Job xiii. 3, "Surely I would speak to the Almighty, I desire הוֹכִיחַ אֱלֹהִים," "to reason" (argue, plead) "with God, until I can prevail with him." And it is used of God's

pleading with men, to bring them to conviction, Isa. i. 18, לְכִי-נִשְׁכַּח, וְנִבְרָרָה,—"Go to" (or "come now"), "and let us plead together." So that an effectual dealing with a brother about sin is included. And this is enforced in the latter clause of the words, וְלֹא-תִשֶׂא עָלֶיךָ חַטָּאת; which may well be rendered, "And thou shalt not bear iniquity for him,"—that is, make thyself guilty of his sin, by not reproving him. And for that jealousy which is to accompany this watchfulness, and the effects of it, our apostle gives in an example in himself, 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: . . . . for I fear," (μή πως, as here μή ποτε) "lest by any means . . . . your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." This belongs to their watch, as they watch for the souls of their people, "as they who must give account," Heb. xiii. 17. The discharge of this duty will be required of them on the account of their office, and that when, I fear, some will be hard put to it for an answer. **For the Scripture is full of threatenings and denunciations of sore judgments against those that shall be found neglective herein. But doth this excuse other believers, members of churches, from a share and interest in this duty? No, doubtless, unless it renders them Cains,—that is, transgressors against the light of nature, and who, as to the institutions of Christ, manifest themselves not to be members of the same mystical body with them that really believe. For in the observation of this and the like duties of their common interest doth the preservation of that body consist. Christ is the head, "from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love," Eph. iv. 16. Every joint, every part in this mystical body that receives influences of life from Christ, the head, and so holds of him, is to work effectually, and to give out the supplies which it receives from Christ, unto the preservation, increase, and edification of the whole.**

There is, indeed, a causeless suspicion that some are apt to indulge unto, instead of this watchful jealousy. But this is the bane of churches and of love, as that is the preservation of them both. The apostle placeth ἐπινοίας πονηράς, "evil surmises," or "suspicions," among the works of "men of corrupt minds," 1 Tim. vi. 4, and that deservedly; but this godly, watchful jealousy, is that which he commends unto others in the example of himself. And whatever appearance they may have one of the other, they may be easily distinguished. Jealousy is a solicitous care, proceeding from love; suspicion, a vain conjecturing, proceeding from curiosity, vanity, or envy. He that hath the former, his heart is ruled by love towards them concerning whom he hath it. From thence he is afraid lest they should miscarry, lest any evil should befall them; for love is the *willing*

*of all good unto others*, that they may prosper universally. Suspicion is an effect of curiosity and vanity of mind; whence commonly there is somewhat of envy, and secret self-pleasing in the miscarriages of others, mixed with it,—a fault too often found amongst professors. And this vice puts forth itself in vain babbling and unheedful defamations; whereas the other works by love, tenderness, prayer, and mutual exhortation, as in the next verse. Again, this jealous watchfulness hath for its end the glory of Christ and his gospel, with the good of the souls of others. This is that which the apostle aims to ingenerate and stir up in the Hebrews, as is evident from his discourse; when vain suspicion hath no end but the nourishing of the lusts from whence it doth proceed. The foundation whereon this duty is built is the common concernment of all believers in the same good or evil, which are the consequents of men's abiding in Christ or departing from him, in reference whereunto this jealous watch is to be ordered. "Take heed lest there be among you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." The good that will ensue on the avoidance of this evil is twofold: the glory of Christ, and the salvation of the souls of them who make profession of his name. And have we not a concernment in these things? Is it not our concernment that Christ be glorified by the professed subjection of the souls of men unto him, and their perseverance therein? that his name, his grace, his power, be glorified, in the holiness, fruitfulness, and stability in profession, of all that are called by his name? If we are not concerned in these things, if we are not deeply concerned in them, we are none of his.

In like manner, are we not concerned that the members of the same body with us should be kept alive, kept from putrefying, from being cut off and burned before our eyes? Are we not concerned that an eye doth not go out, that an arm doth not wither, that a leg be not broken, yea, that a finger be not cut? If it be so, we are not ourselves members of the body. The like may be said of the evil that ensues on the sin of apostasy, which in this duty we labour to obviate and prevent. That which principally of this kind might be insisted on, is the troublesome, defiling infection wherewith apostasy in any is attended; which our apostle speaks unto, chap. xii. 15. The failing of one is commonly the infection and defiling of many. There is a filthy leaven in apostasy, which if not carefully heeded may leaven the whole lump. Ofttimes also it springs from or is accompanied with some word of error that eats like a gangrene. "*Principiis obsta*" is the great rule in these cases. And the duty spoken unto is one signal means of the prevention of this evil. And herein lies our concernment; as also in the preventing of that punishment that may befall the whole for the sins of some, Josh. xxii. 18, 20. And it is the defect which is in this and the like kind of



duties which manifests and makes naked that miserable degeneracy which Christians in general, in these latter evil days, are fallen into. Who almost hath any regard unto them? Instead of these fruits of spiritual love, men for the most part follow “divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” The practical duties of Christianity are amongst many derided. To watch over one another, to warn, to exhort one another, are looked on as things, if possible, beneath contempt. And it is a shame to mention or report the ways and means of dealing with and about the sins of men, which by some are substituted in the room of those appointed in the gospel unto their utter exclusion. But the rule is stable, and will in due time, through the strength of Christ, prevail against the lusts of men.

*Obs. III. [2.] It is the duty of every individual believer to be intent on all occasions, lest at any time, or by any means, there should be found in him “an evil heart of unbelief.”*

This, as was showed, follows on the former, and is a necessary consequence of it. But this so directly falls in with what will be offered from the next clause that thereunto we refer it.

(3.) The evil thus earnestly cautioned against is expressed, [1.] In the *principle* of it, and that is, *Καρδιά πονηρά τῆς ἀπιστίας*: and, [2.] In the *work or effect of that principle*, in these words, *Ἐν τῷ ἀποστῆναι ἀπὸ Θεοῦ ὧντος*.

[1.] The principle of the evil is “an evil heart of unbelief.” What is meant by *καρδιά*, “the heart,” in the sense wherein it is here used, was declared on the verses preceding; what is meant by *πονηρά*, “evil,” shall be showed in its proper place. In special, it is said to be “an evil heart *τῆς ἀπιστίας*,”—“of unbelief;” that is, say most, *ἄπιστος*, “cor malum et incredulum,” “an evil heart, and incredulous,” or “unbelieving,”—an evil and unbelieving heart. So the genitive case of the substantive is put for the adjective,—*ἀπιστίας* for *ἄπιστος*, by a Hebraism not unusual. In this sense “unbelieving” is either exegetical, declaring what is meant by the “evil heart” in this place, even an unbelieving heart; or it is additious, and so a heart is signified which in general is evil, and in particular unbelieving. But there seems to me to be more in this expression; and that *ἀπιστίας* here is “genitivus efficientis,”—denoting the principal efficient cause rendering the heart so evil as that it should “depart from the living God.” *Καρδιά ἀπιστίας*, then, “a heart of unbelief,” is more than *καρδιά ἄπιστος*, “an unbelieving heart;” for this latter word is sometimes used to express a defect in believing, and not unbelief absolutely. So John xx. 27, *Μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος, ἀλλὰ πιστός*,—“Be not unbelieving, but believing.” They are the words of Christ unto Thomas, who, though he failed in his faith, yet was not absolutely without faith. I confess the word is generally used in Scrip-

ture to express a negative unbeliever, or an infidel; but there is something peculiar in this expression, "A heart of unbelief,"—that is, under the power of it, principled by it in its actings. What this unbelief is, and how the heart is rendered *πονηρά*, "evil," thereby, we must now inquire.

As for unbelief, it is usually distinguished into that which is negative and that which is privative.

1st. *Negative* unbelief is whenever any man or men believe not, or have not faith, although they never had the means of believing granted unto them. For when men believe not, they are unbelievers, whether they have had any means of believing or no, or whether their unbelief be culpable or no, whatever may be the nature or degree of its demerit. So the apostle calls him an unbeliever who comes in accidentally to the assembly of the church, who never heard the word preached before, 1 Cor. xiv. 23, 24. In this sense, all those persons and nations who have never had as yet the gospel preached unto them are infidels, or unbelievers; that is, they are so negatively,—they believe not, but yet cannot be said to have in them "an evil heart of unbelief."

2dly. It is *privative*, when men believe not, although they enjoy the means of faith or believing. And herein consists the highest acting of the depraved nature of man. And it is on many accounts the greatest provocation of God that a creature can make himself guilty of. For it is, as might be manifested, an opposition unto God in all the properties of his nature, and in the whole revelation of his will. Hence the gospel, which is a declaration of grace, mercy, and pardon, though it condemns all sin, yet it denounceth the final condemnation of persons only against this sin: "He that believeth shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned," Mark xvi. 16.

Now this privative unbelief is twofold:—(1st.) In *refusing to believe* when it is required; (2dly.) In *rejecting the faith* after it hath been received. (1st.) The first is, when the object of faith, or that which is to be believed, is according unto the mind of God, and in the way of his appointment proposed unto men; when sufficient evidence is given unto the truth and goodness of what is so proposed; and when the authority is made known on which faith is required; yet they refuse to believe. For these three things,—a revelation of the things to be believed made known in the way of God, sufficient evidence given unto the truth proposed, and a just assertion of the authority of God requiring faith and obedience,—do render the unbelief of men privative. Now, as this hath its root in the natural darkness, blindness, and depravedness of the minds of men, so it is educed and acted not without new sinful prejudices, and stubbornness of the will, refusing to attend unto and consider the evidences

