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“A SOUL PREPARED FOR HEAVEN”: THE THEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATION OF ISAAC WATTS’ SPIRITUALITY

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“A SOUL PREPARED FOR HEAVEN”: THE THEOLOGICAL
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For the Glory of God

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PREFACE

Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) opens his seminal work, *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying*, with a Greek proverb that serves as a type of notice: “Man is a bubble.” Some bubbles appear and fade with ease, while others survive more than “two or three turns . . . upon the face of the waters” of this world. Taylor’s bubble analogy is aimed at creating a mental picture of the brevity and fragility of life. Writing a dissertation on a historical figure is a repeated aide-mémoire to the bubble-effect of life. It forced me into the historical corridors of our faith, and it pulled me through a myriad of perspectives. One recurring thought was that we will all one day disappear like a bubble and give our place to others. While sobering, this truth is also an encouragement because it compels us to live with an eternal perspective.

There have been many who have exemplified such an approach to life. There are men and women of the farmland in Lee County, South Carolina, where I was raised and came to faith, who exude a unique type of contentment-laced godliness that can only be found in rural obscurity. Their resolute commitment to hard work, selfless generosity, and personal responsibility shaped me beyond measure. My mother and father also come to mind. They have long been gripped by the cross of Christ, and they have spent their lives investing in eternity. Their fingerprints are all over my journey. My older brother, Justin, modeled success on many fronts and often reached back to pull me along. I’m grateful for his thoughtful counsel over the years. My wife, Maegen, is the crown jewel of my life. She possesses a selflessness that is only surmounted by her joy for life and energy to take it on. If Maegen’s joyful energy was not enough, God replicated it with divine precision in our daughter Grey. I can think too of the faithful leaders who, by

God's providence, recovered and championed biblical fidelity at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It is not lost on me what it took to bring this seminary back to the theological moorings envisioned by its founders. Southern has transformed my life and it holds a special place in my heart. There is Dr. Stephen Yuille, whose supervision of my research project was God's favor upon my life and pursuit of a terminal degree. There is also the input, attention, and kindness of Drs. Don Whitney, Michael Haykin, and Graham Beynon who made this project that much better. Each one of these men took pains to invest in something beyond themselves. The preface to a dissertation could never do justice to their place in my journey or how God has utilized them in his kingdom.

And finally, there is Isaac Watts. He has become yet another one of these bubbles. It is odd how one can become close friends with someone who has been dead for centuries. I have never understood the statement in Hebrews, "though he died, he still speaks," quite like I have in the last two years. Watts has encouraged me to look beyond this world for the source of aim and purpose. Though the pages of this work give painstaking detail to that aim and purpose, it above all else points to the most pivotal influence in history—Christ Jesus. Watts reminds us that Christ's "blood has a voice in it" and that voice still calls out to a broken world. From one bubble to another—and until my "turns" upon the face of life's waters terminate with an eternity of holiness and happiness—thank you. Thank you to the pious Doctor and to all those who have come before and after him.

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May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Nature of Biblical Spirituality

On March 8, 1702, Isaac Watts (1674–1748) accepted a call to pastor Mark Lane Congregational Chapel in London.¹ In his acceptance letter, he penned the following words:

I give up my own ease for *your spiritual profit and your increase*. I submit my inclinations to my duty, and in hopes of being made an instrument to build up this ancient church, I return this solemn answer to your call, that, with a great sense of my own inability, in mind and body, to discharge the duties of so sacred an office, I do, in the strength of Christ and his saints, my utmost diligence in all the duties of a pastor, so far as God shall enlighten and strengthen me; and I leave this promise in the hands of Christ our Mediator, to see it performed by me unto you, through the assistance of his grace and Spirit.²

Watts believed that nurturing his congregants’ “spiritual profit” and “increase” was his principal duty as a minister, and he viewed it as the chief means of bringing about the church’s renewal.³ But what exactly did he mean by it? How did he envision this “spiritual” life?

Alister McGrath defines spirituality as “the way in which Christian individuals or groups aim to deepen their experience of God.”⁴ Similarly, Brad Holt believes

¹ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Rev. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev. George Burder* (London: J. Barfield, 1810), 1:xiv.

² Watts, *Works*, 1:xv. Emphasis added.

³ Watts, *Works*, 3:4–5; Isaac Watts, *An Humble Attempt Toward the Revival of Practical Religion Among Christians, And Particularly the Protest Dissenters, by a Serious Address to Ministers and People In Some Occasional Discourses* (London: E. Matthews; R. Ford; R. Hett, 1731), 1–3. This conviction was common among his contemporaries. See David G. Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered* (Harpden, UK: Gospel Standard Baptist Trust, 1974), 83–86.

⁴ Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 3.

spirituality encompasses the dimensions of “being, relating and doing” because it is ultimately about “experience.”⁵ This emphasis on experience has a rich tradition.⁶ John Calvin affirmed that piety (or, spirituality) is “reverence joined with love of God, which the knowledge of his benefits induces.”⁷ That is to say, he viewed spirituality as a “quickenning movement,” arising from the Holy Spirit’s illumination of the understanding and inclination of the heart.⁸ Like Calvin, the English Puritans emphasized the cognitive, affective, and volitional aspects of communion with God as the genesis of Christian experience.⁹ They were convinced that “we must experience an affective appropriation of God’s sovereign grace, moving beyond intellectual assent to heartfelt dedication to Christ.”¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards adopted the same paradigm: “For who will deny that true

⁵ Bradley C. Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 8. Emphasis original.

⁶ See Ryan M. McGraw, “What is Theology? A Puritan and Reformed Vision of Living to God, through Christ, by the Spirit,” in *Puritan Piety: Writings in Honor of Joel R. Beeke*, ed. Michael Haykin and Paul Smalley (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2018), 36. McGraw notes, “While some might think that experimental piety was a Puritan emphasis, in reality it characterized classic Reformed theology as a whole. Puritanism may have been distinctive in the extent to which it stressed personal piety, yet wedding personal piety with sound doctrine was one of the great strengths of Reformed theology as a whole.” See also Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 317–19. For additional examples of Reformed experimental theology, see Ian Hamilton, *What is Experiential Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 18–25; Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study From Our Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2006), 425–43; W. Andrew Hofferker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1981); and J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990). For a contemporary treatment of the relationship between head and heart in Christian spirituality, see Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 81–99.

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.2.1.

⁸ Elsie Anne McKee, ed., *John Calvin, Writings of Pastoral Piety*, in *Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2001), 91.

⁹ Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason, “Who Were the Puritans,” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 25. Kapic and Gleason argue that, for the Puritans, “intellectual assent to Christian doctrine had to be balanced with practical outworking of God’s grace in life experiences.” See also Richard Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1979), 36.

¹⁰ J. Stephen Yuille, *Looking Unto Jesus: The Christ-Centered Piety of Seventeenth-Century Baptists* (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2014), 23–24. For a survey of how experimental religion moved from the Puritans through to Dissenting figures such as Isaac Watts and Phillip Doddridge, see Mark A. Noll,

religion consists, in a great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart?”¹¹ In a similar fashion, George Whitefield emphasized the affective dimension of spirituality: “We can preach the Gospel no further than we have experienced the power of it in our hearts.”¹²

Watts stood firmly in this tradition,¹³ championing an experimental religion that engages the Christian intellectually, affectively, and volitionally.¹⁴ He penned, “I am

The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys, in *A History of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 1:53–60.

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *The Religious Affections*, ed. John H. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 2:99. It was Edwards’ experimental religion that made him a “theologian of the heart.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival,” in *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 348–71. Edwards is one of the most influential theologians of the eighteenth century with respect to inward religion, as evident in his works on revival: (1) *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of New Hampshire in New-England*; and (2) *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. Richard Lovelace describes Edwards’ writings as “the foundational theology of spiritual renewal in English, and perhaps in any language.” Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 39–40. For more on Edwards, see William M. Schweitzer, “An Uncommon Union: Understanding Jonathan Edwards’s Experimental Calvinism,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2, no.2 (2010): 208–19; Robert D. Smart, “Jonathan Edwards’ Experimental Calvinism: Pastors Learning Revival Harmony of Theology and Experience from a Leader in the Great Awakening,” *Reformation and Revival Journal* 12, no. 3 (2003): 95–103.

¹² George Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 347–48. David Bebbington contends that eighteenth-century evangelical divines were deeply influenced by the Enlightenment’s empiricist method grounded in the thought of John Locke and Isaac Newton. Accordingly, “it is not surprising that Evangelicals frequently spoke of true Christianity as ‘experimental religion’ [because]...it must be tried by experience.” David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 57. In a similar vein, Alan Sell argues that the English Enlightenment “gave a boost to older notions concerning the right of private judgment.” This resulted in an increased emphasis on personal experience. Evangelicals “emphasized the individual’s personal experience as evidential of God’s activity within.” Alan P. F. Sell *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel: Theological Themes and Thinkers 1550–2000* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 106–08.

¹³ Many of Watts’ immediate contemporaries shared his emphasis on experimental religion. By way of example, see John Jennings, *Two Discourses: The First, Of Preaching Christ; The Second, Of Particular and Experimental Preaching* (Boston: J. Draper, 1740). Watts penned the preface to this work, noting, “Have not some of us spent our labour to build them up [Christians] in the practice of duties, without teaching them to search whether the foundation has been laid to an entire change and renovation of heart? Do we lead them constantly to enquire into the inward state of their souls, the special tempers and circumstances of their spirits, their peculiar difficulties, dangers and temptations, and give them peculiar assistance in all this variety of the Christian life? ... How much more powerful and more penetrating will our sermons be, when those who come into our assemblies shall be convinced and judged, and have the secrets of their hearts made manifest, and confess that God is in the midst of us a truth?” Isaac Watts, preface to *Two Discourses: The First, Of Preaching Christ; The Second, Of Particular and Experimental Preaching*, by John Jennings, ix–x (Boston: J. Draper, 1740).

¹⁴ This is also seen in the works which Watts formally endorsed. See, for example, his “recommendatory epistle” in Thomas Halyburton, *Memoirs of the life of the Revered, Learned and Pious Mr. Thomas Halyburton, With a Large Recommendatory Epistle by I. Watts* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1718), iii–xii. Watts notes, “I found here the inward and experimental work of Christianity described at large by a

well satisfied that the great and general reason [for the decline of the church] is the decay of vital religion in the hearts and lives of men, and the little success which the ministrations of the gospel have had of late for conversions.”¹⁵ Watts’ use of the expression “vital religion” is significant.¹⁶ He conceives of it as an inward sense of who God is.¹⁷ In other words, it is an affective (not purely cognitive) knowledge of God.¹⁸ For Watts, this knowledge includes the awakening of the soul to the seriousness of sin and the majesty of God; moreover, it is to experience peace with God, victory over temptation, faith in the unseen, and assurance in the person and work of Christ.¹⁹ Watts remarks, “[The Christian] feels his inward powers sweetly inclined to virtue and holiness ... He

wise, a learned, and ingenious man, who seems to have been a strict observer of his own spirit, and of all the secret motions of it, and more secret springs... though every Christian hath some inward sense of divine things, yet everyone has not so rich a variety of experiences; among those that have, few are of watchful as to take a due account of them; few so wise as to judge aright concerning them; and few so faithful and bold as to consign these things to the writing for use of others.”

¹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 3:2; Watts, *An Humble Attempt*, i–ii. This discourse was published in 1731, just prior to the New England revivals.

¹⁶ See Watts, *Works*, 3:18–19; Watts, *An Humble Attempt*, 54–57. Joseph Bellamy defines “vital religion” as “a vital sense of God in our hearts; a realizing, living sense of his being and perfections; that we see and feel there is a God.” Joseph Bellamy, *The Works of Joseph Bellamy* (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853), 1:530.

¹⁷ Brad Walton notes, “The ‘heart’ has both a volitional-affective dimension, and also a cognitive dimension.” Brad Walton, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections, and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensation, and Heart Religion, Studies in American Religion* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2002), 153.

¹⁸ Madeleine Forell Marshall and Janet Todd describe Watts’ hymns as an “experimental theater” in which he celebrates various “aspects of Christian experience in this world.” Madeleine Forell Marshall and Janet Todd, *English Congregational Hymns in the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 35. They add, “The primary purpose of Watts’s hymns, in theory and practice, was the controlled education of the religious sensibility of his singers. The passions are rehearsed in response to the affecting scenes. The visual precision of these hymns is essential to their purpose, making visible and immediate what through time or distance or distraction may have become obscured. Such visibility and immediacy—of God in heaven, Bible stories, the working of the Sacrament, the ecstasy of divine love—are intended to rouse in the singers the pious passions of love, fear, hope, desire, sorry, wonder, and joy. These hymns [Watts hymns] called for clear, powerful poetry, finely tuned to the common psyche.” Marshall and Todd, *English Congregational Hymns in the Eighteenth Century*, 56. In respect to the general aim of eighteenth-century hymn writing, Tom Schwanda notes, “Evangelical hymns served two purposes: to instruct and to inspire. Hymns taught the content of the gospel... [and] also provided an experiential means of response. The union of text and tune evokes the affections and inspires the possibility of a deepened experience around the content of the hymn.” Tom Schwanda, ed., *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016), 14–15.

¹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 3:19–20; Watts, *An Humble Attempt*, 55–56.

knows that he was once blind and dead in trespasses and sins, but now he is awake, and alive to God and to righteousness; he is born again, he dwells, as it were in a new world, there is a mighty and surprising change past upon him, even from death to life.”²⁰

Interestingly, Watts describes this spiritual life as “eternal life begun,”²¹ explaining, “The hidden life is that whereby he is a Christian; indeed, his spiritual life, whereby he is devoted to God, and lives to the purpose of heaven and eternity. And this is the same life, which, in other parts of Scripture, is called eternal life... The same life of piety and inward pleasure, which begins on earth, is fulfilled in heaven; and it may be called the spiritual, or the eternal, life.”²² Watts’ view of the spiritual life as “eternal life begun” is critical to his spirituality. The spiritual life is eternal life active in the present.²³ It is not equal to eternal life, but it is the *beginning* of eternal life.²⁴ While acknowledging substantial overlap, Watts is careful to differentiate between the two. The spiritual life chiefly respects the soul; it is (1) attended with sorrows and difficulties, (2) pursued through labor and service, and (3) characterized by holiness (yet “mingled with defects”) and happiness (yet “surrounded with a thousand disadvantages and trials”).²⁵ Conversely,

²⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:23; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for John Clark, E. M. Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1721), 1:63.

²¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:96; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:273.

²² Watts, *Works*, 1:96; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:272–73.

²³ While Watts would have been unfamiliar with the expression “inaugurated eschatology,” he certainly affirms its major premise, namely, the Christian experiences the benefits of eternal life in the present. For more on “inaugurated eschatology,” see George Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); and George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). For additional treatments, see Benjamin Glad, Matthew S. Harmon, and G. K. Beale, *Making All Things New: Inaugurated Eschatology for the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2016); J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2014); N.T. Wright, “Joy: Some New Testament Perspectives and Questions,” in *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture, and the Good Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Justin E. Crisp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015); N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Publishing, 2017).

²⁴ This statement is central to this dissertation. The objective is to determine Watts’ approach to the spiritual life, not provide a comprehensive analysis of his eschatology.

²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:96; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:275.

eternal life includes the body and soul; it is (1) attended with all ease and pleasure, (2) enjoyed as the great reward of faith, and (3) characterized by holiness (without any “defects”) and happiness (without any “disadvantages”). In short, the Christian enters eternal life when, “having surmounted every difficulty,” he shines and exults in “full joy and glory.”²⁶ Yet, despite these very tangible differences, Watts insists that the spiritual is “eternal life begun.” By this, he means that the Christian experiences the holiness and happiness of eternal life in the present,²⁷ and it is this experience that provides the basic contour of Watts’ spirituality.

The Life of Isaac Watts

Isaac Watts was born in Southampton on July 17, 1674, the oldest of eight siblings. His parents belonged to an Independent congregation, pastored by Nathaniel Robinson—the ejected rector of All Saints Church.²⁸ His father (Isaac Watts Sr.) was a church deacon and trustee, as well as the leaseholder for the church property.²⁹ He was known as “a most pious, exemplary Christian,”³⁰ and as “a man of strong convictions...willing to suffer for the sake of his conscience.”³¹ In a document entitled,

²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:96; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:275.

²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:1–20; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:1–54.

²⁸ As a result of Parliament’s Act of Uniformity in 1662, approximately 2,000 ministers left the Church of England and became “nonconformists” or “dissenters.” For more on this, see N. H. Keeble, *“Settling the Peace of the Church”: 1662 Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Geo Gould, ed., *Documents Relating to the Settlement of the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity of 1662* (London: W. Kent and Co., 1862); Peter Bayne, “English Puritanism: Its Character and History,” in *Documents Relating to the Settlement of the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity of 1662*, ed. Geo Gould (London: W. Kent and Co., 1862), 1–142; Edmund Calamy, *An Account of the Ministers, Lecturers, Masters and Fellows of Colleges and Schoolmasters, Who were Ejected or Silenced After the Restoration in 1660. By, or Before, the Act for Uniformity. Designed for the Preserving to Posterity the Memory of their Names, Characters, Writings, and Sufferings* (London: J Lawrence, J. Nicholson, and J. Sprint, 1713).

²⁹ Arthur Paul Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works* (London: Independent Press, 1948), 4. Very little is known about Watts’ siblings. His oldest brother, Richard, was a prosperous London physician. A second brother, Enoch, was involved in producing Gibbons’ biography on Watts. For more, see Davis, *Watts*, 6–7.

³⁰ Thomas Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts* (London: n.p., 1780), 1.

³¹ Davis, *Watts*, 4.

“Memorable Affair in My Life,” the younger Watts (at nine years of age) makes mention of his father’s imprisonment for nonconformity in 1683.³² Two years later, while fleeing Southampton due to persecution, Watts Sr. penned the following to his children:

Though it hath pleased the only wise God to suffer the malice of ungodly men, the enemies of Jesus Christ (and my enemies for his sake), to break out so far against me, as to remove me from you in my personal habitation, thereby at once bereaving me of that comfort, which I might have hoped for in the enjoyment of my family in peace, and you of that education, which my love as a father and duty as a parent required me to give; yet such are the longings of my soul for your good and prosperity, especially in spiritual concernments, that I remember you always with myself in my daily prayers addressed to the throne of grace.³³

In the same letter, he encouraged his children to (1) read the Holy Scriptures, (2) consider their “sinful and miserable estate” by nature, (3) pursue the knowledge of God by his “glorious attributes and infinite perfections,” (4) remember God as their Creator, (5) worship God “according to the rules of the gospel,” and (6) obey all their “superiors.”³⁴ This godly influence was no doubt influential in Watts’ conversion. Apparently, he struggled with “considerable convictions of sin” before coming to a saving knowledge of Christ in 1688.³⁵

I am a vile polluted lump of earth,
So I’ve continued ever since my birth,
Although Jehovah grace does daily give me,
As sure this monster Satan will deceive me,
Come therefore, Lord, from Satan’s claws relieve me.

Wash me in Thy blood, O Christ,
And grace divine impart,
Then search and try the corners of my heart,
That I in all things may be fit to do
Service to thee, and sing thy praises too.³⁶

³² Davis, *Watts*, 5.

³³ David G. Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered* (Harpenden, UK: Gospel Standard Baptist Trust, 1974), 17.

³⁴ Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered*, 17–19.

³⁵ Davis, *Watts*, 8.

³⁶ Watts penned this acrostic poem when he was seven years old. Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 5. It is likely that his interest in poetic verse was first nurtured in the home. His father and

School Years

In the words of one of his biographers, Watts was “the little Puritan...the most diligent and advanced scholar, the beloved of his master.”³⁷ At four years of age, he began to learn Latin, and, three years later, he turned his attention to the study of Greek. By the time he reached thirteen years of age, he had also mastered Hebrew and French.³⁸ As a “pale child,” there was “certainly nothing robust about him, but all the indications of the future scholar.”³⁹ Watts’ formal education began in 1680 at the Free-School in Southampton, where he studied under the direction of John Pinhorne (1652–1714).⁴⁰

Having completed his grammar school education, Watts was ready for the university. However, a university education was not available to nonconformists. “The avenues of prosperity and peace seemed to lie only in conformity to the Church of England.”⁴¹ John Speed, a physician in Southampton, offered to subsidize Watts’ expenses at one of the universities. However, Watts was unwilling to “conform,” choosing instead “to take up his lot amongst the Dissenters.”⁴² In 1690, he enrolled at Thomas Rowe’s Academy (associated with the Dissenters) in London.⁴³ During these

grandfather were poets. The earliest record of Watts’ family is of his grandfather, Thomas Watts. He was a gifted man whose interest spanned all sorts of subjects. “My grandfather, Mr. Thomas Watts, had such acquaintance with the mathematics, painting, music and poetry, &c. as gave him considerable esteem among his contemporaries. He was commander of a ship of war in 1656, and by blowing up the ship in the Dutch war he was drowned in his youth.” Watts, *Works*, 4:494.

³⁷ Edwin Paxton Hood, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Writings, His Homes and Friends* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1875), 8.

³⁸ Davis, *Watts*, 8.

³⁹ Hood, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Writings*, 8.

⁴⁰ Davis, *Watts*, 8. Pinhorne was the Master of the Free-School, Rector of All-Saints, and later Vicar of the parish Eling in Hampshire. He was deeply influential in Watts’ life, and they shared a close bond. Watts’ affection for Pinhorne was so strong that he wrote a poem (in Latin) in his honor. He described him as the “faithful preceptor of my younger years.” Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 7–19.

⁴¹ Hood, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Writings*, 13.

⁴² Hood, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Writings*, 14.

⁴³ The Reverend Thomas Rowe was Watts’ tutor and pastor during this period of educational training. At age 19, Watts “joined in communion with the church” under the pastoral care of Thomas Rowe. Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 20. Watts wrote a lyrical poem to Rowe, which reads in part: “I love thy gentle influence, Rowe, Thy gentle influence like the sun, Only dissolves the frozen snow, Then

formative years, Watts produced works on theology, metaphysics, and ethics.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he developed his poetic gifting.⁴⁵ At twenty years of age, Watts formally ended his academic career and returned to his father's home in Southampton.⁴⁶ For two years, he spent time in "reading, meditation, and prayer," in order to prepare "for that work [i.e., the ministry] to which he was determined to devote his life."⁴⁷

Ministry Years

At the end of these two years, Watts accepted a position as tutor in the home of Sir John Hartopp in Stoke Newington.⁴⁸ After five years of tutoring, he formally entered the ministry, accepting the position of associate pastor at Mark Lane Congregational Chapel in London.⁴⁹ On March 18, 1702, Watts succeeded Isaac Chauncy (1632–1712) as pastor.⁵⁰ Due to recurring illness, Watts was absent from the pulpit for prolonged periods

bids our thoughts like rivers flow." Isaac Watts, *Horae Lyricae. Poems, Chiefly of the Lyric Kind. In Two Books. I Songs, &c. Sacred to Devotion. II. Odes, Elegys, &c. to Virtue, Loyalty and Friendship* (London: S and D Bridge, 1706), 154; Watts, *Works*, 4:466. For more on Rowe, see Hood, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Writings*, 16–17.

⁴⁴ Watts brother, Enoch, left two volumes of manuscripts to the biographer Thomas Gibbons. These contained twenty-two Latin dissertations, which Watts penned during his academic career at Rowe's Academy. For the transcripts of two of these, see Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 21–37. In addition to these twenty-two Latin theses, Gibbons published two English dissertations related to student meetings in July 1693 and September 1693. For the transcripts, see Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 38–58. Gibbons also notes that Enoch provided him with Watts' complete abridgement of Theophilus Gale's three-volume work, *The Court of the Gentiles*. Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 59.

⁴⁵ Much of Watts' poetry from this period was composed in letters to his family. For an example, see Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 69–71.

⁴⁶ In 1728, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Aberdeen conferred honorary Doctorate degrees upon Watts. David Jennings, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Late Reverend Isaac Watts D.D. Preached to the Church of which he was Pastor. December 11, 1748* (London: J. Oswald and W. Dilly, 1749), 26–27.

⁴⁷ Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 92.

⁴⁸ Two of Watts' most well-known discourses were funeral sermons for Sir John Hartopp and his wife Lady Hartopp. For copies, see Watts, *Works*, 2:1–80; Isaac Watts, *Death and Heaven; or The Last Enemy Conquer'd, and Separate Spirits Made Perfect: With an Account of The Rich Variety of Their Employments and Pleasures; Attempted in Two Funeral Discourses, In Memory of Sir John Hartopp Bart. And His Lady, Deceased*, 2nd ed. (London: John and Barham Clark, Eman Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1724). For more on Sir John Hartopp and his family, see Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Writings*, 34–37.

⁴⁹ Watts preached his first sermon on July 17, 1698 (his twenty-fourth birthday).

⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:xiv. Watts accepted this call immediately following Chauncy's resignation

of time. His health became such an issue that the church hired Samuel Price to serve as an assistant. In September 1712, Watts suffered from a particularly difficult illness. He was “seized with a violent fever which shook his constitution and left such wakens upon his nerves as continued with him in some degree to his dying day.”⁵¹ This illness kept Watts from engaging in public ministry until 1716. During this time, Price was formally ordained as the co-pastor of Mark Lane. Watts moved into the home of Sir Thomas Abney, where he lived for the remainder of his life. The impact of Abney’s kindness upon Watts was tremendous. One biographer writes:

Here he enjoyed the uninterrupted demonstrations of the truest friendship. Here, without any care of his own, he had everything which could contribute to the enjoyment of life, and favour the unwearied pursuit of his studies. Here he dwelt in a family which for piety, order, harmony, and every virtue was a house of God. Here he had the privilege of a country recess, the pure air, the retired grove, the fragrant bower, the spreading lawn, the flowery garden, and other advantages to sooth his mind, an aid to his restoration to health, to yield him whenever he chose them most grateful intervals from his laborious studies, and enable him to return to them with doubled vigour and delight.⁵²

Due to his illness, Watts was obligated to pass most of his time “in retirement from the world.”⁵³ This allowed him to devote himself to writing. He published numerous poems and hymns: *Horae Lyricae* (1706) and *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707).⁵⁴ Some

in January 1702. Thomas Rowe’s church provided a letter of recommendation for Watts. “For as much as our dear broth Mr. Isaac Watts who was with great satisfaction admitted a member amongst us, and hath since walked as becomes the gospel to the glory of God and to the honour of his holy profession, doth now desire his dismissal from us, we do in compliance therewith discharge him from his membership among us in order to his being receive by you, praying that his ministerial labours, and those gifts and graces were with the Lord Jesus Christ, the great head of the church, hath been pleased so richly to furnish him may be abundantly blessed to the conversion of souls, and your edification, to whose grace and blessing we do from our hearts commend both him and you.” Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 97–98.

⁵¹ Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 100.

⁵² Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts*, 113.

⁵³ Philip Doddridge and David Jennings, “The Preface, with Some Account of the Author’s Life and Character,” in *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D.* 6 vols, Rev. and corrected by D. Jennings, D.D. and the late P. Doddridge, D.D. (London: T. and T. Longman, J. Buckland; J. Oswald, J. Waugh, and J. Ward, 1753), 1:iii. Doddridge and Jennings noted, “Besides, as the Doctor’s feeble state of health, through the greater part of his life...[caused] not so many incidents and changes...as generally furnished out a good part of such histories.”

⁵⁴ For more on Watts’ poetry, psalms, and hymns, see David W. Music, “The Early Reception of Isaac Watts’s Psalms of David Imitated,” *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregational Song* 69, no. 4

of his most influential works were related to education: *Logic* (1724) and *Improvement of the Mind* (1741). He also wrote on a vast array of subjects such as civics, metaphysics, and astronomy,⁵⁵ and he penned several practical works for the common Christian: *A Guide to Prayer* (1715) and *An Exhortation to Ministers* (1731).⁵⁶

Watts passed into eternal glory on November 25, 1748. In the funeral sermon, David Jennings spoke of Watts' piety, remarking, "The active and sprightly powers of his nature failed him...yet his trust in God, through Jesus the Mediator, remained unshaken to the last."⁵⁷

(2018):14–19; Harry Escott, *Isaac Watts Hymnography: A Study of the Beginnings, Development and Philosophy of the English Hymn* (London: Independent Press, 1962); Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1915), 108–216; Frederick John Gillman, *The Evolution of the English Hymn: An Historical Survey of the Origins and Development of the Hymns of the Christian Church* (New York: Macmillian Company, 1927); Bonamy Dobree, *English Literature in the Early Eighteenth Century: 1700–1749* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 153–58; Bernard L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts: Five Informal Papers* (London: Epworth Press, 1942); Kenneth Harrington Cousland, "The Significance of Isaac Watts in the Development of Hymnody," *Church History* 17, no. 4 (December 1948): 287–98; Rochelle A. Stackhouse, *The Language of the Psalms in Worship: American Revisions of Watts' Psalter* (Landam, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997); Donald Davie, *The Eighteenth-Century Hymn in England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁵ For a detailed discussion on each publication, see Watts, *Works*, 1:xix–xxxvii. For a chronological list of Watts' works, see Thomas Milner, *The Life, Times and Correspondence of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1834), xvii–xxi.

⁵⁶ The popularity of Watts' works extended well beyond the shores of England. Cotton Mather is credited with first introducing Watts' hymns to America as appendices to printed sermons and guides to prayer. Christopher N. Phillips, "Cotton Mather Brings Isaac Watts's Hymns to America; or, How to Perform a Hymn Without Singing It," *The New England Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (June 2012): 205, 210. According to the Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge Among the Poor, Watts's *Hymns* (1710), *Divine Songs* (1715), *Psalms* (1719), *Prayers for the use of children* (1728), *Short view of the whole scripture history* (1732), and *First and second set of catechisms* (1730), "reached a larger audience than all other books including the Bible: by 1795 these totaled 163,914 copies." Isabel Rivers, "The First Evangelical Tract Society," *The Historical Journal* 50, no.1 (March 2007): 8–9. For a full listing of Watts' works printed and distributed by the Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge Among the Poor in 1763 and 1795, respectfully, see Rivers, "The First Evangelical Tract Society," 19–22. For the more detailed work on the publication and distribution of evangelical dissenters in the eighteenth-century, see Isabel Rivers, *Vanity Fair and the Celestial City: Dissenting, Methodist, and Evangelical literary Culture in England 1720–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵⁷ Jennings, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Late Reverend Isaac Watts*, 33. For additional funeral sermons on Watts, see Caleb Ashworth, *Reflections on the Fall of a Great Man. A Sermon Preached to a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters at Daventry in Northamptonshire, On the Occasion of the Death of the Late Reverend Isaac Watts D.D.* (London: J. Waugh, 1749); John Milner, *The Rest and Reward of Good Men at Death. A Sermon Preached at Pekham-Surry, Dec. 11, 1748. Being the Next Lord's Day after the Interment of that Eminent, Faithful, and Useful Minister of Jesus Christ Dr. Isaac Watts* (London: J. Noon, 1749).

The History of Research

Most studies of Watts are biographical in nature and, therefore, void of any serious analysis of his theology or spirituality.⁵⁸ There are three academic dissertations that examine his hymnody.⁵⁹ There are two academic dissertations that interact with his thinking. The first is Therese Whitehouse's "Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge: Letters, Lectures and Lives in Eighteenth-Century Dissenting Culture." While offering an interesting glimpse into the relationship between education and publishing in the lives of Isaac Watts and his protégé, Philip Doddridge, this dissertation is of limited use to the present study.⁶⁰ The second is Graham Beynon's "Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion, and the Revival of Religion," which is also published as a monograph.⁶¹ It is a rigorous examination and systemization of Watts' thought. Beynon begins by considering Watts' interest in church revival and renewal.⁶² He proceeds to explain that Watts' understanding of revival is deeply influenced by his emphasis on reason and passion.⁶³ Beynon identifies Watts as a "modified Puritan," shaped by Puritan affective theology and

⁵⁸ See David G. Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered* (Harpenden, UK: Gospel Standard Baptist Trust, 1974); Arthur Paul Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works* (London: Independent Press, 1948); Thomas Wright, *Isaac Watts and Contemporary Hymn-Writers*, vol. 3 (London: C. J. Farncombe & Sons, 1914); Edwin Paxton Hood, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Writings, His Homes and Friends* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1875); Thomas Milner, *The Life, Times and Correspondence of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1834); Thomas Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts* (London: n.p., 1780); Jeremy Belknap and Andrew Kippis, *Memoirs of the Lives, Characters and Writings of Those Two Eminently Pious and Useful Ministers of Jesus Christ, Dr. Isaac Watts and Dr. Philip Doddridge* (Boston: n.p., 1793); Samuel Johnson, *The Life of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* (London: J.F., C. Rivington, and J. Buckland, 1785). Gibbons' memoir is particularly important because he knew Watts and his brother. This gave him direct access to unpublished material.

⁵⁹ See Donald Rodgers Fletcher, "English Psalmody and Isaac Watts" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1951); James Wendall Plett, "The Poetic Language of Isaac Watts's Hymns" (PhD diss., University of California, 1986); Harry Escott, "Isaac Watts' Work in Hymnology, with Special Regard to its Derivative and Original features" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1950).

⁶⁰ Therese Whitehouse, "Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge: Letters, Lectures and Lives in Eighteenth-Century Dissenting Culture" (PhD diss., Queen Mary University of London, 2011).

⁶¹ Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

⁶² Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 7-13.

⁶³ These practical works are prayer, preaching, and worship. Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 119-91.

Enlightenment rationalism. He explains,

[Watts'] position on these foundational topics [reason and passion] is formative for his practical works which attempt to revive religion. His views of reason and passion are the guiding principles for his views on the practice of preaching, praise, and prayer; and they are the driving force behind his reformation of these areas. For Watts, revival turns on right understanding of the place and role of reason and passion in the Christian life.⁶⁴

Beynon positions Watts in an ecclesiastical movement in which logic, passion, worship, preaching, and prayer function as the primary means of church revival. Beynon argues that Watts understands revival primarily as the restoration of the church through reforming how it worships, preaches, and prays.

Beynon's work is a valuable contribution to the study of Watts; however, additional research is required. While Beynon's discussion of Watts' approach to reason and passion in the spiritual life is valuable, attention to those theological convictions that ultimately shaped Watts' spirituality is needed. Moreover, Beynon's overview of how reason and passion contribute to the experiential nature of Watts' vision of the Christian life is insightful,⁶⁵ but he does not fully consider how this is expressed in spirituality.

Research Methodology

A vast number of Watts' writings were published during his lifetime.⁶⁶ In 1753, Watts' works were compiled and published in six volumes.⁶⁷ He prepared the manuscripts for these volumes prior to his death, and entrusted them to his friends, Philip Doddridge and David Jennings. In 1810, these six volumes were republished, and several memoirs

⁶⁴ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 10.

⁶⁵ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 48-53. Beynon calls this "the reasonableness of Christian experience."

⁶⁶ For a complete list of works published during Watts' lifetime, see Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works*, 271-78.

⁶⁷ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D.* 6 vols, Rev. and corrected by *D. Jennings, D.D. and the late P. Doddridge, D.D.* (London: T. and T. Longman, and J. Buckland; J. Oswald; J. Waugh; and J. Ward, 1753).

were added.⁶⁸ I make use of the original publications during Watts' lifetime and the 1810 edition.⁶⁹ I also make use of two volumes of posthumous works (i.e., sermons, hymns, poems, letters) which were published in 1779.⁷⁰ There are other published and unpublished sermons and letters.⁷¹ I include this material throughout the dissertation.

By way of secondary resources, I interact with two major groups. The first is comprised of the English Puritans. Watts drank deeply from this well and interacted directly with numerous Puritan works in his writings. He derived much of his thinking from these sources and, therefore, I interact with them in those places where they shed light on Watts' thought and practice. The second group is comprised of Watts' fellow Evangelicals. He functioned as a transitional figure between Puritanism and classical Evangelicalism. Accordingly, I interact with the writings of several of his contemporaries to demonstrate how Watts fits in the broader movement.

Thesis and Summary of Contents

This dissertation's thesis is that happiness and holiness ("eternal life begun") establish the primary contours of Watts' spirituality. His understanding of holiness and happiness is grounded in his formulation of four key theological truths: (1) the depravity of man; (2) the beauty of Christ; (3) the excellency of heaven; and (4) the tri-unity of God. Furthermore, his practice of holiness and happiness is linked to two principle

⁶⁸ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons, and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Rev. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev.. George Burder*, 6 vols. (London: J. Barfield, 1810).

⁶⁹ Citations will include a reference to the original work published during Watts' lifetime and the citation from the 1810 publication of his works. The memoirs in the 1810 publication are from the biographies of Gibbons and Johnson. The 1753 publication includes a prefix by Jennings and Doddridge, but it is of limited use. Apparently, Watts requested that no history of his life be included in the publication. It seems that Doddridge and Jennings acquiesced. Watts, *Works*, ix.

⁷⁰ Isaac Watts, *The Posthumous Works of the Late Learned and Reverend Isaac Watts, D.D.* 2 vols. (London: T. Becket and J. Bew, 1779).

⁷¹ See Isaac Watts, "Letters," in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 9 (1894), 301–549.

means: (1) the knowledge of God; and (2) the love of God.

While chiefly concerned with the field of biblical spirituality, this dissertation does make a secondary contribution. Historically, Isaac Watts is a significant transitional figure between Puritanism and Evangelicalism, at the beginning of the eighteenth-century.⁷² Theologically, Isaac Watts stands in a confessional tradition. His approach to anthropology, soteriology, and eschatology, is fairly standard; however, his thinking on the Trinity is innovative in places. This dissertation contributes to a better understanding of his theology and, therefore, provides a glimpse into some of the main theological discussions of the eighteenth-century.

The Expression of Spirituality: Holiness and Happiness

Chapters 1–2 highlight the main features of Watts’ spirituality. In short, holiness and happiness are “eternal life begun.” Watts explains this by way of their (1) principles, and (2) ingredients. Holiness and happiness are principally spiritual matters (i.e., unseen aspects of the Christian life) and, therefore, grounded in the soul. The ingredients of holiness and happiness are more practical in nature. In sum, Watts explains how the expression of holiness and happiness is seen in the Christian’s life.

⁷² For example, Graham Beynon argues that Watts is a “modified Puritan” based upon his use of reason and passion. “Watts gladly bore the name of Puritan, frequently referenced Puritan authors and was keen to be seen in continuity with them. However, he was also acutely aware of the intellectual changes of his day and was equally keen to take on board the best of them. Hence, he becomes a modified or ‘Enlightenment’ Puritan. We have seen that Watts significantly absorbed Enlightenment thought on the role of reason, especially showing dependence on John Locke. However, he retains significant elements of traditional Puritan thought in the limits placed on reason. In particular he views reason as fatally weakened by sin. The source of this weakness is located in the overthrow of right reason by sinful passions. Despite this Watts still has a high view of reason. The overall result is an uneasy tension in Watts: he wishes to defend orthodoxy by the principles of rationality so esteemed in his day, but still to carve out space for doctrine ‘above reason.’ In his resultant position he appears to continue the trajectory established by later Puritan figures such as Baxter and Howe.” Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 92. See also Arthur Paul Davis, “Isaac Watts: Late Puritan Rebel,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 13, no. 2 (1956): 123–30. For additional details on how Watts modified several Reformed theological positions, see Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel*, 106–08.

The Foundation of Spirituality: A Theological Framework

Chapters 3–6 provide the theological framework for Watts’ spirituality. An examination of four key doctrines provides a better understanding of how he arrives at happiness and holiness as the basis for his spirituality. For Watts, doctrine leads to the experience of God.⁷³ In other words, holiness and happiness are grounded in theology.⁷⁴

The first doctrine is the depravity of man. Original sin pervades humanity. Watts writes, “What tongue can express, or what heart can conceive, the immense load; and everlasting train of mischiefs and miseries, that lie heavy on poor mankind...for almost six thousand years? All these were introduced by man’s first disobedience.”⁷⁵ Watts believes there are two types of people on earth: the spiritual man and the natural man. The natural man rejects the “two chief spirits...God and his own soul” while taking “pains to gratify [his] senses, and indulge every fleshly appetite.”⁷⁶ Conversely, the spiritual man is one who pursues holiness and attempts to “mortify [his] sinful passions

⁷³ James Gordan argues that whatever definition of evangelical spirituality is used, “it must include the impact of doctrine on experience and moral practice.” James Gordan, *Evangelical Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1991), viii. Peter Adam notes how Reformed spirituality, which he categorizes as a subset of evangelical spirituality, “claims that the roots of theology line the revelation of God, rather than experience.” Peter Adam, *Hearing God’s Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 29. Tom Schwanda argues, “Evangelical spirituality reflected a deep experiential intimacy with the triune God,” with the authoritative role of Scripture, and its subsequent doctrines, being primary categories to describe the nature and content of evangelicalism. Schwanda, *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality*, 9.

⁷⁴ For example, Esther Edwards Burr (the daughter of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards and mother of U.S. Vice President Aaron Burr) noted the spiritual nature of Watts’ writings in her journal: “Since Mr. Burr [her husband] left me I have been reading Dr. Watts’s Miscellaneous thoughts, which I have never read before. I think them like the rest of that valuable gentleman’s works. There is something in the good Doctor’s writings different from everybody else—more engaging.” Esther Edwards Burr, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr 1754–1757*, ed. Carol F. Karlson and Laurie Crumacker (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 45. The statement that Watts is a man concerned with the soul is supported by Philip Doddridge (1702–1751), who wrote extensively about the means of reviving religion through a doctrine-based experience of God. “The generality of the Dissenters, who appear to be persons of serious piety, have been deeply impressed with the peculiarities of the gospel-scheme. They have felt the divine energy of those important doctrines, to awaken, and revive, and enlarge the soul; and therefore, they have a peculiar relish for discourses upon them.” Philip Doddridge, *Free Thoughts on the Most Probable Means of Reviving the Dissenting Interest Occasioned by the Enquiry into the Causes of its Decay* (London: n.p., 1730), 19–21. He clarifies what he believed to be the most acceptable disposition of a Dissenting preacher: “We have then advanced thus far; that he who would be generally agreeable to dissenters, must be an evangelical, an experimental, a plain, and an affectionate preacher.”

⁷⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:125; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:358.

⁷⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:39; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:107.

and set [his] affection on things above.”⁷⁷

The second doctrine is the beauty of Christ. Given humanity’s predicament, Christ alone is the way to happiness and holiness.⁷⁸ Christ secures both by means of his mediatorial work. This is on full display in this chapter, and points to the Christo-centric nature of Watts’ spirituality.

The third doctrine is the excellency of heaven. Watts viewed death as the doorway to the ultimate experience of holiness and happiness—eternal life. Without this hope, there is no holiness or happiness in the present. Watts goes so far as to suggest that the pursuit of holiness and happiness is the means by which the Christian prepares for eternity. It is the “noblest honour” and the “sweetest consolation” of every Christian to “get as near him [God] as earth and grace will admit” because “it [holiness and happiness] is the best preparative for heaven and the state glory.”⁷⁹

The fourth doctrine is the tri-unity of God. Watts was consumed by the particulars of the doctrine of the Trinity. He referred to it as the “very center and spring of all felicity.”⁸⁰ Watts expression of holiness and happiness engages each person of the Triune God. This chapter considers Watts’ understanding of this reality while placing him in the context of the Trinitarian debates of the eighteenth century.

⁷⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:39; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:107–08.

⁷⁸ Given man’s condition, Watts was deeply interested in the revival at Northampton. See Isaac Watts, “Letters,” 358. The first edition of Edwards’ account was sponsored by Watts and John Guyse. For details, see C. C. Goen, introduction to *The Great Awakening*, by Jonathan Edwards, ed. C. C. Goen, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 36–45. Watts and Guyse write, “May the numerous subjects of this surprising work hold fast what they have received, and increase in every Christian grace and blessing! May a plentiful effusion of the blessed Spirit also descend on the British Isles and all their American plantations, to renew the face of religion there! And we entreat our readers in both Englands to join with us in our hearty addresses to the throne of grace, that this wonderful discovery of the hand of God in saving sinners, may encourage our faith and hope of the accomplishment of all his words of grace, which are written in the Old Testament and in the New, concerning the large extent of this salvation in the latter days of the world. ‘Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly; and spread thy dominion through all the ends of the earth. Amen.’” Isaac Watts and John Guyse, preface to *A Faithful Narrative*, by Jonathan Edwards, ed. C. C. Goen, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 137.

⁷⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:130; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:372.

⁸⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:137; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:393.

The Cultivation of Spirituality: Head and Heart

Chapter 7 examines the two means of cultivating the spiritual life—knowledge of God and love for God. First, Watts maintains that knowledge of God is the foundation of the Christian faith.⁸¹ In order to experience God, the mind must know him.⁸² Watts explains, “[I]t is impossible that we should love anything that we know not: and it is not to be expected that we should love God supremely or with all our heart, if we have not known him to be more excellent, and more desirable than all other things we are acquainted with.”⁸³ The mind, therefore, is critical to the pursuit of holiness and happiness. Second, the Christian cultivates holiness and happiness through love for God. As the Christian grows in the knowledge of God, he also grows in his appreciation of God’s love.⁸⁴ This, in turn, compels us to love God. Watts asserts that God is the “first cause” of love and “must be the last end of all, and no creatures, as divided from him, can make us either holy or happy.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ See Watts’ discourse, “Faith Built on Knowledge,” based on 2 Timothy 1:12. He argues that the word “believed” is of central importance to understanding Paul. “By believe we are here to understand an assent to the revelation that Jesus Christ had made of himself, as sent from the Father to save sinners, and a trust in him for salvation.” Watts, *Works*, 1:681; Isaac Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects. To Which is Added, An Essay on the Powers and Contests of the Flesh and Spirit*, (London: Printed for J. Oswald and J. Buckland, 1747), 173–74.

⁸² This is not a unique concept to Watts, but part the broader Puritan understanding of love for God. See, for example, Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial: Romans 8:28* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2001), 49. Watson notes, “The ground of love to God is knowledge. We cannot love that which we do not know.”

⁸³ Watts, *Works*, 2:637; Isaac Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God and the Use and Abuse of the Passion in Religion, with a Devout Meditation Suited to Each Discourse. To Which is Prefix’d, A Plan and Particular Account of the Natural Passion, with Rule for the Government of Them* (London: J. Clark, R. Hett, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1729), 110.

⁸⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:638; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 110–11.

⁸⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:357.

CHAPTER 2

DEFINING HOLINESS AND HAPPINESS

Introduction

James Gordan argues that spirituality includes “the impact of doctrine on experience and moral practice.”¹ Tom Schwanda notes that “early evangelicals understood that spirituality was a lived experience that required both an inward knowledge of the presence of the triune God and the experimental or practical application of it in daily life.”² This emphasis on experience is clearly evident in Watts’ writings.

Watts grounds Christian experience in the knowledge of God’s truth.³ In contrast to many approaches to spirituality (namely, mysticism), Watts is cautious when it comes to championing a subjective experience (via feelings) as evidence of an unmediated knowledge of God.⁴ Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains that mysticism “makes feeling the source of knowledge of God, and not intellect, not reason, not

¹ James Gordan, *Evangelical Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1991), viii.

² Tom Schwanda, ed., *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016), 8.

³ See, for example, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, “The Truth of Scripture and the Problem of Historical Relativity,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1992), 183. Hughes notes, “The objective character of Scripture as truth given by God comes before and validates my subjective experience of its truth.” See also J. Stephen Yuille, *Great Spoil: Thomas Manton’s Spirituality of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 6n18.

⁴ Here I am using the word “mysticism” to describe an unmediated (apart from Scripture) knowledge of God. Admittedly, the term “mysticism” is confusing, as it is used in multiple ways: (1) As I have just explained, it refers to a view of the Christian life that stresses esoteric and sensory experiences while marginalizing the mind. By way of example, see Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain: An Autobiography of Faith* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1998); and Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle: The Classic Text with a Spiritual Commentary*, ed. Dennis Billy (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2007). (2) It refers to a specific school of Christian spirituality; e.g., the “English mystics” (14th century) and “German mystics” (15th century). (3) It refers to a view of the Christian life that emphasizes its experiential aspects. John Calvin and the English Puritans, for example, stand in this third tradition. So too does Isaac Watts.

understanding.”⁵ The rise of deism and rationalism during the Enlightenment led many in Watts’ day to an extreme known as “enthusiasm.”⁶ As Michael Heyd argues, the “phenomenon of enthusiasm” was a reaction to the “enlightened” and “disenchanted” culture of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe.⁷ During this time, theologians “were fighting simultaneously on at least two fronts: against the spread of deistic...views on one hand, and against ‘enthusiasm,’ prophesying, deviations and other ‘superstitions’ on the other.”⁸

Watts resisted both extremes. As Graham Beynon observes, Watts was hesitant to embrace either enthusiasm or rationalism, but instead championed a middle-way.⁹ Watts articulated an approach to the Christian life that maintained a biblical balance between reason and passion. Beynon describes Watts’ position as “the reasonableness of Christian experience.”¹⁰ Watts’ approach deeply impacted his spirituality. In the dedication to his volume of sermons on the inward and personal aspects of Christianity, he declares that his aim is to recover and defend a correct understanding of experience within personal piety. He states,

You are my witnesses, that in the common course of my ministry, I often press the duties of sobriety and temperance, justice and charity, as well as the inward and spiritual parts of godliness. But since treatises on the latter subjects are seldom published now-a-days, I have permitted the matters of secret converse between God

⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Fellowship with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 90.

⁶ For more on the use of the term “enthusiasm” in Watts’ era, see Michael Heyd, “*Be Sober and Reasonable*”: *The Critique of Enthusiasm in Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Brill, 1995), 11–43.

⁷ Heyd, “*Be Sober and Reasonable*,” 2.

⁸ Heyd, “*Be Sober and Reasonable*,” 3. See, for example, Joseph Bellamy, *True Religion Delineated, or, Experimental Religion, As Distinguished from Formality on one Hand, and Enthusiasm on the other, set in a Scriptural and Rational Light* (London: S Kneeland, 1750). Edwards penned the preface to this work, affirming his position on experimental religion. See Jonathan Edwards, preface to *The Works of Joseph Bellamy in Two Volumes*, by Joseph Bellamy (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853), 1:3-6.

⁹ Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 192-93.

¹⁰ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 48-50.

and the holy soul to take up a larger share in these discourses; and it has been my aim to rescue these arguments from the *charge of enthusiasm*, and to put them in such a light, as might shew their perfect consistence with common sense and reason.... It is necessary that a Christian preacher should teach the laws of sobriety, the rules of charity and justice, our duty to our neighbour, and our practice of public religion *but it is my opinion that discourses of experimental piety*, and the work of the closet, should also sometimes entertain the church and the world... Our fathers talked much of pious experience... but I mourn to think that some are grown so degenerate in our days, as to join their names and works together in common jest, and to ridicule the sacred matter of their sermons because the manner had now and then something in it too mystical and obscure.¹¹

According to Watts, the inward experience of God's grace, by means of God's Word, is the essence of "experimental piety."¹² It stands in marked contrast to the extremes of rationalism and mysticism.¹³ For Watts, this inward experience is chiefly expressed in holiness and happiness—"eternal life begun."¹⁴

The Christian experiences holiness and happiness by knowing and loving God as he is revealed in Scripture.¹⁵ Watts contends that the "word of God... is the chief instrument, or means, whereby this divine life [eternal life begun in holiness and

¹¹ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Rev. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev. George Burder* (London: J. Barfield, 1810), 1:lxv; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 1 (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1721), 1:viii–ix. Emphasis added.

¹² For some examples of where he utilizes this phrase, see Watts, *Works*, 1:lxv, 460, 591, 696. The subtitle of Watts' first volume of published sermons even makes clear his emphasis on Christian experience. It reads: "Wherein may things relating to *Christian experience*, and the future state, are set in a fair and easy light." Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:ii. Emphasis added.

¹³ Watts, *Works*, 1:11; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:29. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:11; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:29.

¹⁵ It is imperative to note that Watts does advocate for specific, yet tempered, experiences related to unmediated knowledge of God. The details of which are beyond the scope of this study because they derive specifically from Watts' pneumatology. However, it should be noted that Watts affirms "extraordinary experiences" of God with respect to (1) the witness of the Holy Spirit, and (2) the "first fruits of the Spirit" or "foretastes" of heaven. These are not unique to Watts, but he likely derived them from Puritan influences such as John Flavel, Thomas Goodwin, and Richard Baxter. For more on the extraordinary witness of the Spirit in Watts' theology, see Watts, *Works*, 1:711–21; Isaac Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects. To Which is Added an Essay on the Powers and Contests of Flesh and Spirit* (London: J. Oswald and J. Buckland, 1747), 250–78. For Watts on the first fruits of the Spirit, see Watts, *Works*, 3:238–51; Isaac Watts, *The World to Come: Or, Discourses on the Joys or Sorrows of Departed Souls at Death, and the Glory or Terror of the Resurrection*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Longman and J. Brackstone, 1745), 2:113–53.

happiness] is wrought and supported in the soul.”¹⁶ Elsewhere, he argues that the Christian “feeds sweetly on the hidden blessings of scripture” and “beholds the purity of God in the precepts.”¹⁷ Turning to Psalm 119, Watts states that the “written word” of God is “a transcript of God’s holiness” that is “hidden in the heart” so that it “secures the saint from sin.”¹⁸ Based on Psalm 1, Watts penned the following verse, celebrating the centrality of Scripture in the Christian’s experience:

Blest is the man, whose cautious feet
Shun the broad path which sinners choose,
Who hates the house where atheist meet,
And dreads the words that scoffers uses.

He loves t’ employ his morning light
Reading the statutes of the Lord,
And spends the wakeful hours of night
With pleasure pond’ring o’re the Word.¹⁹

During the eighteenth-century, there was widespread philosophical inquiry into the nature of happiness.²⁰ David Bebbington argues that early Evangelical divines were influenced by this larger philosophical context.²¹ Many theologians elevated “happiness

¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:97; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:278.

¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:98; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:278.

¹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:98; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:279.

¹⁹ Isaac Watts, *Horae Lyricae. Poems Chiefly of the Lyric Kind. In Two Books. I. Songs, &c. Sacred to Devotion. II. Odes, Elegys, &c. to Virtue Loyalty and Friendship* (London: S. and D. Bridge, 1706), 54–55. The verses quoted here are from Watts’ original publication of *Horae Lyricae*, 1706. Several words in the first stanza were altered in the 1810 edition. See Watts, *Works*, 4:125–26.

²⁰ See Brian Michael Norton, *Fiction and the Philosophy of Happiness: Ethical Inquires in the Age of Enlightenment* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2012), 1–24.

²¹ By way of example, Bebbington points to theologians such as John Wesley, William Wilberforce, and Jonathan Edwards. He also utilizes the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfectionism as an example. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 60. For a study of happiness in Jonathan Edwards, see Kevin David Hall, “Jonathan Edwards and Sanctification: The Pursuit of Happiness Found in Union and Obedience” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017). Likewise, Watts wrote a discourse about whether human reason is a sufficient guide to true happiness, see Isaac Watts, *The Strength and Weakness of Human Reason; or, The Important Question About the Sufficiency of Reason to Conduct Mankind to Religion and Future Happiness, Argued Between an Inquiring Deist and a Christian Divine: And the Debate Compromised and Determined to the Satisfaction of Both, by an Impartial Moderator*, 2nd ed. (London: C. Rivington, 1737); Watts, *Works*, 2:219–425.

into the primary place among human objectives.”²² Watts was among them, championing happiness as a central objective of the Christian life. Watts, however, was adamant that the Christian’s pursuit of happiness was intrinsically linked to the practice of holiness.²³ There is “such a necessary connection between them, that they run into one another.”²⁴ Together, holiness and happiness form the key expression of his spirituality.

This emphasis is not unique to Watts. He stands in a tradition that stretches back to Augustine.²⁵ He inherited it directly from his Puritan predecessors, who stressed the relationship between blessedness and holiness. As J. Stephen Yuille argues, the Puritans embraced “Aristotle’s teleological framework” while rejecting his view of “the virtuous man.” They made it clear that our “chief good” is God enjoyed.²⁶ Many of Watts’ contemporaries expressed this same conviction. Martin Schmidt notes that John Wesley held to a formula of “holiness is happiness,” which was anticipated by “the whole of Puritanism and goes back eventually to Augustine.”²⁷

As Watts makes clear, holiness and happiness manifest themselves differently in the life of a Christian, yet each is grounded in the same doctrinal formulations. This chapter considers how Watts defines holiness and happiness. This is significant, as his

²² Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 61. Bebbington accounts for this emphasis as follows: (1) the influence of Jonathan Edwards; (2) interest in divine providence; and (3) belief in a millennium that would bring happiness on earth.

²³ Bebbington believes Wesley’s theology has this same basic principle. See also Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2016), 1:101.

²⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:5; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:14.

²⁵ Yuille, *Great Spoil*, 14n14. Yuille notes, “For Aristotle, the conclusion was primarily ethical; that is, the happy person is the virtuous person—virtue being the mean between two extremes.” For Aristotle on happiness, see Aristotle, “ETHICA NICOMACHEA,” in *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross, trans. W. D. Ross, vol. 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), For Augustine on happiness, see Augustine, *Trilogy on Faith and Happiness*, The Augustine Series, vol. 6, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland J. Teske, Michael J. Campbell, and Ray Kearney (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2010). For Thomas Aquinas, see *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oats & Washbourne, n.d.).

²⁶ Yuille, *Great Spoil*, 14n14. Yuille traces the pursuit of blessedness in the writings of Thomas Watson, Robert Harris, William Gurnall, Thomas Shepard, Richard Baxter, and John Flavel.

²⁷ Schmidt, *John Wesley*, 101n5.

approach to the spiritual life rests upon his understanding of these two concepts.

A Definition of Holiness

When defining holiness, Watts considers its (1) principles, and (2) ingredients.²⁸ The “principles” of holiness are preliminary considerations related to the nature of the soul,²⁹ whereas “ingredients” of holiness are those means by which holiness is obtained in the present life.

Principles: Matters of the Soul

Watts affirm three principles of holiness. First, it is a matter of the soul because of its *object*. It is “chiefly spiritual, *viz.* God and heaven, invisible and eternal things.”³⁰ For Watts, these “spiritual objects” ought to be “chief” in our “esteem,” “most” in our “thoughts and desires,” and occupy first place in our “designs and pursuits.”³¹ He adds,

A saint, who is *spiritually minded*, aims at those things that are more a-kin to the nature of a spirit; he seeks the knowledge of the favour of God, who is the supreme of spirits, the infinite and self-sufficient Spirit, in whose knowledge, and in whose love, all intelligent creatures find a full sufficiency of blessedness. He knows that all created spirits who are holy and happy, are made so by derivations from God’s all-sufficient holiness and happiness; and therefore he applies himself with zeal and vigour to all those spiritual exercises of meditation, faith and prayer, wherein God

²⁸ For overviews of holiness as a communicable attribute of God, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 2:216–21; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 73–74; Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 2:407–23. For a survey of the biblical-theological approach to holiness, see David Paterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

²⁹ Watts leans heavily upon Rom 8:1–4 in articulating these principles of holiness. He interprets these verses as applying to obedience. For a modern discussion of this interpretation, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 405–06. Schreiner notes, “If Paul had merely desired to describe those who are in Christ forensically, he could have written ‘to those who are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.’ The use of the participle ‘walk’ shows that the concrete obedience of believers is in mind.”

³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:38; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:106.

³¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:38; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:106. Watts appeals to Romans 8:5 in support of this claim: “For those who live according the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.”

reveals himself and his mercy.³²

It is important to note that Watts views holiness as a byproduct of God's holiness. It is, therefore, contingent upon knowing God. To "seek the knowledge of the favour of God" is to devote ourselves to God and eternal things. The "chief desire of a holy soul" is the triune God, whom we know (head) and worship (heart) because of (1) Christ and his gospel, and (2) the Holy Spirit and his grace.³³ This Trinitarian approach to holiness demonstrates how the spiritual life is defined by the object of our esteem.³⁴

Second, holiness is a matter of the soul because of its *source*. In short, it is "communicated to us by God the Father of our spirits," who creates a "new and spiritual nature."³⁵ Here Watts grounds holiness in the Holy Spirit who renews and changes the heart. Based on John 3:6 and Romans 8:13–14, Watts argues that holiness receives "its very nature and operation in us from the Spirit of God."³⁶ It is the regeneration of the soul,³⁷ whereby sin is no longer our "nature and delight" nor our "common and allowed

³² Watts, *Works*, 1:38; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:106.

³³ Watts, *Works*, 1:38; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:106. John Owen makes a similar, yet far more detailed, claim. See John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation; or, The Saints' Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded*, ed. William H. Gould (1850-53; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009). For secondary sources on Owen's argument, see Alan Spence, "John Owen and Trinitarian Agency," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 158–59; Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007); Kelly M. Kapic "Communion With God by John Owen (1616–1683)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, eds Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 167–82.

³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:38; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:106–07.

³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:39; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:108–09.

³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:39; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:108. The work of the Holy Spirit versus the *person* of the Holy Spirit is important distinction. Watts focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life, as opposed to the corporate body of Christ. For more on this, see Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1977), 79–85. John Calvin was one of the first theologians to focus on the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification. B. B. Warfield notes that we owe the "broad departments" of common grace, regeneration, and the witness of the Spirit to Calvin. Benjamin B. Warfield, introduction to *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, by Abraham Kuyper, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), xxxiv. For Calvin on this, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.7; 2.12–25.

³⁷ Many of the Puritans share this conviction. John Owen writes, "The work of the Holy Spirit [is that] whereby he communicates the great, permanent, positive effect of holiness unto the souls of believers...And our first assertion is, That in sanctification of believers, the Holy Ghost doth work in them,

practice.”³⁸

Third, holiness is a matter of the soul because its *subject*. Watts remarks, “The chief springs of holiness, and of opposite to sin, are found in the soul or spiritual part.”³⁹ Watts contends that even the soul of the unregenerate has tendencies toward holiness by way of the conscience—the “inward stings and sharp reproofs of natural conscience” that withholds the unregenerate from “many an inordinate appetite and passion...and many a grosser sin.”⁴⁰ In the regenerate, holiness takes root in the understanding and will as knowledge of God and love for God are active.⁴¹ Watts explains,

It is in the soul that the love of God is wrought by the Holy Spirit; it is the soul that repents of past sins, and watches against temptation; it is the soul that believes the gospel, and trusts in our Lord Jesus Christ; it is the soul that by faith takes a distant prospect of heaven and hell, and converses with invisible things beyond the reach

in their whole souls, their minds, wills, and affections, a gracious, supernatural habit, principle, and disposition of living unto God; wherein the substance or essence, the life and being, of holiness doth consist. This is that spirit which is born of the Spirit, that new creature, that new and divine nature which is wrought in them, and whereof they are made partakers.” See John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, *PNEUMATOLOGIA, or A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, ed. William H. Gould (1850-53; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 468–69.

³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:39; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:109. Another Puritan who greatly influenced the thinking of Isaac Watts was Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680). He echoes a similar position on the role of the Holy Spirit in communicating holiness. See, Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Work of the Holy Ghost (The Third Person of the Trinity) in Our Salvation*, vol. 5, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (London: Printed for T.G., 1683), 2.40–41. Goodwin writes, “The new creature is in the same third of John, ver. 6, styled spirit (as elsewhere it is called a spiritual man, 1 Cor. ii.), ‘That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’ It is therefore professedly baptized into the same name, because the father of this new birth and baptism is the Spirit. With men the begotten bears the name of the most immediate parent; and so this case, though this work of the Spirit be in common termed the divine nature (2 Peter i. 4) because it is the image of the Godhead, of which all three persons are partakers, yet to show that in a more peculiar manner it is the child of the Spirit, it is called spirit.”

³⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:39; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:109.

⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:40; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:110.

⁴¹ Watts, at times, held to both a two faculty (understanding and will) and three faculty division of the soul (understanding, will, and the passions). In some places, Watts separates the passions as unique faculty that influences the will. For discussion of this see, Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 79. For an example of Watts on a three faculty division, see Watts, *Works*, 3:634; Isaac Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United: In Several Reconciling Essays on the Law and the Gospel, Faith and Works* (London: T. Longman, T. Shewel, and J. Brackstone, 1745), 146. J. Stephen Yuille notes that both the two faculty and three faculty positions were common within the Reformed tradition. The Puritans, such as George Swinnock, often held three faculties of the soul and designate the passions (or affections) as a unique faculty. J. Stephen Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 32-34. Watts inherits his varying positions from the two traditions. However, according to Yuille, “the difference between a bipartite or tripartite division of the faculties is unimportant, give the fact that the function of the affections remains the same in both paradigms.” Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality*, 34.

and power of flesh and sense: it is by the powers of the soul enlightened and renewed, that we come to see the value and excellency of religion, and spiritual things above temporal; and are inclined to chuse [sic] God for our only happiness, and Jesus Christ as the way to the Father. The understanding and will are faculties of the soul...[and] the soul of a believer seems to be the more proper, immediate, and receptive subject of the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God; and this will appear by consulting the word of God, or the experience of men.⁴²

Watts believes that Scripture attests to the soul (understanding and will) as the primary seat of holiness (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 4:23; 1 Thess 5:23).⁴³ Commenting on

Romans 7, Watts states,

Paul's discourse from the 16th ver. of Romans vii. to the 25th where you find him all along distinguishing the flesh and the mind. By one of them he complains in a variety of expressions, that he is led away to sin, while the other of them approves and pursues after holiness; and though the words flesh and spirit are often used for the principles of sin and holiness, yet it may be remarked, that he does not confine himself here to these terms, but uses also the words body and members, to represent sin; inward man, and mind, when he points to the springs of holiness; which would lead one very naturally to believe that there is more sanctification in the mind or soul of the believer.⁴⁴

According to Watts, experience confirms that we are “tempted to many more sins by our various carnal appetites and senses,” as they “strike against” the soul.⁴⁵ Watts argues the “soul of a Christian would not be guilty [of sin] half so often, if the lusts of the body were not more active.”⁴⁶ Again, if the Christian had “no fleshly objects about us, no outward

⁴² Watts, *Works*, 1:40; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:110–11.

⁴³ For example, see Philip Doddridge, *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, Subjoined to Each Chapter*, 4th ed. (London: J. Waugh and J Buckland, 1748). This work describes the sinner and the saint in the way of conversion, the design of the gospel, and a host of other matters pertaining to holiness as the subject of the soul. Doddridge asserts, “Religion, in its most general view, is such a sense of God in the soul, and such a conviction of our obligations to him, and of our dependence upon him, as shall engage us to make it our great care to conduct ourselves in a manner which we have reason to believe will be pleasing to him.” Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, 2. Of note is that Doddridge dedicated the entire work to Watts: “My much honored friend, Dr. Watts, had laid the scheme [of the book], especially the former part. But as those indispositions with which God has been pleased to exercise him had forbid his hopes of being able to add this to his many labors of love to immortal souls.” Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*, iii–x. For more on Doddridge and this work, see Robert Strivens, *Philip Doddridge and the Shaping of Evangelical Dissent* (London: Routledge, 2016), 123–25.

⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:40; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:112.

⁴⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:40; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:112.

⁴⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:41; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:115.

senses, no inward treasures of fancy, no appetites of the body” there would be complete devotion at all times.⁴⁷

Ingredients

Having established that holiness is primarily a matter of the soul, Watts considers its chief ingredients. The first is “an aversion to, and hatred of, all sin.”⁴⁸ While recognizing that complete aversion to sin will only be realized in heaven, Watts maintains that the regenerate “cannot sin with a full purpose of heart; he that is born of God cannot sin with constancy and greediness, as other do.”⁴⁹ This is due to the fact that holiness “refines” the soul in all its powers thereby bringing it to “sweet compliance” of the law of God.⁵⁰

The second ingredient is a “contempt of this world, a sacred disregard of temporal things raised by the sight of eternal things.”⁵¹ Because we possess eternal life, we are “above this world in a good measure” and “weaned” from it “in some degree.”⁵² As a result, we experience “contempt” for the present world. Watts is careful to explain that “contempt” does not imply to inactivity or the avoidance of Christian duty in this life. Rather, it is to be understood as fulfilling our duties while being “ready every

⁴⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:41; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:113.

⁴⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:12; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:33. John Owen notes, “Sin is enmity to God as God, and therefore to all of God. Not his goodness, not his holiness, not his mercy, not his grace, not his promises: there is not any thing of him which it doth not make head against; nor any duty, private, public, in the heart, in external works, which it opposeth not. And the nearer (if I may so say) any thing is to God, the greater is its enmity unto it. The more of spirituality and holiness is in any thing, the greater is its enmity. That which hath most of God hath most of its opposition.” John Owen articulates a similar understanding of holiness. See John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6, *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Reminders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*, ed. William H. Gould (1850-53; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 180.

⁴⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:12; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:32. For more on Watts’ view concerning the relationship between holiness and the moral law, see *Works*, 3:633–37; Isaac Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 142–53.

⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:12; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:33.

⁵¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:13; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:35.

⁵² Watts, *Works*, 1:13; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:35–36.

moment to be gone from this world.”⁵³ To avoid any potential confusion, Watts explains contempt for this world is not to be confused with Stoicism, Epicureanism,⁵⁴ Ciceroism,⁵⁵ or Cynicism.⁵⁶ As we grow in holiness, we pursue contentment in duties, burdens, and troubles, while living with “a view of things beyond the grave.”⁵⁷

The third ingredient of holiness is “delight in the worship and enjoyment of God.”⁵⁸ From Watts’ perspective, this is what makes Christianity unique, as it centers the enjoyment of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He writes,

Now the Christian religion attains this end in a good measure; it brings the soul to delight in divine worship and converse with God, which no mere human religion could ever do: For since no human religion could ever teach an awakened sinner, how he might appear in the presence of a holy God, with assurance and comfort, no other religion could make a soul delight in the worship of God. We can never delight in drawing near to God, that hath infinite vengeance in him, while we know not but he will pour that vengeance out upon us; we fly far from him, unless we have some good ground of hope, that he will forgive us our iniquities, and receive us into his favour. Now since there is no other doctrine, that shews us how our sins may be forgiven, or how the favour of God may be attained; there is no other religion can allure or draw us into the presence of God with pleasure: Heb. x. 19, 20. Let us draw near and worship the Father, in full assurance and confidence, that he will accept our persons and our worship, since we have such an high-priest to introduce us with acceptance; since by his flesh and incarnation, he has made a way for us to come into the presence of God with satisfaction and pleasure, therefore let us draw near

⁵³ Watts, *Works*, 1:15–16; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:42.

⁵⁴ For a general overview of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies, see Robert Drew Hicks, *Stoic and Epicurean* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962); Whitney J. Oates, *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers: The Complete Extant Writings of Epicurus, Epictetus, Lucretius, Marcus Aurelius* (New York: Modern Library, 1957); John M. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Howard Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1989); Brad Inwood, “Stoicism,” in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 126–39

⁵⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:15; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:39–41. For more on Cicero’s philosophy, see Jed W. Atkins, *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: The Republic and Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Cicero taught his followers “not so much to condemn riches and pleasures, as to exchange them for fame and glory, and public applause.”

⁵⁶ Cynics encouraged people to relegate “all the necessary duties and decencies of life” to the “rank and level of brute beasts.” For a brief introduction to Cynic philosophy in the context of the Paul’s ministry, see Troy W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 58–78; and Donald Reynolds Dudley, *A History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the 6th Century A.D.* (London: Methuen, 1937).

⁵⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:15; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:40.

⁵⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:16; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:42.

and worship him.⁵⁹

We enjoy access to God and his blessedness through Christ, our mediator. Watts believes Christianity “leads the soul out of itself to God as it gives a clearer and larger knowledge of God himself” through the death and resurrection of Christ.⁶⁰ Ultimately, this access to God is the “beginning” of our heaven.⁶¹

The fourth ingredient is “zeal and activity for the service of God.”⁶² Heaven is not an idle state. Accordingly, service of God is the present and future end of every believer.⁶³

The fifth ingredient of holiness is a “heartly love to all men, and especially to the saints.”⁶⁴ Watts calls this a “noble ingredient of eternal life” because it is a “beautiful part of the image of God communicated to the soul of man.”⁶⁵ There are two important themes to note here. First, love for others flows from love for God:

[He] is the original and foundation of eternal life, is a glorious pattern of this love; he makes his sun to rise, and his rain to fall on the just and on the unjust, and leaves not himself without witness of his divinity, by filling the hearts of men with food and gladness: See Matt. v. 45. Acts xiv. 17. He shews his love to enemies and rebels,

⁵⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:16; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:42–43.

⁶⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:16; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:44.

⁶¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:16; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:44.

⁶² Watts, *Works*, 1:16; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:44.

⁶³ Watts, *Works*, 1:17; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:45. Watts appeals to Psalm 103:20–21 to prove that heaven is not an idle state, but one of “service and activity.” Watts interprets this psalm as depicting angels who function as “swift messengers to perform the will of their God.” Calvin interprets the passage in a similar fashion: “Here put in subjection to God, the Psalmist chiefly addresses the angels. In calling upon them to join in praising God, he teaches both himself and all the godly... The angels are doubles too willing and prompt to discharge of this duty, to stand in need of incitement from us. With what face then, it may be said, can we, whose slothfulness is so great, take it upon us to exhort them?” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, in vol. 21 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1996), 141.

⁶⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:17; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:46.

⁶⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:17; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:46–47. Watts mentions the image of God in the context of love for neighbor, as modeled by Christ. For a similar understanding of the image of God, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.4. Calvin equates the renewal of the image of God to conformity to Christ. We see “how Christ is the most perfect image of God; [and] if we conformed to it, we are so restored that with true piety, righteousness, purity, and intelligence we bear God’s image.” For a historical survey of this subject, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 33–65.

in forgiving millions of offences, and pardoning crimes of the largest size and deepest aggravations, and he loves his saints with peculiar tenderness.⁶⁶

Second, Christ is the preeminent example of love. Watts writes, “Our Lord Christ...came down from heaven to exemplify his divine love” and it was “his love to mankind that persuaded him to put on flesh and blood” and to “suffer pains, agonies and death, that his enemies might obtain salvation and life.”⁶⁷ The magnitude of Christ’s love encourages us to love our enemies, forgive our persecutors, pity the miserable, and take “peculiar delight” in our fellow Christians.⁶⁸

A Definition of Happiness

The second component of the spiritual life is happiness. Again, Watts’ definition consists of (1) principles, and (2) ingredients. The former consists of matters related to the soul, whereas the latter consists of those practical aspects which draw us near to God.⁶⁹ Watts’ definition is grounded in one overarching conviction: “Nearness to God is the foundation of a creature’s happiness.”⁷⁰ This statement sets the trajectory for understanding Watts’ approach to happiness.

Principles: Matters of the Soul

The first principle of happiness is pardon from sin and peace of conscience. Happiness is directly linked to the soul being “made sensible” of God forgiving sin and

⁶⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:17; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:46–47.

⁶⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:17; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:47.

⁶⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:18; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:48.

⁶⁹ Based on Psalm 65:4, Watts argues that “blessedness” depends upon “his near approaches to God.” See, Watts, *Works*, 1:122; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:350–51. This view has been prevalent throughout the church’s history. For a brief discussion, see Klaus Isslar, “Happiness,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scrogie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 492–93. For a discussion of happiness in the Puritan context, see S. Bryn Roberts, *Puritanism and the Pursuit of Happiness: The Ministry and Theology of Ralph Venning, c. 1621–1674* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2015), 78–101; Yuille, *Great Spoil*, 11–63.

⁷⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:122; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:351.

withholding judgment.⁷¹ This principle “belongs only to the doctrine of Christ.”⁷² In short, the soul is awakened to God’s goodness through Christ’s work of reconciliation:

But when a poor, convinced, awakened soul, that now believes the doctrine of Christ, has been long before tormented in his conscience about atonement for sin, and found no hope; the Christian religion, the gospel, with its pardoning grace, and the satisfaction that Christ has made, gives the soul peace, and leads the troubled conscience to rest and quiet; he trusts this gospel, he receives this salvation, and hath the witness in himself that it is divine.⁷³

The second principle of happiness is the “special favour of God.”⁷⁴ Watts explains,

This is called seeing of God, often in scripture. When souls are fully possessed of the love of God; when they have it shed abroad in their hearts in perfection; when they know that the infinite and eternal Maker and Governor of all things loves them, and will for ever love them, this is eternal life; and this is enjoyed in some measure here on earth by true believers. This is a part of eternal life, begun in the heart of every Christian; for when God pardons, he receives into his peculiar favour.⁷⁵

Here Watts places great emphasis on the love of God, linking happiness directly to “a joyful sense of the love of God shed abroad” in the soul.⁷⁶ The misery of the unregenerate is their inability to rightly appreciate God’s love. According to Watts, the “soul be tormented, that knows not whether God will love him or not, nor how this love may be attained; nor, when once attained, how long this love will continue?”⁷⁷ Watts also links God’s love to the trinitarian nature of the gospel. In brief, the sinner finds happiness in the gospel of Christ, “for the Father loves the Son infinitely, and loves all those that believe on him, for his sake; they are forever accepted in him who is first and forever

⁷¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:6; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:15.

⁷² Watts, *Works*, 1:6; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:15.

⁷³ Watts, *Works*, 1:8; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:20.

⁷⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:8; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:21.

⁷⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:8; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:21.

⁷⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:8; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:22.

⁷⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:9; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:23–24.

accepted; and they are beloved in him who is first and forever beloved.”⁷⁸

The third principle of happiness is the “pleasure that arises from the regular operation of all our powers and passions.”⁷⁹ According to Watts, the “state of grace” brings about a measure of happiness in every believer when appetites and affections are aligned to “constant obedience” and the pursuit of “their proper objects.”⁸⁰ Watts notes that reason submits to faith and, therefore, “makes the lower faculties submit to reason, and obey the will of our Maker.”⁸¹ By means of regeneration, then, reason is renewed and, accordingly, guides our appetites, affections, and judgements toward God. This, for Watts, is happiness. Prior to the renewal of reason, there were “corrupt wishes” and “tumults and hurricanes” in the soul.”⁸² However, regeneration marks the right ordering of the natural powers, resulting in happiness. Watts summarizes,

When we have attained a good hope; of forgiving grace through the blood of Christ, and believe that we are beloved of God our Maker, what have we then to do but to abide in his love? We learn to despise those tempting objects that would awaken our intemperate passions, and walk onward in peace and pleasure towards our complete felicity.⁸³

It is through Christ, our Mediator, that the faculties and “intemperate passions” are brought into peace and harmony, thereby leading “toward our complete felicity.”⁸⁴

Ingredients

Watts’ “ingredients” are foundational to how we find happiness in God. The

⁷⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:9; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:24.

⁷⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:9; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:24.

⁸⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:9; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:22.

⁸¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:10; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:26. For more on the intersection between reason, revelation, and faith in Watts, see Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 36-42.

⁸² Watts, *Works*, 1:9; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:24.

⁸³ Watts, *Works*, 1:9–10; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:25.

⁸⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:10; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:25.

first is “contemplation of the noblest object.”⁸⁵ Essentially, Watts argues that happiness arises when the understanding is engaged toward its proper object. “Truth is its proper food; and truth, in all the boundless varieties and beauties of it, is the object of its pursuit.”⁸⁶ This engagement is a “divine pleasure” because the understanding is fixed on God’s grace, wisdom, and providence. Happiness is employing the mind to “converse with that wisdom which laid the eternal scheme of all the wonders, and of ten thousand more unknown beauties in the transactions of providence, with which the blessed minds above are feasted to satisfaction.”⁸⁷ The right use of the understanding is a “beatific exercise” which draws the soul near to God, resulting in happiness.

The second ingredient is “love of the chiefest good.”⁸⁸ This particular ingredient is directly related to the will and affections. Watts explains,

And those whom God chooses, and causes to approach himself, when they are under divine illuminations, see so much beauty and excellency in his nature, his power and wisdom, and so many lovely glories in his overflowing grace, that they cannot but love him above all things; and this love is a great part of their heaven.⁸⁹

For Watts, “love of the chiefest good” is realized by dwelling on the “endless stores and treasures of unknown loveliness in the Godhead.”⁹⁰ As we grow in our knowledge of God, we love him. Watts describes this as the “outgoings” of love to God.

The third ingredient of happiness is “the delightful sense of the love of an Almighty Friend.”⁹¹ Here we experience the “returns” of love from God. All told, then, we experience happiness in God as we know him (first ingredient), love him (second

⁸⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:131; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:352.

⁸⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:123; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:352.

⁸⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:123; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:353.

⁸⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:354.

⁸⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:354.

⁹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:355.

⁹¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:355.

ingredient), and are beloved (third ingredient).⁹² In sum, for Watts, “happiness requires mutual love.”⁹³ And this love is cultivated by means of the knowledge of God.

Clearly, then, our experience of happiness is contingent upon the extent to which these ingredients are prevalent in us. For this reason, Watts acknowledges that there are “several degrees of felicity.”⁹⁴ The first is when we (who are sinners by nature) “are brought so near to God, as to be within the sound and call of his grace.”⁹⁵ This is common grace, whereby the gospel is proclaimed in the midst of the kingdom of darkness. Watts notes, “Happy [are] those countries where the apostles of Christ planted the gospel, and brought grace and salvation near them, though they were before at a dreadful distance from God!”⁹⁶ Watts acknowledges “degrees of blessedness” even among those who enjoy a gospel ministry. Some are raised by religious parents; others are blessed with godly ministers; and others are active participants in religious duties.⁹⁷

The second “degree” of happiness is when we “obtain reconciliation with [God] by the blood of Christ.”⁹⁸ Reconciliation is the “design” of all the approaches that God makes toward us.⁹⁹ Watts declares,

⁹² Watts summarizes all three ingredients in terms of knowing God, loving God, and being beloved by God. He writes, “The loving-kindness of God is life, or something better than life; Psalm lxii. 3. And to have a sensation of this loving-kindness, is to feel that I live. To think, to know, and to be assured that I am beloved, by an all-sufficient Power, who can do more for me than I can ask or think, in life, and death, and in eternity, and to have pleasing and spiritual sensations of this shed abroad in the heart; this raises the Christian near to the upper heaven, while he dwells on earth, and he rejoices with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:356.

⁹³ Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:355.

⁹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:132; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:377. Blessedness is “rooted in the knowledge of the living God who alone is blessed.” J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 18.

⁹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:132; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:377.

⁹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:132; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:377–78. Watts’ evangelical impulse is clearly evident. He praises God for bringing the gospel to “Blessed England” as a manifestation of his “divine choice and peculiar favour.”

⁹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:132; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:378–79.

⁹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:132; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:379.

⁹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:132; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:379.

Happy persons, who are weary of their old estrangement from God, who have heard and have received the offers of his mercy, who have made their solemn approaches to God by Jesus the Mediator, and are joined to the Lord in a sweet and everlasting covenant! Happy creatures, who behold the beauties of their Maker's face with double pleasure, who love him with all their souls, and begin to taste the love of his heart too! This is a matter of special privilege.¹⁰⁰

By means of Christ's atonement, and the new birth arising from his work, we possess "solid and substantial felicity."¹⁰¹ According to Watts, it is one thing for a stranger to be brought near to God in the gospel, but another thing for believers to be brought into greater conformity to God's will. He notes, "More blessed are those sons who are most like their heavenly Father, and keep closest to him...whose hearts are always in a heavenly frame and who graces and virtues brighten and improve daily."¹⁰²

The third "degree" of happiness is when we "dwell and abide" in God's "higher courts."¹⁰³ Until glorification, we experience foretastes of this "degree" of happiness by way of wonder. That being the case, Watts entreats us to "raise our thoughts, and wonder at the blessedness of the saints and angels in the upper world."¹⁰⁴ Happiness is grounded in the hope of experiencing the beatific vision, dwelling in the presence of God, and entering into everlasting light.¹⁰⁵

The fourth "degree" of happiness is when we wonder at the person and work of Christ. Happy are those who "wonder yet more at the blessedness of the man Christ Jesus

¹⁰⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:133; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:380.

¹⁰¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:133; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:381.

¹⁰² Watts, *Works*, 1:133; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:382.

¹⁰³ Watts, *Works*, 1:133; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:382.

¹⁰⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:133; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:382.

¹⁰⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:134; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:382–83. Watts develops these points from 1 Cor 8:12 and Rev 7:15. As with the other degrees of blessedness, Watts contends for levels within the state of perfect glory. He believes the apostle Paul "the greatest of the apostles, who labored more than they all, and was in sufferings more abundant than the rest" will have a 'rank of blessedness' in eternity that is superior to that of the crucified chief." Watts, *Works*, 1:134; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:384–85.

in his approach to God.”¹⁰⁶ Watts unpacks five features of Christ’s approach to God. The first is Christ’s union with God. The “wonderous union” between the natures of Christ has “everlasting pleasure in it, [and is] vastly beyond our nearest unions and approaches to God.”¹⁰⁷ The second is Christ’s knowledge of God. It is intimate, extensive, and perfect. As such, “Christ has the highest advantage to fill all those capacities [of the soul] with inconceivable treasures of knowledge, by dwelling so near to God, and being so intimately united to Divine Wisdom.”¹⁰⁸ Though we are united with Christ by the gospel, this is “a distant copy” of Christ’s knowledge and nearness to God.¹⁰⁹ The third is Christ’s “outgoings” (i.e., desire, love, and delight) toward God. They are “more noble in their kind” and “more intense in their degree, than those of any other creature.”¹¹⁰ Watts maintains that Christ provided far superior forms of worship to the Father while on earth; for example, his faith, humility, and acknowledgment of God’s glory were far superior. Christ the man was superior.¹¹¹ The fourth is Christ’s sense of the love of God. It is “fuller,” “richer,” and “more transporting.”¹¹² This is because God “makes nearer approaches” to Christ and “communicates more of his love” to him.¹¹³ According to Watts, this unique love of God for Christ manifests itself particularly in his love for Christ’s human nature:

¹⁰⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:134; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:386.

¹⁰⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:135; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:387.

¹⁰⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:135–36; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:388.

¹⁰⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:136; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:388–89. Watts writes, “Our nearness to God bears no proportion to that of the man Jesus; for his union to the godhead is of a superior kind. He has therefore a vaster comprehension of all truth, and as sweeter relish in the survey of it, than any created spirit, angelic or human; and thereby this part of his blessedness becomes far superior to theirs.”

¹¹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:136; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:389.

¹¹¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:136; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:389–90.

¹¹² Watts, *Works*, 1:136; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:390.

¹¹³ Watts, *Works*, 1:136; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:390.

We may venture to say, that God loves the human nature of Christ better than he does any other creature; and this human nature has a stronger, and more intimate consciousness of the divine love, and a sweeter sensation of it, than saints or angels can have, because of the personal union between the son of man, and the eternal God; which union, though we know not precisely what it is, yet we know to be sufficient to give him the name Emmanuel, God with us,; which distinguishes it most gloriously from all our unions to God, and raises his dignity, his character, and his advantages...to so sublime a degree above that of all other creatures.¹¹⁴

The fifth is Christ's mediatorial office. He "feels, and tastes, and relishes, eminently and in a superior manner, all the joy and the blessedness that he conveys to our souls."¹¹⁵

Prior to glorification, Christ gives us "the first relish of [our] sweetness."¹¹⁶ At glorification, however, he will "draw near to the Father, and say...I now approach *with them* to the courts of thy upper house."¹¹⁷

The fifth "degree" of happiness is when we move "beyond all created nature, and lift our thoughts upward to the blessedness of the three glorious Persons of the Trinity."¹¹⁸ Admiration for the Trinity leads to happiness because there are "infinite and unknown pleasures [that] are derived from their ineffable union and communion in one godhead."¹¹⁹ There is "inconceivable nearness" between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, which is the "very center and spring of all felicity."¹²⁰ The triune God's "blessedness or nearness" is not a "dull or inactive state"; rather, it consists of knowledge and love.¹²¹ With respect to this knowledge, Watts notes,

And besides the general glories of the divine nature, we may suppose, that a full and comprehensive knowledge of the sameness, the difference, the special properties, and the mutual relations of the three divine person, which are utterly

¹¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:136; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:390.

¹¹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:137; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:391–92.

¹¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:137; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:392.

¹¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:137; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:392.

¹¹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:138; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:392.

¹¹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:138; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:392–93.

¹²⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:137; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:393.

¹²¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:137; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:393.

incomprehensible to mortals, and perhaps far above the reach of all created minds, is the incommunicable entertainment of the holy Trinity, and makes a part of their blessedness.¹²²

This blessedness is also rooted in love (1 John 4:8).¹²³ Watts conceives of this divine love in terms of communion, inbeing, and indwelling. God “can love nothing in the same degree with himself, because he can find no equal good.”¹²⁴ Again, “The Father delights infinitely in his perfect image” so too does the “Son take infinite delight in the glorious archetype, and thus imitates the Father.”¹²⁵

This, then, is Watts’ “scale of happiness,” beginning on earth and ending in heaven. It is summed up in his hymn, “The Scale of Blessedness; Or, Blessed Saints, Blessed Savior, and Blessed Trinity.”

Ascend, my soul, by just degrees,
Let contemplation rove
O’er all the rising ranks of bliss,
Here, an in worlds above.

Blest is the nation near to God,
Where he makes known his ways;
Blest are the men whose feet have trod
His lower courts of grace.

Blest were the levite and the priest,
Who near his altar stood;
Blest are the saints from sin releas’d,
And reconciled with blood.

Blest are the souls dismiss’d from clay,

¹²² Watts, *Works*, 1:137–38; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:393–94.

¹²³ Watts, *Works*, 1:138; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:394–95.

¹²⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:138; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:395. The pattern for Trinitarian communion, as a degree of happiness, is found in Scripture “with great ease and evidence,” according to Watts. The union of the Trinity is the pattern for our union to God in happiness. See John 17:21–26; 1 John 1:3.

¹²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:138; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:395. Watts appeals to Heb 1:3 and John 5:19–20 to support his argument. “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel’” (John 5:19–20).

Before his face they stand;
Blest angels in their bright array,
Attend his great command.

Jesus is more divinely blest
Where man to Godhead join'd,
Hath joys transcending all the rest,
More noble and refin'd

But, O what words or thoughts can trace
The blessed Three in One!
Here rest my spirit, and confess,
The infinite unknown.¹²⁶

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, Watts' approach to the spiritual life is expressed in holiness and happiness. As we grow in conformity to God's will (holiness), we grow in the enjoyment of God (happiness). This vision of the spiritual life is shaped by four key theological motifs. The first is the depravity of man. Since happiness is rooted in holiness, Watts' doctrine of sin shapes his spirituality. The second is the beauty of Christ. Experiencing holiness and happiness is impossible apart from reconciliation to God. How do we draw near to God? The answer resides in Watts' understanding of Christ's mediatorial work. The third doctrine is the excellency of heaven. Since the spiritual life is "eternal life begun," it is important to consider how Watts views eternity. The fourth is the tri-unity of God. For Watts, happiness is most fully realized in wonder of the Trinity. How does he understand this doctrine? It is to this theological foundation that we now turn.

¹²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:142; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:407–08.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEPRAVITY OF MAN

Introduction

The Enlightenment encompassed numerous facets of English society,¹ and its impact was far reaching.² One of the more influential Enlightenment figures was John Locke (1632–1704).³ His influence extended into the theological mooring of early eighteenth-century England.⁴ As one historian notes, Dissenters of the era were “looking to Locke rather than to Calvin for intellectual support of their faith.”⁵ This was

¹ For a survey of the key tenets, contours, and individuals of the eighteenth-century English Enlightenment, see John Orr, *English Deism: Its Roots and Its Fruits* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1934); Franklin Le Van Baumer, *Modern European Thought: Continuity and Change in Ideas, 1600–1950* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1977), 160–62; James A. Herrick, *The Radical Rhetoric of the English Deist: The Discourse of Skepticism, 1680–1750* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997); Jeffery R. Wigelsworth, *Deism in Enlightenment England: Theology Politics, and Newtonian Public Science* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Peter Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

² David Bebbington notes, “Contrary to the common view, Evangelicalism was allied with the Enlightenment.” David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 19. Again, “The Evangelical movement, however, was permeated by Enlightenment influences.” For more on Bebbington’s thought on this subject, see *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 50–74.

³ For more on Locke, see John Dunn, *Locke: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Maurice Cranston, *John Locke: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957).

⁴ See Robert Strivens, *Philip Doddridge and the Shaping of Evangelical Dissent* (London: Routledge, 2016), 67–82. Striven’s work is particularly important to how the Dissenters, like Doddridge and Watts, modified John Locke’s Philosophy, in order to pair it with Christian doctrine.

⁵ Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 392. For details on Locke’s interaction with theologians from the eighteenth-century, see Alan P. F. Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997). Sell concludes that “Locke encouraged many divines to set out from the starting point of epistemology, and to seek a reason for their faith. In this he was pre-eminent though not alone; nor was he absolutely original for, as we have seen, he was intellectually indebted to Arminians, Neoplatonists, Latitudinarians and Puritans, as well as to Newton and other pioneers of modern scientific method. However, we have also seen that most divines had no compunction about utilizing what they found helpful in Locke’s writings and discarding or opposing the rest.” Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines*, 270. For details on Locke’s impact upon Watts’ position on philosophy and reason, see Alan P. F. Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity*

particularly evident in discussions concerning the nature of man and sin.⁶ Locke opposed any notion of the imputation of Adam's sin to the human race.⁷ The "eighteenth century acclaimed him for having demolished...the Christian doctrine of total depravity, a black, spreading cloud which for centuries had depressed the human spirit."⁸ Owing to Locke's influence, the nature of original sin became a controversial issue.⁹ There were several "interlocking questions" that framed the debate: "Was man born good, bad, or neutral? Was his nature fixed for all time, or was it changeable, and therefore conceivably improvable and even perfectible?"¹⁰ Clyde Holbrook notes the scope of the debate:

The controversy over human depravity in the eighteenth century was no mere intramural squabble among theologians. It was an important phase of a revolution that was occurring in Western man's estimate of his nature and potentialities. Literature, philosophy, economic and political theory, as well as theology, were to feel the decisive impact of this revolution. The notion of man as a fundamentally rational, benevolently inclined individual was emerging as the unquestionable postulate for the expansionist mood of Western culture. But the doctrine of original sin marred this flattering image. It stood for everything the spirit of the Enlightenment detested.¹¹

With the debate over human depravity front and center, John Taylor (1694–1761) published a substantial work, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, Proposed to Free*

(Cambridge: James Clarke, 2004), 36–37; Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 17–67.

⁶ For example, see John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in Scriptures*, in *The Works of John Locke*, vol. 2 (London: John Churchill and Sam Manship, 1714), 574–676.

⁷ Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines*, 229–36.

⁸ Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1932), 64–65. This position by Becker is disputed in scholarship. Some see Locke as an intermediate between the austere position of Calvinists, on one end of original sin, and the Deist on the other. See, Sell, *John Locke and the Eighteenth-Century Divines*, 229; W. M. Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁹ Baumer demonstrates how Hume made the science of man the center of all sciences in eighteenth-century England. "Even mathematics, natural philosophy, and natural religion depended on it, not to speak of logic, morals, criticism (sentiments) and politics." Baumer, *Modern European Thought*, 160–61.

¹⁰ Baumer, *Modern European Thought*, 161.

¹¹ Clyde A. Holbrook, editor's introduction to *Original Sin*, by Jonathan Edwards, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 2.

and *Candid Examination*.¹² Taylor's landmark treatise repudiated the Calvinist position regarding human nature, and "laid out boldly...one of the most impressive and destructive criticisms" of total depravity.¹³ His work provoked responses from several important and influential Calvinist divines.¹⁴ One of the leading voices of dissent was Jonathan Edwards.¹⁵ His treatment of the subject was not "an answer to any particular book written against the doctrine of original sin," but more of a general defense of what he saw as a "great important doctrine."¹⁶ Almost eighteen years prior to Edwards, Watts formally waded into the debate with the publication of *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind; or, An Attempt to Vindicate the Scriptural Account of These Great Events, Upon the Plain Principles of Reason* (1740).¹⁷ In the preface to the second edition, Watts

¹² John Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* (London: J. Wilson, 1740).

¹³ Holbrook, Editor's Introduction to *Original Sin*, 3:3.

¹⁴ E.g., David Jennings, *A Vindication of the Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, From Mr. Taylor's Free and Candid Examination of It* (London: R. Hett and J. Oswald, 1740); John Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin: According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* (Bristol, UK: E. Farley, 1757); Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3, *Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

¹⁵ For a discussion of the controversy in New England, and Edwards interaction with Taylor, see Holbrook, Editor's Introduction to *Original Sin*, 3:4–67. For details on the reception of Edwards' work, see Holbrook, Editor's Introduction to *Original Sin*, 3:98–102.

¹⁶ Edwards, *Original Sin*, 3:103. Holbrook's summary of Edwards' work is divided according to three general ideas. He explains, "First, that all men, in a wide diversity of circumstances, unfailingly and persistently do fall into heinous sin, which is justly punishable by God; second, that the only rational explanation for this deplorable state of affairs is mankind's vitiated and corrupt nature, brought about by the fall of Adam, in which all men participated by virtue of the principle of identity; and third, that God, although completely sovereign, cannot in the least be regarded as the active author of sin or as unjust in his arrangement of a world in which this continuing debacle takes place." Holbrook, Editor's Introduction to *Original Sin*, 3:27.

¹⁷ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Rev. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev. George Burder* (London: J. Barfield, 1810), 6:49–185; Isaac Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind: or, An Attempt to Vindicate the Scriptural Account of These Great Evens Upon the Plain Principles of Reason*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for James Brackstone, 1742). Watts formally published two editions of this work. The first edition only references his disagreement with Daniel Whitby (1638–1726). Even with his references to Whitby in the preface, Watts is measured in his criticism. He admits to avoiding the "needless labor" of entering into the careful examination of Whitby's scheme, but instead relies entirely on Scripture and reason to formulate his positions. Watts, *Works*, 6:50–51; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, viii–ix. It is in the second edition of *Ruin and Recovery*, utilized in these citations, that Watts specifically addresses Taylor. This was due to the fact that Taylor published a second edition of his work in 1741, which included a supplement

expresses his concern over the loss of the doctrine of original sin.¹⁸ Wherever this doctrine is rejected or renounced, “the glories of the gospel will in the same proportion be depreciated, neglected, and despised.”¹⁹ Given Watts’ conviction concerning the fundamental importance of this doctrine, it is no surprise that it is critical to a full understanding of his spirituality.²⁰ Watts states, “The scriptural doctrine of original sin has engaged my pen, because in my opinion, it has the most extensive and powerful influence on several parts of practical godliness.”²¹ Four aspects of Watts’ doctrine of sin directly impacts his approach to the spiritual life.

Created Upright

The first is his view of man’s nature. In short, man was “created upright.” For Watts, it is important to understand what this entails because it serves to shed light upon man’s nature after the fall. By way of comparison, we “arrive at some determination” about the nature of degeneracy.²² To that end, therefore, Watts sets forth five “qualifications” of man’s nature prior to the fall.

First, “upright” man enjoyed a perfection of natural powers in his body and

directly addressing Watts’ arguments. See “Advertisement Concerning the Second Edition,” in Watts *Works*, 6:53–56; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, xv–xxiv.

¹⁸ In the second edition advertisement, Watts admits to having “endeavoured . . . to relieve and soften all the harsher, and more obnoxious parts of this doctrine of original sin.” Watts, *Works*, 6:54; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, xvii–xviii. He points the reader to David Jennings’ earlier work as a supplement to his revised edition. This approach to polemics gives rise to the charge that Watts was a “hesitant Calvinist.” See Roland N. Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 116; and Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 46.

¹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:54; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, xvii.

²⁰ Herman Bavinck provides a distinctly theological classification of anthropology that aids in understanding how sin impacts spirituality. He notes that anthropology “does not concern itself with the knowledge of ‘humanness,’ which can be obtained by scientific research, by anatomy, physiology, and psychology, but deals with human origin and destiny, with our relation to God, our misery due to sin, our need for redemption, our memories of paradise, and hopes for the future.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 1:287.

²¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:53; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, xvi.

²² Watts, *Works*, 6:61; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 11.

soul. This perfection includes the understanding by which Adam possessed “all knowledge, both of God and creatures, which was needful for happiness.”²³ For Watts, this “knowledge” consisted of (1) a clear reason, (2) an uncorrupted judgement, (3) a sensible conscience, and (4) a complete understanding of all necessary truth.²⁴ In addition to enjoying perfection in the understanding, man also possessed perfection in his will (or inclination).²⁵ He “must be not only innocent as a tree or a brute is, but must be formed holy; that is, he must have a principal holiness concreated with him.”²⁶ This “concreated” holiness consists of several elements. To begin with, his will possessed a “propensity to holiness and virtue,” so that in all things he sought to “please and honor God.”²⁷ As a result, he loved God supremely, feared to offend him, and was zealous in serving him. Because of this perfection in the will, man possessed a “heart inlaid with love and goodwill to creatures.”²⁸ This manifested itself in relational purity; that is to say, he endeavored to operate in honesty and truth. Thus, man had no “domineering pride, envy, malice, falsehood, brawls or contentions,” but sought “the welfare and happiness of his fellow creatures as well as his own.”²⁹

Second, “upright” man enjoyed the “power to choose evil as well as good.”³⁰

²³ Watts, *Works*, 6:58; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 4.

²⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:58; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 4–5.

²⁵ For more on Watts’ understanding of the human faculties, see footnote 41 of chapter 2.

²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:58; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 5.

²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:58; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 5.

²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:59; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 6.

²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:59; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 6.

³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:59; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 8. Augustine articulates a similar position: Adam was “able not to sin,” while those in Adam are “not able not to sin.” Greg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 347–48. Augustine writes, “Therefore to the first man, who, in that good in which he had been made upright, had received the ability not to sin, the ability not to die, the ability not to forsake that good itself, was given the aid of perseverance,—not that by which it should be brought about that he should persevere, but that without which he could not of free will persevere. Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), 485.

This freedom of the will came with a “state of probation” wherein man had a “super propensity” to do what is right.³¹ The content of this super propensity, according to Watts, was his ability to preserve himself in holiness and happiness. God’s wisdom, justice, and goodness require that man “be furnished with powers of self-preservation in his state of innocency.”³²

Third, “upright” man enjoyed immortality in body and soul. His body had “no principles of decay or death.”³³ In addition, his soul was equipped to experience immortality through “higher degrees of excellency and happiness.”³⁴ He was able to (1) guard against sin, (2) avoid harm, (3) improve his natural powers, and (4) improve his ability to serve and converse with God.³⁵ These “higher degrees of excellency and happiness” were a hedge against mortality.

Fourth, “upright” man enjoyed a privileged environment. Watts describes it as a “beautiful and magnificent...furnished with all manner of necessaries and conveniences of life.”³⁶ It was not only aesthetically pleasing, but it functioned to reinforce man’s holiness and happiness. God designed creation for man’s benefit and enjoyment.

The final qualification is related to propagation. According to Watts,

³¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:59; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 8. Augustine understands this “super propensity” in terms of Adam’s ease of obedience due to alignment of the desire and will. He notes, “There was so great an abundance of other foods, the common prohibiting the eating of one kind of food was as easy to observe as it was simple to remember, and it was given at a time when desire was not in opposition to the will: such opposition arose later, as a punishment of the transgression.” Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XIV.12, 607.

³² Watts, *Works*, 6:59; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 8. He appeals to specific aspects of the doctrine of God in order to defend his position, specifically God’s being is his wisdom, justice, and goodness, and thus these are the means of holiness and happiness. For a modern treatment of the simplicity of God, see James E. Dolezal, *All That Is In God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017).

³³ Watts, *Works*, 6:59; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 9.

³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:60; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 9.

³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:60; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 9.

³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:60; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 10.

perfection, in the original state, would have been imputed by way of human propagation. In other words, propagation would have produced offspring perfect in holiness and happiness. If Adam and Eve had conceived prior to the fall, their children would have been “innocent and holy and capable of maintaining [their] duty and happiness.”³⁷

Universal Degeneracy

The second component of Watts’ doctrine of sin concerns his view of man’s nature after the fall. In sum, sin corrupts the faculties of the soul, and leads to spiritual and physical death. Moreover, sin extends its corrupting influence to all of creation. Watts describes this result of the fall as “universal degeneracy.” He believes his view of universal degeneracy is supported by (1) observation, and (2) revelation. We review each in turn.

Considerations from Observation

To support his contention that man’s universal degeneracy is verifiable from observation (or reason), Watts offers thirteen considerations. Considerations 1–3 are drawn from his observation of the natural world. The earth, says he, “carries with it some evident tokens of ruin and desolation.”³⁸ We see it in the “waste and barren ground” of deserts, caverns, and morasses.³⁹ We also see it in the destruction caused by floods, fires, hurricanes, and earthquakes.⁴⁰ Moreover, the plants testify to the extensiveness of man’s sin: “Noxious plants or fruits of moral and malignant juice” cause “disease, anguish, and death.”⁴¹ The animal kingdom also confirms it: “tribes of serpents,” “immense flights of

³⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:60; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 11.

³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:61; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 12.

³⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:61; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 13–14.

⁴⁰ Watts argues that Moses and Peter “supposed the great Creator to have laid up stores and magazines of ruin and destruction within the bowels of the earth.” Watts, *Works*, 6:63; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 18–19. In this section, Watts appeals to Genesis 7:11–24 and 2 Peter 3:6–10.

⁴¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:64; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 21.

locusts,” and “innumerable hosts of caterpillars” are observable evidence of universal degeneracy.⁴² The process of birth itself is logical proof of man’s sin. The “exquisite pain and anguish” of childbirth proves we “are not the innocent favorites of heaven.”⁴³ Even the hardships required to maintain human life testify to man’s ruin: “toil,” “pain,” “hazard,” and “tiresome fatigues.”⁴⁴

Considerations 4–7 are drawn from Watts’ observation of the general disfunction and brokenness in man’s character. As evidence, he mentions the “monstrous barbarities” that were committed by “men in the Christian inquisitions of Spain, Portugal, and Italy.”⁴⁵ He highlights the “brutal and wicked tribes of heathenism, the African savages, and the American cannibals, who kill and roast their own fellow creatures.”⁴⁶ Even young children are examples of universal degeneracy.⁴⁷ The “young ferments of spirit and envy” and the “native wrath and rage” found in the “little hearts of infants” turn to “obstinacy and perverseness” even before they learn to speak.⁴⁸ Watts concludes,

⁴² Watts, *Works*, 6:65–66; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 24–25.

⁴³ Watts, *Works*, 6:67; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 28–29.

⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:68; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 29–30.

⁴⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:69; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 35.

⁴⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:69; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 35.

⁴⁷ This conviction manifested itself in Watts’ concern for the education of children: “There are a thousand instances wherein this is evident in fact; that where the education of children is neglected, the whole generation becomes vicious.” Watts, *Works*, 6:72; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 44. Watts published thirteen works, between 1715 and his death, directly related to education. For more on Watts as an educator, see Arthur Paul Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works* (London: Independent Press, 1948), 73–102.

⁴⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:72; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 41. Watts goes on to detail the implications of neglecting children’s natural inclination to sin: “And, take any notice of any such examples set before them, or are capable of such imitation. And it might be added, that even in the best of families, where good examples stand round them, where children from their youngest years are instructed in their duty, and encouraged and excited to practise virtue and religion, and persuaded to it by all the motives of authority and love, and led by many examples as well as by precepts, yet their hearts naturally run astray from God. The greatest part of them in their childhood visibly follow the corrupt influences of sense, appetite, and passion, and in very early years they manifest the inward evil principles of pride, obstinacy, and disobedience: And multitudes, even in such families, grow up to practise many vices, and to publish the iniquity and shame of their nature, in opposition to all the influences of instruction and advice, example and authority. And if all children were utterly untaught and unrestrained, even in the years of childhood, these iniquities would break out and discover themselves with much more evidence and shame: This appears in particular families, even in such countries and such towns which are civilized by learning

If great multitudes of mankind are grossly sinful, and if every individual, without exception, is actually a sinner against the law of his Creator; if sinful propensities and inclinations appear even in youngest years, and every child becomes an actual sinner almost so soon as it is capable of moral or immoral actions; we have just reason to conclude, there is some original and universal degeneracy spread over the whole race of men from their birth: For it is not to be supposed that the wisdom, equity, and goodness of God would ever have produced such a world, wherein every single creature coming out of their Maker's hands in their original state of innocence and full power to obey, should be thus defiled by their own willful and chosen disobedience.⁴⁹

Considerations 8–10 are drawn from Watts' observation of the relationship between man and his Creator. For starters, man is unable to obey God's law, according to which he is required to love to God and his neighbor. Because of the fall, man does not have "a ready and practical power to perform" this commandment without "sinful irregularity in thought, word, or deed."⁵⁰ Not only does man disobey God's law, he lies under God's displeasure. The main indication of this is that "thousands of rational creatures" descend "hourly to death and the grave."⁵¹ God's displeasure with man is also evident in (1) disease, (2) war, (3) famine, and (4) disaster.⁵² Watts observes that the young are subject to the same judgment, and they are not exempt from the misery of death.⁵³

Consideration 11 arises from God's wisdom, righteousness, and holiness. In short, it is "sufficiently evident" that "iniquity, folly, and wretchedness" (as evident in

and politeness." Watts, *Works*, 6:72; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 43–44.

⁴⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:73–74; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 46–47.

⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:75; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 50.

⁵¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:77; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 56.

⁵² Watts, *Works*, 6:77–78; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 56–60.

⁵³ Watts, *Works*, 6:81–82; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 66. Watts' language is vivid. He notes, "Do we not shudder with a sort of sympathy and compassion, when we read of children falling into the fire, and lying there in helpless screams till their limbs are burned off, or their lives expire in flames? Or when they drop into scalding vessels of some boiling liquid, whereby they resign their souls to extreme anguish? Are not all our tenderest powers shocked and pained, when we hear of infants left on their couches, or in their cradles, by poor parents, for an hour or two, while dogs or hogs have gnawed off their flesh from their bones, and they have been found in dying agonies and blood?" Watts, *Works*, 6:81; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 67–68.

considerations 1–10) could not have come from God.⁵⁴ God made man upright and happy, therefore he is not the source of sin in the world. Universal degeneracy is the only explanation for man’s predicament.

Consideration 12 is based on Watts’ observation of man’s vain attempt to relieve the “train of wretchedness” by means of “poor, low, sorry pleasures.”⁵⁵ Here, Watts is thinking particularly of food, sports, “gadding abroad,” and “mixing with trifling and impertinent company.”⁵⁶ He is convinced that people attempt to divert their attention from the harsh realities of life by “gaming” and engaging with “childish sports.”⁵⁷ They “aim at no higher felicities” than the “four-footed beasts of the earth.”⁵⁸ For Watts, all of this confirms universal degeneracy.

Consideration 13 is related to man’s general disregard for his eternal state. Watts notes, “Multitudes are running down daily, and directly to death and darkness...without earnest inquires and sollicitudes of the soul about their manner there, and their final fate and doom, when this life is at end.”⁵⁹ Man’s indifference to eternal realities confirms his corrupted state. His disregard as to the eternal state of his soul, in the face of imminent death, is an obvious result of the “spreading poison” that “renders [him] so prone to sin” and, therefore, “so thoughtless of the future, and so unprepared for it.”⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:84; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 74.

⁵⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:86; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 80.

⁵⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:86; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 82.

⁵⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:87; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 81.

⁵⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:87; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 83.

⁵⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:87; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 84

⁶⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:88; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 86.

Considerations from Revelation

Watts also appeals to God’s revelation in support of his position regarding universal degeneracy.⁶¹ He demonstrates (by way of eight considerations) that Scripture clearly attests to original sin. Considerations 1–5 are based on what the Bible says about how sin entered the world. Appealing to Genesis 1:26–28, 2:7, 3:20, and Acts 17:26, Watts concludes that God created man in a “holy and happy state, in his own likeness and in his own favor.”⁶² He appointed Adam to produce offspring “in his own holy image, or in the same circumstances of holiness and happiness.”⁶³ But this holiness and happiness was marred as a result of the fall.

Curst be the man, for ever curst,
That doth the smallest sin commit;
Death and damnation for the first,
Without relief and infinite.⁶⁴

God established two promises with Adam as the representative of his posterity. The first is the promise of immortality and happiness, based upon obedience.⁶⁵ The second is the promise of misery and death, based upon disobedience. These two promises

⁶¹ This twofold approach to doctrine through logic and revelation is common in Watts. He writes, “Those who oppose the doctrine of original sin will neither allow our arguing from reason or revelation. Our fathers, as well as some present writers, have abundantly proved this doctrine from several places of Scripture: And our adversaries have endeavoured to shew, from the light of reason, that it does not agree with the reason and nature of things, and therefore, say they, Scripture must be otherwise explained; and they are forced to labour hard to give some strained and perverse interpretations of it to support their scheme...Whereas all I have attempted to do here, is to shew that reason goes a great way to teach and prove what Scripture asserts, and that reason and Scripture agree, as far as reason goes, in one and the same account of this matter. And thus we confirm our belief that this great article of original sin, which we learn both from observation and reason, as well as revelation.” Watts, *Works*, 6:114; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 158.

⁶² Watts, *Works*, 6:114; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 160.

⁶³ Watts, *Works*, 6:115; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 161.

⁶⁴ Isaac Watts, *Horae Lyricae. Poems Chiefly of the Lyric Kind. In Two Books. I. Songs, &c. Sacred to Devotion. II. Odes, Elegys, &c. to Virtue Loyalty and Friendship* (London: Printed by S. and D. Bridge, 1706), 95. Watts’ first publication of *Horae Lyricae* is used here because the 1810 publication altered the second verse of the poem. The phrase “the smallest of sin” was changed to “one willful sin” in the 1810 publication. See Watts, *Works*, 4:444.

⁶⁵ Watts understands this as a covenant of works, based on Romans 2:7–9, Galatians 3:12, and Hosea 6:7. Likewise, Augustine understands obedience as the “mother and guardian of all other virtues in a rational creature.” As such, a lack of obedience, according to Augustine, is the ground of imputed sin. He notes, “Therefore, the unrighteousness of disobeying the command was all the greater in proper to the ease with which it could have been observed and upheld.” Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV:12, 607–08.

are represented in the two trees as “symbols, seals, or figures” of either (1) life and happiness, or (2) death and misery.⁶⁶

Considerations 6–8 detail two important aspects of sin. The first is that God imputes (reckons) Adam’s sin to all his posterity, because he is their head. Watts explains, “Adam was the head of all mankind, who became sinful and mortal by the corruption of our nature.”⁶⁷

When we say the sin or iniquity of the father is imputed to the children of a traitor, who never were nor could be precisely in their father’s situation or circumstances, we do not mean that every single evil act of the father is charged upon the child, as if the child had done it; but that the guilt or liableness to punishment which arises from those acts of the father is so far transferred or imputed to the child, that the child suffers banishment or poverty for the sake of it.⁶⁸

Based upon Romans 5:12–14, Watts argues that Adam’s sin brought condemnation upon all men.⁶⁹ Importantly, Watts interprets “condemnation” in a legal sense, emphasizing “that death is not only a natural, but a penal evil, and comes upon [even] infants considered as accounted guilty and condemned...for the sin of Adam their

⁶⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:116–17; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 166.

⁶⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:121; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 166. Elsewhere, Watts grounds this assertion in Romans 1:32. Of note, he briefly interacts with John Locke, and categorically rejects his interpretation of this passage. “I would take notice of the remark, which Mr. Locke makes on the last verse of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, where the apostle expresseth himself thus, concerning the wicked heathens, in our common reading, viz. Who knowing the judgement of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death. But Mr. Locke endeavors to correct this reading by a direct contradiction of it, and that borrowed from one manuscript only...that is, as he explains it, ‘they knew not that God had pronounced death to be the wages of sin.’ I grant, indeed, the heathens knew it not to be a divine revelation; but their own reason could and might tell them, that they had offended God, the original and sovereign giver of life, they had forfeited this life, and God might deprive them of it, that is put them to death.” Watts, *Works*, 6:128; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 197–98.

⁶⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:217; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 433–34. Likewise, Augustine argued for imputed sin through Adam. “In the first man, therefore, there existed the whole human race which was to pass through the woman into her progeny when that conjugal pair received the divine sentence of its own damnation. And what man, became, not when he was created, but when he sinned and was punished: this he propagated, so far as the origin of sin and death are concerned.” Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.3, 543.

⁶⁹ With respect to the same text, Anthony Hoekema argues, “Paul contrasts the bad results that have come to us through Adam, our first head, with the blessing that have come to us through Christ...Paul’s point is not that death and condemnation have come upon us because all of us somehow, at some time or other, sin, but death and condemnation have come upon us because of the transgression of one man, whom Paul, following biblical narrative, calls Adam.” Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 115.

legal head, or representative, and surety.”⁷⁰ The single offence of Adam brought death upon his posterity by “righteous constitution.”⁷¹ Because Adam is our “federal head and representative,” his disobedience means his offspring are counted guilty.⁷² This aspect of sin directly corresponds to what Watts elsewhere terms the *relative evil* of sin.⁷³ In a hymn, based upon Romans 5:12, he vividly portrays the impact of Adam’s first sin:

Backward with humble shame we look
On our original;
How is our nature dash’d and broke
In our first father’s fall!

To all that’s good averse and blind,
But prone to all that’s ill:
What dreadful darkness veils our mind!
How obstinate our will.

⁷⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:121; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 179. Based upon Genesis 5:1–3, Watts argues that Moses includes the death of Adam, followed by his offspring, in order to highlight how the “course and custom of dying came into the world.” Watts, *Works*, 6:115; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 161–62. Calvin argues, “Adam, when he lost the gifts received, lost them not only for himself but for us all... The beginning of corruption in Adam was such that it was conveyed in a perpetual stream from the ancestors into their descendants.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 2.1.7.

⁷¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:122; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 180. The Westminster Confession of faith states, “They [Adam and Eve] being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation.” Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms with Proof Texts* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2007), 6.3, 27.

⁷² Watts, *Works*, 6:122; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 181. For more on the history of the doctrine of original sin, from the Augustinian position, see Alan Jacobs, *Original Sin: A Cultural History* (New York: HarperOne, 2008). Calvin argues, “Since, therefore, the curse, which goes about through all the regions of the world, flowed hither and yon from Adam’s guilt, it is not unreasonable if it is spread to all his offspring. Therefore, after the heavenly image was obliterated in him, he was not the only one to suffer this punishment—that, in place of wisdom, virtue, holiness, truth, and justice, with which adornments he had been clad, there came forth the most filthy plagues, blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity, and injustice—but he also entangled and immersed his offspring in the same miseries.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.5.

⁷³ Watts’ division of sin into two categories, relative and real, is similar to how Reformed theologians use the phrase “original sin” in reference to (1) guilt and (2) depravity. For example, Louis Berkhof notes two elements of original sin: (1) original guilt, and (2) original pollution. In the former, the “word ‘guilt’ expresses the relation which sin bears to justice, or as other theologians put it, to the penalty of the law.” The latter, original pollution, is “the presence of positive evil” and includes (1) total depravity and (2) total inability. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 245–46. For an example of this in Puritan thought, see Timothy K. Beougher, *Richard Baxter and Conversion: A Study of the Puritan Concept of Becoming a Christian* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 45; J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001).

Conceiv'd in sin (O wretched state!)
Before we draw our breath,
The first young pulse begins to beat
Iniquity and death.

How strong in our degenerate blood
The old corruption reigns,
And mingling with the crooked flood,
Wanders thro' all our veins!⁷⁴

The second detail concerns Watts' understanding of the image of God in man. Because of his disobedience, Adam lost the image of God, and thus forfeited immortality and happiness. For Watts, the image of God in Adam, prior to the fall, was moral, natural, and political.⁷⁵ It was the moral image of God that was primarily lost at the fall, including both holiness and happiness. Adam's sin "broke his habit of holiness, or destroyed the inward principle of virtue and piety";⁷⁶ as a result, Adam lost "both his own delightful sense of the favour and love of God, and...[his] own love to God."⁷⁷ All that remains after the fall is the natural image of God ("the spiritual faculties") and the political image of God ("a degree of dominion over the creatures").⁷⁸ Although the natural and political images remain, they lack the moral image of God and, therefore, cannot properly pursue holiness or happiness.

⁷⁴ Watts, *Works*, 4:269–70; Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In Three Books. I. Collected From Scriptures. II. Compos'd on Divine Subjects. III. Prepared for the Lord's Supper. With an Essay Towards the Improvement of Christian Psalmody, by the Use of Evangelical Hymns in Worship, as Well as the Psalms of David* (London: Printed by J. Humfreys, 1707), 55–56.

⁷⁵ Watts explains the moral image of God in terms of righteousness and holiness. For a similar understanding, see William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creed, Or Creed of the Apostles*, ed. Ryan Hurd, in *The Works of William Perkins*, vol. 5, eds. Joel R. Beeke and Derrek W. H. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 64–65. For a discussion of this paradigm within Puritan thought, see J. Stephen Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnoock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 32–42.

⁷⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:118; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 169. Watts appeals to Ephesians 4:24 as evidence of his position.

⁷⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:118; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 169.

⁷⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:125; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 188.

The Relative Evil of Sin

The third component of Watts' doctrine of sin concerns his understanding of its "relative" evil. He defines this as "an actual opposition to, or violation of, God's righteous law," which "subjects the sinner to the punishment which the law threatens."⁷⁹ The relative evil of sin is described as unrighteousness, disobedience, transgression, guilt, and is, therefore, the grounds for legal condemnation.⁸⁰ It is only removed by pardon through Christ's atoning work. Watts maintains "that death is the penalty threatened for the sin of man."⁸¹ The relative evil of sin, as guilt before God, is the legal basis for death: (1) natural, (2) spiritual, and (3) eternal.

First, natural death is the dissolution of the body. Due to man's broken "allegiance to his Creator and supreme Lord," natural death is the "the first and most obvious idea of the punishment threatened."⁸² In addition to the death of the body, the curse includes "all the pains, and sorrows, and sicknesses... which by degrees tend to wear out nature, and to bring man down to the dust."⁸³ Scripture exhibits the "sorrows and miseries of this life, and the final deprivation of life itself."⁸⁴

Second, spiritual death is (1) the anguish of a guilty conscience, (2) the loss of the divine image in holiness, (3) the loss of divine favor, and (4) the infliction of sorrows

⁷⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:226; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 456–57. Anthony Hoekema provides clarity by distinguishing between original sin and actual sin. Original sin is "the sinful state and condition in which every human being is born; actual sin, however, is the sins of act, word, or thought that human beings commit." Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 143.

⁸⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:226; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 456–57. For more on this, see, R. K. Johnson, "Imputation," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 600–01. See also John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, vol. 19, *Calvin's Commentaries*, ed. and trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 273.

⁸¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:136; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 220.

⁸² Watts, *Works*, 6:136; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 221.

⁸³ Watts, *Works*, 6:137; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 222.

⁸⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:137; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 223.

upon the soul.⁸⁵ A tormented conscience “consists in the uneasy and painful reflects of the mind.”⁸⁶ It arises from “actual transgressions, as the natural consequence of a guilty mind.”⁸⁷ It is the “striking of the mind” with “sharp reflections and inward remorse.”⁸⁸ The loss of the divine image in holiness is a “bias or propensity toward evil” and is manifested in actual sins and transgressions.⁸⁹ The loss of divine favor is the “loss of the manifestations of God’s love, or friendly converse, . . . and any peculiar instances of his grace.”⁹⁰ Finally, the infliction of sorrows upon the soul are an active “punishment of sense” whereby pain, sorrow, and tribulation “may be impressed upon the soul by God himself, or by good or evil angels.”⁹¹

Third, eternal death is “the misery both of the soul and body, in the invisible world, and in the future state.”⁹² Because man has “forfeited” all that God has given, the “utter destruction of the life of the soul” is God’s prerogative as the “righteous governor.”⁹³ However, God sustains the soul of the unregenerate into perpetuity as a “greater punishment than annihilation.”⁹⁴ Regarding the body, Watts affirms that it will

⁸⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:137; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 223–27.

⁸⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:137; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 223.

⁸⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:137; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 224.

⁸⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:137; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 224.

⁸⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:137; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 225.

⁹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:138; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 225.

⁹¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:138; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 226. Watts appeals to Heb 2:14 to argue that Satan has the power of death, which includes the “power sometimes to kill the body.” Watts, *Works*, 6:138; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 226.

⁹² Watts, *Works*, 6:138; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 227.

⁹³ Watts, *Works*, 6:138; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 227. Watts contends that no place of Scripture absolutely declares the perpetual immortality of the unregenerate soul. He writes, “There is no place of Scripture, that occurs to me, where the word death, as it was first threatened in the law of innocence, necessarily signifies a certain miserable immortality of the soul, either to Adam, the actual sinner, or to his posterity. I say, I do not remember any such text.” Watts, *Works*, 6:139; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 228.

⁹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:139; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 228.

be raised in order to be reunited with the soul, so that they may be “made eternally miserable together.”⁹⁵ The body will be the “everlasting instrument of the soul’s misery and torment.”⁹⁶ This is the “double punishment” (or second death) as found in Revelation 21:8.⁹⁷ The unregenerate will “receive the reward of their obstinacy and impenitence, their violation of the law of God, and their neglect of all the means and hopes of grace.”⁹⁸

The Real Evil of Sin

In addition to the “relative” evil of sin, Watts speaks of the “real” evil of sin. It is the “harmful nature” or “evil qualities” of life and is most closely related to the experience of sin.⁹⁹ Watts remarks,

The real evil of sin is that disorder in the habits, or principles, or powers of the soul, which inclines it to act contrary to the holy nature, perfections, and image of God, as well as against his law. It is a disorder also in these very actions, as they are contrary to the nature of God, defacing his image, spoiling the soul’s original rectitude, breaking the true order of things, and destroying the truest happiness of man. This disorder in the soul, or its principles of action, is called in Scripture, lust, concupiscence, corruption, sin that dwells in us, the body of death, the flesh, the carnal mind, the law of sin, and the law in the members. The same disorder in actions of like makes them be called sins, abominations, iniquity, wickedness, evil works or ways, &c.¹⁰⁰

Watts believes the real evil of sin is removed by sanctification—a change to “our sinful nature and temper into the image of God and holiness.”¹⁰¹ Sin is “a principle or habit in the mind, which inclines us to break the law of God.”¹⁰² When we transgress

⁹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:140; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 230.

⁹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:140; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 230. Watts is hesitant about this position because he cannot prove, from Scripture, the immortality of the unregenerate person. The only promise of life articulated in the Bible, according to Watts, is to the innocent in Christ.

⁹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:140; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 231.

⁹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:140; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 231.

⁹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:225; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 455.

¹⁰⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:225–26; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 455–56.

¹⁰¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:226; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 457.

¹⁰² Watts, *Works*, 6:225; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 455.

God's law, we fall into one (or more) of five forms of sin. First, it is an affront to God's sovereignty. According to Watts, transgression is "an affront to the authority and government of a wise and holy God, a God who has sovereign right to make laws for his creatures and has formed all his commands and prohibitions according to infinite wisdom."¹⁰³ Second, it is to abuse the faculties of body and soul. This "carries in the nature of it a high ingratitude to God our Creator."¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, it prohibits the "return of love and obedience" by way of "wicked abuse of that goodness which has bestowed upon us all our natural powers and talents, our limbs, our sense, and all our faculties of soul and body."¹⁰⁵ Third, it is a corruption of God's design. Sin "breaks upon the wise and beautiful order" of God and "counters [the] divine appointment" of living for God's glory."¹⁰⁶ It exchanges man's glory for God's glory as our chief end. Fourth, it defaces "the moral image of God in the soul."¹⁰⁷ It does so by (1) darkening the mind, (2) turning the heart from God and holiness, and (3) strengthening the inclination to vice.¹⁰⁸ It also sends us down the path of "intemperance and malice, folly and madness...perdition and

¹⁰³ Watts, *Works*, 1:544; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons on the Principal Heads of Christian Religion; Preached at Berry-Street, 1733. Published for the Use of Families, Especially on the Lord's-Day Evenings* (London: R. Hett and J. Oswald, 1735), 1:550. This sermon by Watts was published in the aforementioned work along with five other authors—J. Guyse, D. Neal, S. Prince, D. Jennings, and J. Hubbard. This sermon is number forty-five in the first volume and is entitled, "The Perpetual Obligation of the Moral Law; The Evil of Sin and its Desert of Punishment." It is based on 1 John 3:4, "Sin is the transgression of the law," and Rom 6:23, "The wages of sin is death."

¹⁰⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:544; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:550.

¹⁰⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:544–45; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:550.

¹⁰⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:544; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:550.

¹⁰⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:545; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:551.

¹⁰⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:545; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:551–52.

misery.”¹⁰⁹ Fifth, it provokes God’s anger and exposes us to punishment.¹¹⁰

The Law

Watts positions God’s law as the undisputed standard, in order to give clarity to the nature of God and sin. Because the law reflects God’s nature, transgression constitutes the “real” evil of sin. We “see the sinfulness of our hearts and lives...discover every blot in our souls, and every blemish in our conversations...[and] seek the appointed salvation of Jesus.”¹¹¹ In order to appreciate Watts’ view of the “real” evil of sin, it is important to examine his concept of the relationship between sin and the law.¹¹²

According to Watts,

The moral law signifies that rule which is given to all mankind to direct their manners or behavior, considered merely as they are intelligent and social creatures, as creatures who have an understanding to know God and themselves, a capacity to judge what is right and wrong, and a will to choose and refuse good and evil.¹¹³

There are two main reasons why the moral law is the lens through which we define sin. First, it is expressed in the Decalogue and in the Greatest Commandment, and it is imprinted on the conscience.¹¹⁴ It requires us to (1) seek after the knowledge of God, (2) trust in God’s Word, (3) perform those duties prescribed by God, and (4) abstain from

¹⁰⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:545; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:552.

¹¹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:545; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:552.

¹¹¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:548; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:560.

¹¹² Calvin argues that the moral law functions as a mirror to disclose our sinfulness: “The law is like a mirror. In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both—just as a mirror shows us the spots on our face. For when the capacity to follow righteousness fails him, man must be mired in sins.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.7.

¹¹³ Watts, *Works*, 1:540; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:539.

¹¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:541; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:540.

those things forbidden by God.¹¹⁵ In terms of “prescribed” duties, Watts has in mind things such as fear, love, trust, hope, worship, obedience, prayer, praise, patience, providence, and living for God’s glory.¹¹⁶ All of these are required under the moral law.

The second reason why Watts grounds the real evil of sin in the moral law is because it is a “universal and perpetual obligation to all mankind.”¹¹⁷ In other words, the Creator established a rule (or standard) of behavior for his creatures. Watts explains, “Every creature must owe its all to him that made it.”¹¹⁸ Therefore, specific dynamics of obligation arise from the creature/Creator relationship. God requires that we (1) reverence and obey him, (2) fear and worship him, (3) love him above all things, and (4) address him with prayer and praise.¹¹⁹ These requirements are founded in the moral law.

The Flesh

The above discussion of the real evil of sin naturally leads to Watts’ doctrine of the flesh. “[T]he principles, springs, and occasions of our sinful actions,” says he, “lie very much in the flesh; and these have a fatal and unhappy influence to lead the soul or

¹¹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:540; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:540. The Dutch Reformer, Wilhelmus A Brakel (1635–1711), affirms the law as the means by which Christians have knowledge of God and his directives. “Law, in our language may be a derivative from ‘to know’ because the knowledge of God’s law has been impressed upon man’s nature, and God has more clearly made it known to His church in order that they might know them (Ps. 78:6). Thus, by virtue of the etymology of the word we can say that the law is a known and binding rule of conduct.” Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Law, Christian Graces, and the Lord’s Prayer*, in vol. 3 of *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1995), 35–36. For an accessible Reformed explanation of the law in the Christian life, see A Brakel, *The Law, Christian Graces, and the Lord’s Prayer*, 3:35–81.

¹¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:540; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:540.

¹¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:541; Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:542.

¹¹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:541; Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:543.

¹¹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:542; Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:543. Watts argues that the obligation of the moral law is perpetual because of God’s nature and man’s sinfulness. With respect to God’s nature, Watts appeals to Luke 16:17, Matthew 5:17, and Romans 2–3 to defend this position. See Watts, *Works*, 1:543; Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons*, 1:546.

spirit into sin.”¹²⁰ This “unhappy influence” shapes Watts’ vision of the spiritual life: holiness and happiness.

According to Watts, the term “flesh” is used in two ways in the Bible—metaphorically (or figuratively) and literally. Metaphorically,¹²¹ it is the “course of sin” in the (1) affections and appetites, (2) the mind, and (3) the will.¹²² Watts appeals to Paul’s struggle as described in Romans 7. Whether Paul is describing a regenerate or unregenerate state, “still he supposes the great occasion of sinful actions to proceed from the flesh.”¹²³ Literally, the term “flesh” refers to the body.¹²⁴ It is “the seat or spring of many sinful affections.”¹²⁵ Watts gives details as to the subjective and objective sense in which the flesh operates.¹²⁶ Subjectively, the flesh impacts the soul of man, while objectively, it gives rise to outward actions of the body. Watts makes seven observations, from reason, to affirm that “the springs and principles of sin lie very much in our fleshly

¹²⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:724; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 287.

¹²¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:724; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 287–88. Watts appeals to Peter, Paul, and James, to defend his position on the metaphorical sense of the term “flesh” in Scripture. See 1 Pet 2:11; 2 Pet 2:18, 20; Rom 6:12; 7:24; 8:8–9, 12; Col 3:5; Gal 5:19, 24; Jas 4:1.

¹²² Watts, *Works*, 1:36; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 1 (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1721), 99. Watts appeals to Rom 8:1 to formulate his position on the doctrine of the flesh. This threefold metaphorical understanding of the flesh is found among Puritan theologians. William Perkins notes that the primary definition of the flesh in the New Testament, and specifically as utilized by Paul, is “the natural corruption or inclination of the mind, will, and affections to that which is against the law.” William Perkins, *Two Treatises. 1. Of the Nature and Practice of Repentance. II. Of the Combat of the Flesh and the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (London: John Legatt, 1600), 113. For additional treatments of this threefold understanding, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed. John Bolt, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 346–446; John Brine, *The Opposition of Flesh and Spirit in Believers Considered in a Sermon Preached February the 8th, 1761* (London: George Keith, 1761), 2–3.

¹²³ Watts, *Works*, 1:724; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 289.

¹²⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:725; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 289–90.

¹²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:725; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 289–90.

¹²⁶ Bavinck notes, “The means through which Satan tempts us are, subjectively, the flesh within us (all sinful desires, thoughts, etc.) and, corresponding with that, objectively, the world with its lust of the eye and of the flesh, as well as the grandeur of life.” Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 1:458.

natures.”¹²⁷

Observation 1. Sin manifests itself in peculiar dispositions. “Those that have melancholy humours mingled with their natural constitution, are inclined to sullen vices, to an unsociable and charitable behavior among men, as well as they are often tempted...to despair of the mercies of God, and, upon this account, to abandon all religion.”¹²⁸ In addition, some people are predisposed to sins such as vanity, lust, greed, and anger.¹²⁹ These are the grounds for various sins in the mind, affections, or will.

Observation 2. Sin arises from struggles with illness or disease. Watts notes, “When the body is frequently exercised with sharp and tedious pains, even a well-tempered man becomes peevish and fretful...vexes his own spirit with impatience; he murmurs against the hand of God...tires out his best friends with perpetual disquietude...resents everything, and scarce anybody can please him.”¹³⁰ Watts observes how some Christians’ dispositions are altered for the worse by illness and then restored when they recover.¹³¹

Observation 3. Sin varies according to age. The youthful often struggle with luxury, vanity, money, exhibiting thoughtlessness.¹³² For their part, the elderly are disposed to “ease above all things.” They neglect “the pleasures of the flesh,” but “hoard

¹²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:725; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 294. Perkins understands lusting of the flesh as having two actions. The first “is to engender evil motions and passions of self-love, envy, pride, unbelief, anger etc.” The second is to “hinder, and quench, and overwhelm the good motions of the spirit.” Perkins, *Two Treatises*, 119. All these are equally captured in Watts’ seven propositions in his discourse on the flesh versus the Spirit.

¹²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:726; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 295. For more faculty-humor psychology, see Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality*, 32–33.

¹²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:726; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 295.

¹³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:727; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 296.

¹³¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:727; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 297–98.

¹³² Watts, *Works*, 1:727–28; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 298.

up gold for fear of want.”¹³³

Observation 4. Sin is provoked by enticing objects. Watts states, “The daylight opens before us the scenes of a vain world, crowded with ten thousand allurements to sin; nor can the shadows of the night conceal or banish those temptations that attack us at the other avenues beside the eye.”¹³⁴ The bodily senses are the chief means by which we are inclined to sin. The five senses are inlets for temptation:

[A]s when we are engaged in any part of divine worship, the common and obvious appearances round about us, the walls, the doors, the windows, the furniture of the place, or the persons present, impress our senses, and often turn away the thoughts from the sacred work. We forget God to pursue the creature, even in his own awful presence, and in the midst of our solemn devotions. A curious ear shall wrap up the soul in melody of a song, till it has lost the divine sense and meaning. A vain and wandering eye roves among the faces, the postures, and the dress of our fellow-worshippers, and calls the mind away from prayer and devout attention. Oh! How often does the criminal indulgence of these sensitive powers carry the soul afar off from God and religion! How does it break off many a holy meditation in a moment!¹³⁵

Watts’ extension of the senses into sinful wanderings, even in the context of worship, is indicative of his heightened awareness of the dangers and realities of the flesh. Even while engaged in meditation and prayer, the senses of the flesh entice and distract.

Observation 5. Sin arises in the imagination. When “the corrupt appetites are kindled, and sinful passions awake,” they “solicit a spirit to sin, even when the objects are afar off, and out of reach.”¹³⁶ Watts observes that mental images are linked to past sensations and passions by “unknown and unperceived ties.”¹³⁷ Therefore, when a memory is awakened by way of temptation, “a whole train of images appear at once” and

¹³³ Watts, *Works*, 1:728; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 298–99.

¹³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:728; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 300.

¹³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:729; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 302–03.

¹³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:729; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 304.

¹³⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:729; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 304.

all the passions, linked to those images, run through the “organs of sense.”¹³⁸ By way of example, Watts puts forward the simple sound of a person’s name which, when mentioned or heard, calls again “all those alluring and mischievous senses which first drew the heart away from God and religion, spoiled the labours of a pious education, and plunged the younger sinner into early debaucheries.”¹³⁹ It is the memory, closely linked to the senses, that unlocks a plethora of sinful desires.

Observation 6. Some sins “are very nearly imitated by brute creatures.”¹⁴⁰

Watts makes mention of foxes, wasps, dogs, peacocks, horses, and pigs.¹⁴¹ What makes this such a compelling argument, for Watts, is that we exhibit many of the same behaviors as the “brute animals” which do not have a rational soul. If the “brute animal” exhibits pride, greed, envy, and mischievousness, then how much more guilty is man? Watts notes that man’s “guilt appears much more evident, when we consider that man has also an intelligent mind, a reasonable soul, capable...of resisting these irregular tendencies of the flesh.”¹⁴²

Observation 7. The “chief occasion of sin” is the union between the soul and the flesh in original sin. By the fall, the soul was “tainted, corrupted, or defiled with original sin, by its union to sinful flesh.”¹⁴³ Watts is careful to explain that we are born with a defiled soul, not by nature, but because of original sin.¹⁴⁴ He adds, “neglect of

¹³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:730; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 304–05.

¹³⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:730; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 305.

¹⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:730; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 306.

¹⁴¹ The dog stands for envy, the pig greed and gluttony, the peacock pride, and the horse vanity. Watts, *Works*, 1:730–31; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 306–07.

¹⁴² Watts, *Works*, 1:731; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 307–08.

¹⁴³ Watts, *Works*, 1:731; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 308.

¹⁴⁴ The “soul [or spirit] is not to be judged of, or considered as a single separate being, but as in union with flesh and blood, as making up a compound creature of the human species.” Watts, *Works*,

God, and aversion to all that is holy or heavenly...are conveyed to us all...and therefore sin is described by flesh, because it came from the father of our flesh.”¹⁴⁵ The soul is formed immediately by God and “united to these bodies that come from Adam by the laws of creation.”¹⁴⁶ This union causes flesh, the seat of sin, influences the whole course of human activity.

Holiness, Happiness, and the Depravity of Man

Set in the context of the Enlightenment, and the resulting controversy over the nature of man and the doctrine of sin, Watts was compelled to articulate and defend his understanding of both. In his defense, Watts effectively highlights three overarching implications for the spiritual life. First, Watts’ understanding of humanity’s “uprightness” prior to the fall lays the foundation for his concept of holiness and happiness. Adam and Eve were holy and, therefore, able to enjoy God. The entrance of sin into the original created order means that humanity has lost both holiness and happiness.

Second, Watts’ understanding of “universal degeneracy” means that humanity is plagued by a twofold problem. The first is the “relative” evil of sin. This relates to the legal consequences of disobeying God’s law, namely the judicial or forensic loss of

1:731; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 309. Herman Bavinck notes, “These two forces [flesh and the spirit] are not really spatially separated in born-again people, as though one part of them were regenerate and other part unregenerate (e.g., the will saying yes and the mind saying no). On the contrary, flesh and spirit are there together, and both are in every faculty of the soul, pervading and overlaying the whole man. The entire will is on the one hand carnal and on the other spiritual; the same is true of the mind, reason, the inclination, the body, ear, eye, and the rest.” Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, 1:443. Calvin notes, “Then as the spirit takes the place of the soul in man, and the flesh, which is the corrupt and polluted soul, that of the body.” Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, 271. Perkins also affirms the position of the flesh and the Spirit being united in the Christian: “The flesh [is not] placed in one part of the soul, and the spirit in another; but they are joined and mingled together in all the faculties of the soul. Perkins, *Two Treatises*, 114.

¹⁴⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:37; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:104.

¹⁴⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:37; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:103. With respect to Romans 7:24, Calvin writes, “Paul points out this [the body or the flesh] as the origin of evil, that man has departed from the law of his creation, and as become thus carnal and earthly. For though he still excels brute beasts, yet his true excellency has departed from him and what remains in him is full of numberless corruption, so that his soul, being degenerated, maybe be justly said to have passed into a body.” Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, 273.

holiness and happiness.¹⁴⁷ The second is the “real” evil of sin. The moral law demonstrates that humanity’s corruption extends to every part and faculty of the soul, including the mind, affections, and will.

Third, Watts’ understanding of human depravity shapes how he perceives of man’s recovery of holiness and happiness. The “relative” evil of sin is remedied by means of justification, whereas the “real” evil of sin is remedied by means of sanctification.¹⁴⁸ As the individual’s sin is addressed by means of justification and sanctification, holiness is restored. As a result, the individual is able to enjoy God.

Happiness and holiness are (1) lost on account of “real” and “relative” sin, and (2) recovered on account of the dual blessing of justification and sanctification. This means Watts’ understanding of sin a critical theological foundation to his view of the spiritual life.

¹⁴⁷ For more on the forensic aspect of sin in terms of justification, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992), 2:633–36.

¹⁴⁸ John Flavel provides additional insight on man’s recovery from the “relative” and “real” evils of sin. He uses these terms with respect to justification and sanctification. Justification is a “relative” change wherein *righteousness is imputed* and the believer is “freed from the guilt of sin,” whereas sanctification is the “real” change wherein *holiness is imparted* and the believer is “freed from the dominion sin.” John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 2:149. See also J. Stephen Yuille, *The Inner Sanctum of Puritan Piety: John Flavel’s Doctrine of Mystical Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 55. Likewise, Calvin notes, “As Christ cannot be torn into parts, so these two which we perceive in him together and conjointly are inseparable—namely, righteousness and sanctification. Whomever, therefore, God receives into grace on them, he at the same time bestows the spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15).” Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.6. For more on the link between justification and sanctification in the thought of Calvin, see Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 50–54. Turretin notes that justification is “never taken for an infusion of righteousness, but...it always must be explained as a forensic term,” whereas sanctification is “the real and internal renovation of man...from his native depravity.” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:634, 689.

CHAPTER 4
THE BEAUTY OF CHRIST

Introduction

Given Watts' doctrine of human depravity, it is no surprise to discover that he places tremendous importance on Christ's atoning work. The cross of Christ is a major theological tenet within orthodox Christianity and is of distinct importance within Evangelicalism.¹ According to David Bebbington, one of the defining components of Evangelicalism is "crucicentrism."² Holding forth "any theme other than the cross as the fulcrum of a theological system...[is] to take a step away from Evangelicalism."³ Tom Schwanda incorporates Bebbington's concept of crucicentrism into a broader category, termed "new life in Christ."⁴ According to Schwanda, the "blood of Jesus...became a significant focus in sermons and hymns" within the Evangelical movement.⁵ In a similar vein, Donald Bloesch views the doctrine of atonement as "the basis for a biblical, evangelical spirituality."⁶ What Bebbington, Schwanda, and Bloesch say about the significance of the atonement to Evangelicalism is also found in eighteenth-century

¹ For example, see John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

² David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 14–17. Likewise, Derek Tidball argues, "Because of grace, Evangelical spirituality is cross-centered." Derek J. Tidball, *Who are the Evangelicals?: Tracing the Roots of Today's Movements* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 198–99.

³ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 15. Bebbington argues, "The atonement eclipsed even the incarnation" among British Evangelicals.

⁴ Tom Schwanda, ed., *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016), 4.

⁵ Schwanda, ed., *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality*, 5.

⁶ Donald G. Bloesch, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call to Unity Amid Diversity* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1983), 133.

English Dissent in general and the writing of Isaac Watts in particular.⁷ This is evident in one of his most famous hymns: “Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ.” The supremacy of the cross is vividly portrayed in the opening verses:

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the prince of glory dy’d,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride

Forbit it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.⁸

As evident in this hymn, the beauty of Christ’s atoning work is a striking feature of Watts’ theology and thus it deeply undergirds his spirituality.

As with the doctrine of original sin, Watts’ understanding of Christ’s atonement must be understood in the context of controversy. He wrestled deeply with the competing voices of the English Deist movement,⁹ and consequently was forced to defend his position regarding the nature of Christ’s substitutionary atonement.¹⁰ Watts’ first major

⁷ George Burder states that the “great object...of the Doctor’s life, was to place the doctrines of the fall—the atonement—divine influence—the necessity of repentance, faith, and holiness (which formed his system of orthodoxy), in a point of view consistent with their truth and importance.” Watts, *Works*, 1:xxix.

⁸ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Reve. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev. George Burder* (London: J. Barfield, 1810), 4:349; Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In Three Books. I. Collected From Scriptures. II. Compos’d on Divine Subjects. III. Prepared for the Lord’s Supper. With an Essay Towards the Improvement of Christian Psalmody, by the Use of Evangelical Hymns in Worship, as Well as the Psalms of David* (London: J. Humfreys, 1707), 189. This hymn is more commonly known by the title “When I Survey the Wonderous Cross.” It is based upon Gal 6:14, “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

⁹ The beliefs of the Deist movement in eighteenth-century England are not easily defined. Alan Sells notes, “The deists did not constitute anything so precise as a school of thought, or even a clearly-defined movement. Rather, they were writers who in a general way imbibed prevalent skepticism regarding some of the claims of orthodox Christianity, revelation, Christian ‘evidences’ as generally conceived, the authority of the Church, and the probity of the priesthood, whilst being unlike one another on many points of detail.” Alan P. F. Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel: Theological Themes and Thinkers 1550–2000* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 113.

¹⁰ Watts’ distain for Deism was significant, and much of his life was given to fight against its advancement. Watts was “perpetually attacking Deism in sermon, essay, and preface.” Arthur Paul Davis,

work against Deism, written in 1722 and published in 1729, is entitled: *A Caveat Against Infidelity: Or, the Danger of Apostasy from the Christian Faith: with an Answer to Various Queries, Concerning the Salvation of the Heathens and the Hope of the Modern Deists, Upon Their Pretences to Sincerity*. While Watts takes up several nuanced arguments against Deism, the atonement is a main subject in the publication. The Deists “deny the atonement of Christ, and the pardon of sin through the virtue of his atonement.”¹¹ This open assault is evident, for example, in Thomas Morgan (d. 1743) who produced, *The Moral Philosopher. In a Dialogue Between Philalethes a Christian Deist, and Theophanes a Christian Jew*. It was instrumental in the advancement of Deist thought with respect to the doctrine of the atonement. Morgan portrays Christ as a martyr for the purpose of (1) true natural religion and (2) the common good of humanity.¹² So-called “Christian Deists,” such as Morgan, struggled with the perceived “moral difficulties” of Christ suffering for the guilt of others.¹³ Morgan writes,

For Christ having discovered or revealed the true religion to the world, seal'd it as a martyr with his blood...it may be truly said in a sense that is common enough, and very well understood without being attended with any of the forgoing absurdities, that the doctrines of our salvation cost him his life, that he died for us, and that the gospel, with all its benefits, accrue to us at the price of his blood.¹⁴

Isaac Watts: His Life and Works (London: Independent Press, 1948), 105. Formally, Watts published five polemical works against Deism: *A Caveat Against Infidelity* (1729), *The Strength and Weakness of Human Reason* (1731), *The Redeemer and Sanctifier* (1736), *Self-Love and Virtue Reconciled Only by Religion* (1739), and *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind* (1740).

¹¹ Watts, *Works*, 4:106–07; Isaac Watts, *A Caveat Against Infidelity: Or, The Danger of Apostasy from the Christian Faith: With An Answer to Various Queries Concerning the Salvation of the Heathens, and the Hope of the Modern Deists, Upon Their Pretences to Sincerity* (London: John Clark and Richard Hett, 1729), 171. The publications of Watts’ contemporary, Thomas Chubb (1679–1747), is one example of this view. See Thomas Chubb, *A Discourse Concerning Reason with Regard to Divine Revelation* (London: T. Cox, 1731), 16–17. Chubb argues that moral living, based upon natural religion, makes one acceptable before God. The moral implications of a vengeful God do not square with reason. For more on Chubb, see Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel*, 123.

¹² For the natural religion of the “Christian Deist,” Matthew Tindal (1656–1733), see Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel*, 121.

¹³ See Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 419.

¹⁴ Thomas Morgan, *The Moral Philosopher. In a Dialogue Between Philalethes a Christian Deist, and Theophanes a Christian Jew* (London: n.p., 1737), 164. Morgan goes on to equate Jesus with

In addition, the Deists questioned the need for a mediator between Creator and creature.¹⁵

The need for a mediator, based upon God's retributive justice, was a major moral and theological issue:

In traditional theology a mediator is needed so as to prevent the absolute abhorrence of sin, which comes from God's justice falling without mercy upon mankind. Yet there is no need in the radically humanist theology we are describing [i.e. Deism] for anything to stand between God's justice and human failings, since that justice is but one aspect of a disinterested concern to distribute happiness among human beings... Given the concept of divine justice held by the deists, it is equally hard to see why their God would require anything other than repentance to be reconciled to even the greatest sinner. So benevolent and reasonable a deity as this would not have needed a third party to carry the repentance over or make it acceptable.¹⁶

According to Watts, this aversion to Christ's penal substitutionary atonement, and the resulting antipathy toward his mediatorship, is devastating to the Christian life. As one biographer notes, "Watts hated Deism intensely" because "it stood for everything in religion that he detested."¹⁷ Moreover, Watts believed Deism was "the antithesis of evangelicalism, and the cold spirit of logic upon which it was raised affronted the warm *experimental religion* which he preached so zealously."¹⁸ For Watts, warm experimental religion is grounded upon the necessity and beauty of Christ's cross. In one sense, true Christian spirituality "views the Christian life as primarily a sign and witness to the

"any great and good man who ventures his life for his country, or for the common good of mankind." The death of a person in defense of a good cause does not indicate "that such an one had been offered up as a sacrifice of atonement to appease the vengeance of an angry deity, or to render God propitious to our country or to the world." Morgan, *The Moral Philosopher*, 165.

¹⁵ Charles Blount (1645–1693) is a prime example of this. See Charles Blount, *The Oracles of Reason* (London: n.p., 1693), 28. This repudiation of a need for a mediator was somewhat unique to Deism. Furthermore, for mediation of some variety has (historical speaking) been required in most religions. Herman Bavinck observes, "Particularly in religion the person of the founder and mediator plays a large role. Mediators between humanity and the deity, messengers of God who convey his blessings and revelations to humans and, conversely, lay their prayers and gifts before his throne, occur in all religions. Sometimes it is subordinate deities or lower spirits, at other times people who—dedicated to God and animated by his spirit—are favored with special revelations and endowed with supernatural powers. But between humanity and the deity there is always another who effects and maintains fellowship between the two. Belief in mediators is universal." Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 3:238–39.

¹⁶ Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion*, 111–12.

¹⁷ Davis, *Watts*, 105.

¹⁸ Davis, *Watts*, 105.

atoning work of Christ.”¹⁹ Watts epitomizes this viewpoint by his rich integration of Christ’s mediatorship (especially his atonement) into the Christian life. It is central to the recovery of humanity from the “relative” and “real” evils of sin, for the purposes of holiness and happiness. The first section of this chapter considers how Watts positions the mediation of Christ as the basis of salvation and what it means to draw near to God.²⁰ The second section details Watts’ doctrine of the atonement in the narrower framework of satisfaction. As such, this section outlines the manner and use of the atonement in Watts’ spirituality.

Christ’s Mediation

For Watts, nearness to God is of central importance to the recovery of man from the ruin of sin, and it rests upon Christ’s mediatorial office.²¹ He notes, “The blessed God has sufficiently informed us in the word of his gospel, that it is in vain for us to hope to draw near to God...without a Mediator.”²² The nature and sequence of God’s approach to humanity through the Mediator, Jesus Christ, is central to Watts’ spirituality. The recovery of man (or, his reconciliation to God) is a “mutual approach” or “mutual nearness.”²³ Man’s nearness to God depends first on God’s approach to the creature. If “our souls are set a moving towards him, it is because his heart, his pity and his love

¹⁹ Bloesch, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity*, 133.

²⁰ Drawing near to God becomes the central feature of Watts’ theology of realized happiness. In order to appreciate this, it is necessary to first understand the details of mediatorship in his theology.

²¹ Watts uses the term “access” and “nearness” interchangeably as synonyms in reference to the relationship between God and man.

²² Watts, *Works*, 3:656; Isaac Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United: In Several Essays on the Law and the Gospel, Faith and Work* (London: T. Longman, T. Shewel, and J. Brackstone, 1745), 207. Watts goes on to say that some sinners “would attempt to approach him, and obtain his favour again merely by his own powers and performances; as though the goodness of God would receive him again into his presence, and into his love in the same manner as before. Sinful mankind have been often trying to make their way to God in and of themselves: Thence arise the various mistaken grounds of hope.”

²³ Watts, *Works*, 3:656; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 207.

moved first towards us.”²⁴

Furthermore, access to God through Christ the Mediator is linked to holiness and happiness in Watts’ thought:

God, who is essentially happy in being for ever near himself, and one with himself, has made the happiness of his creatures to depend on their being near to him, and their union with him; and he knows it is misery enough to be afar off from God²⁵ ... He resolved to bring some off at least, out of their state of distance from him, and to restore them to his favour and his image, to *holiness and happiness*.²⁶

Indeed, access to God through Christ’s mediatory work is central to man’s recovery from the “real” and “relative” evils of sin for the purpose of realized “holiness and happiness.” This access rests on three actions.

God’s Approach to Sinners

The first is God’s approach to man by means of eight “steps.”²⁷ In the first three, he views man as he stands as a result of the fall. First, man is “fallen from [God’s] image and his love, and at a wide and dreadful distance from their Creator.”²⁸ This separation from God is multidimensional, in that man is (1) in a fallen state, (2) under condemnation, (3) exposed to misery, (4) deserving of indignation and wrath, (5) under the sentence of death, and (6) constantly moving away from God without fear and love.²⁹ Second, because of his perfections (i.e., holiness, justice, and wisdom), God will not

²⁴ Watts, *Works*, 3:656; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 207.

²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 3:657; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 210.

²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 3:659; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 215–16. Emphasis added.

²⁷ Elsewhere, Watts attributes most of this section to the work of the Father. (1) The Father is the offended “on the account of sin...true in every man in a state of nature.” (2) The Father is a reconciler “ready to receive us upon our return to him.” (3) The Father is an appointer “since we could not provide ourselves such a friend, he has appointed his own Son to that [mediator] office.” (4) The Father is a worker of faith because “he works...faith in us [through reconciliation] by his own Spirit.” Watts, *Works*, 1:488; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 3 (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1729), 3:437–38.

²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 3:657; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 209. See Rom 3:9–12.

²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 3:657; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 209–10.

“receive sinful creatures into his favour again without some signal honour done to his broken law and authority.”³⁰ Third, people are incapable of making himself a partaker of God’s “favour and happiness, without a change to their corrupt natures.”³¹ For these reasons, a distinct recompence is required to bring man near to God. It consists of (1) a “complete alteration” of the “vicious affections,” and (2) a “universal turn of the heart” from the evil of sin to God.³² Understanding our condition by virtue of the fall sets the groundwork for God’s action to recover us.

In the next three steps, God prepares to approach man in order to restore nearness. Initially, God decrees and determines, from “his free grace,” that all humanity will not perish. Accordingly, he ordains a particular means of return to him. God “did not think fit to be reconciled to men or bring them back again to himself, without a Mediator.”³³ Watts provides three detailed reasons why mediation is necessary. First, it is necessary in order to maintain the dignity and honor of God’s majesty. God “cannot admit criminals immediately to his favour, and his presence, and his embrace without some honourable mediator to introduce them.”³⁴ Second, it protects the honor of Jesus Christ. Watts argues that mediation is the only way “to do sublime honour to his Son Jesus Christ who is the express image of his person and his first favorite.”³⁵ Third, it assures the effectiveness of salvation, and therefore unites “all the saved number in one unfailling and all-sufficient head.”³⁶ It is in these steps that Watts begins to emphasize the nature and function of Christ as Mediator. Christ is qualified to be the Mediator based

³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 3:657; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 211.

³¹ Watts, *Works*, 3:658; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 213.

³² Watts, *Works*, 3:658; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 213.

³³ Watts, *Works*, 3:660; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 218.

³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 3:660; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 219.

³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 3:660; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 219.

³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 3:660; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 219.

upon the furnishing of “every necessary talent and qualification” from the Father.³⁷ These qualifications include: (1) his anointing with the Holy Spirit without measure; (2) his birth into lowly circumstances before growing in age and wisdom; (3) his call and commission as a public prophet and teacher of the gospel; (4) his perfect example of humility, love to God and man, holiness, submission, and obedience; (5) his death as a sacrifice for the sins of men; (6) his resurrection from the dead as the “head of vital influence...to work repentance and holiness in their hearts”; (7) his ruling and governing all things; and (8) his suitability to answer the need and want of sinful man to complete salvation.³⁸

In the final two steps, Watts highlights God’s arrival to humanity. All of the acts of his “preparation to restore mankind to holiness and happiness” would have been “ineffectual” if he had not given the gathering of the saints “into the hands of his Son Jesus Christ.”³⁹ God arrives in terms of Christ’s authority and commitment to (1) secure the salvation of many, and (2) function as an intermediary for our addresses to God. Regarding the first, Watts notes, “Though the gospel be sent to be preached to all the world in general...yet we are told often by the evangelist John, of those particular persons whom the Father had given unto Christ, that they might be his, that is, his seed, his subjects, and his willing people.”⁴⁰ With respect to the second, Watts applies this literal sense of God’s arrival to prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. According to Watts, Christ is the only worthy and acceptable foundation by which to approach God:

We must come unto the Father by him in every part of worship: By him we must believe, or trust in God, we must pray to the Father in his name, we must ask forgiveness of our sins for his sake: It is by him we must offer up our sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise; and by him we must present all our services of obedience,

³⁷ Watts, *Works*, 3:661; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 220.

³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 3:661; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 220–21.

³⁹ Watts, *Works*, 3:662; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 224–25.

⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 3:663; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 225.

and whatsoever we do in word or deed, must be all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; that we may be accepted of the Father, and that the Father may be glorified in his Son.⁴¹

God's approach to humanity through the Mediator, Jesus Christ, is the divine initiative for our access to God.

Christ's Mediation for Sinners

The second action is Christ's role as mediator. According to Watts, there are five specific ways in which Christ functions as the means of access to God. The first is his incarnation. Because Christ took on flesh (human nature), thereby becoming one with us, he functions as "an union of peace and reconciliation between a holy God and sinful man."⁴² The incarnation was Christ's "pledge of that friendship" between "God the creator and his guilty creatures."⁴³ The second means is Christ's perfect obedience of the righteous law. It is "by his blood" that Christ "has repaired the honour of the law, and government of God."⁴⁴ Christ's death for sinners "laid a happy foundation for our approach to God."⁴⁵ The third means is Christ's ascension into heaven "to present his own sacrifice before the throne of God."⁴⁶ He stands before God as the sinner's "pure and perfect mediatorial righteousness."⁴⁷ The fourth means is Christ's eternal intercession on behalf of sinners. His "blood has a voice in it" and the blood's real-time presence before God has "a powerful pleading."⁴⁸ This makes our services, prayers, and praises

⁴¹ Watts, *Works*, 3:664; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 227–28. For an excellent survey of Christ's titles in Scripture, see Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory: A Study of the Designations of our Lord in the New Testament with Especial Reference to His Deity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1950).

⁴² Watts, *Works*, 1:488; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:439.

⁴³ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:439.

⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:440. See 1 Pet 2:24.

⁴⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:440.

⁴⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:440.

⁴⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:441. See Heb 9:11–12, 24.

⁴⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:441. Watts bases this continual

acceptable to God through “infinite merit.”⁴⁹ The fifth means is Christ’s role in introducing “our departing souls into the presence of God.”⁵⁰ According to Watts, this is the “last great act” of Christ’s mediatorial office because it brings about our “full and complete access to God.”⁵¹

The Sinner’s Response

The third action is man’s approach to God. It is an “echo or answer” to God’s initial action, whereby man comes “nigh to God.”⁵² In each step of God’s approach to man, there are two “successive” acts in the soul that are “nearly simultaneous,” namely, repentance and faith.⁵³ By means of these “motions of the soul,” the sinner returns to God. Repentance is produced when we realize our distance from God, and faith in Christ is the means by which we return. Watts summarizes this return in three steps: (1) we see ourselves as God sees us; (2) we are convinced of our need for Christ as Mediator; and (3) we repent and believe.⁵⁴

The first step begins when we perceive our guilt and misery before our Creator. Watts is not referring to a mere cognitive recognition of sin. Rather, we must “see [sin] so as to feel it, and be affected with it at our heart,” so that it makes “such an impression”

intercession on Heb 7:25, where we read that Christ “is able to save the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”

⁴⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:442.

⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:442.

⁵¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:489; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:442.

⁵² Watts, *Works*, 3:656; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 207.

⁵³ Watts, *Works*, 3:657; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 208–09.

⁵⁴ In a letter to a friend in 1735, Watts explains his position regarding man’s inability to believe and repent, apart from Christ. In short, there is a “moral impotence” that creates an inability in the sinner. Therefore, the mind will not “learn divine things” and “they shut [God] out of their hearts, they have a delight in sin, a dislike to Christ and his salvation; they have rooted obstinacy of the will against the methods of divine mercy and against holiness which is connected with happiness.” Thomas Milner, *The Life, Times and Correspondence of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1834), 513.

upon our souls that we become restless in our search for a recovery.⁵⁵ Second, we set “before our own eyes the holiness, justice and wisdom of the law of our Creator, in order to make ourselves deeply sensible to our great guilt.”⁵⁶ The law of God functions as the measure of offense to God and makes “sensible” the need for “reparation of honour.”⁵⁷ Third, we must be fully aware of our total inability to change our nature. Fallen human nature is “incapable of enjoying happiness” in God’s presence “by reason of the opposition of our will to his holiness.”⁵⁸ This recognition leads us to depend wholly upon “free grace and mercy of God” for recovery of affections that are “holy and heavenly.”⁵⁹

The second step is our “echo or response” to God’s assessment of us. In short, we prepare for Christ the Mediator through holy desire. Holy desire, according to Watts, is the “belief and hope, we should resolve never to rest and continue in such deplorable circumstances.”⁶⁰ We desire reconciliation to God.⁶¹ Before we repent, we must exercise some faith in God’s mercy and his willingness to be reconciled.⁶² According to Watts, striving for reconciliation to God is the “beginnings of true repentance *flowing from faith*

⁵⁵ Watts, *Works*, 3:657; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 210–11.

⁵⁶ Watts, *Works*, 3:658; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 212.

⁵⁷ Watts, *Works*, 3:658; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 212.

⁵⁸ Watts, *Works*, 3:659; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 214.

⁵⁹ Watts, *Works*, 3:658; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 215.

⁶⁰ Watts, *Works*, 3:659; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 216.

⁶¹ Watts writes, “In this sense we may say that the kingdom of heaven, or the blessings of salvation suffer violence, as our Saviour express it; Matt. xi. 12. And the violent take it by force.” Watts, *Works*, 3:659; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 216. For similar interpretations, see Thomas Watson, *Heaven Taken by Storm: Showing the Holy Violence a Christian is to Put Forth in the Pursuit After Glory*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992). For modern interpretations of Matthew 11:12, see Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 114; W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1991), 256; and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 430.

⁶² Sinclair Ferguson argues, “In the order of nature, in terms of the inner logic of the gospel and the way its ‘grammar’ functions, repentance can never be said to precede faith.” He adds, “Faith...directly grasps the mercy of God in [Christ], and as it does so the life of repentance is inaugurated as its fruit.” Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 101.

or hope in divine mercy.”⁶³ Watts summarizes this second step as the first work of repentance and faith, wherein the sinner is resolute in heart to return to God as his “portion and...everlasting happiness.”⁶⁴

The third step is the sinner’s conversion, and it consists of three components: (1) an aversion to sin; (2) a sight of Christ the Mediator; and (3) a commitment to Christ’s intermediary work. God produces shame, sorrow, hatred of sin, and aversion to sin, so that we “feel the evil of sin” upon the soul.⁶⁵ It is only when the heart is “painfully affected with shame and sorrow” that God works to “recover to himself a peculiar people, averse to sin and zealous of good works.”⁶⁶ In this condition, we behold Christ as the great Mediator:

We are called to behold him, and to survey him in the glory of his personal excellencies, in his original fitness for this work of reconciler, and in the several offices which God has commissioned him to sustain... We must be made to see the blessed Jesus in the riches of his grace, and his large and various furniture for this great undertaking... It must be the language of our hearts in a way of echo to the appointment of God. There is none like him, there is not like Christ, for a reconciler of the offended to God and offending man... We must see him as the one that has made full atonement and satisfaction to the just and majesty of God, for the sins of men and by his own sufferings and death.⁶⁷

⁶³ Watts, *Works*, 3:660; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 217. Watts is logically positioning faith before repentance. Calvin would agree as he positions repentance as the fruit of faith, writing, “Now it ought to be a fact beyond controversy that repentance not only constantly follows faith, but is also born of faith.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 3.3.1. Elsewhere, Calvin states, “When we refer to the origin of repentance to faith we do not imagine some space of time during which it brings it to birth; but we mean to show what a man cannot apply himself seriously to repentance without knowing himself to belong to God. But no one is truly persuaded that he belongs to God unless he has first recognized God’s grace.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.3.2. The precise relationship between faith and repentance has been debated within the Reformed tradition. For more, see Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 264–65; John Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1955), 113; and Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 492.

⁶⁴ Watts, *Works*, 3:660; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 217.

⁶⁵ Watts, *Works*, 3:660; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 217. An earlier pastor of Mark Lane, David Clarkson (1622–1686), defines repentance in a similar fashion. It includes “three acts” in the soul: “sorrow for sin, hatred of it, resolution to forsake it.” David Clarkson, *Of Repentance*, vol. 1, *The Practical Works of David Clarkson*, ed. Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 1:25.

⁶⁶ Watts, *Works*, 3:660; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 218.

⁶⁷ Watts, *Works*, 3:662; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 223.

Having thus repented of sin and looked to Christ, we fully commit to Christ as Mediator.⁶⁸ This means we entrust all the “important affairs of our souls to him.”⁶⁹ In return, we receive from Christ “everything that we stand in need of, in order to our being brought home to God.”⁷⁰ It is through his office of Mediator, and by his offices of prophet, priest, and king, that we commit ourselves into Christ’s hands.⁷¹ We submit to him in all his appointed mediatorial offices. In addition, he imparts grace to us, receives our soul at death, raises our bodies from the dust, and makes us “completely holy and happy, in the favor and image of God forever.”⁷² All these works of Christ’s mediation bring about the yearning of full commitment to Christ through repentance and faith. Subsequently, the soul is given over to Christ as the all-sufficient Mediator. Therefore, we offer thanksgiving, praise, service, and obedience in and by the name of our Lord Jesus

⁶⁸ David Clarkson expresses this same connection between faith, repentance, and mediation. When we apply Christ “in the exercise of faith and repentance, through his mediation, that which is therein evil shall not be remembered, that which is good therein will be accepted.” David Clarkson, *Of Taking Up the Cross*, in vol. 1 of *The Practical Works of David Clarkson*, ed. Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 1:465.

⁶⁹ Watts, *Works*, 3:663; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 226.

⁷⁰ Watts, *Works*, 3:663; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 226.

⁷¹ John Flavel also positions the offices of prophet, priest, and king under Christ’s mediatorship. Christ became man “to qualify and prepare him for a full discharge of his mediatorship, in the office of our Prophet, Priest, and King.” John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 1:80. In more contemporary treatments, Archibald Alexander Hodge is helpful in explaining how Christ’s offices of prophet, priest, and king are functions of his mediatorship. He writes, “Thus, Christ undertook but one *munus* or office, that of Mediator between God and man, in order to secure the salvation of his elect. But in doing this he necessarily discharges all the *officio* or functions which the work necessarily involves. The *munus* or office of Mediator involves all the three functions of the prophet, of the priest and of the king. These are not separate offices...but they are the several functions of the one office of Mediator.” Archibald A. Hodge, “Lecture XI: The Offices of Christ,” in *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887), 235. The Westminster Confession of Faith states, “It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King.” Westminster Assembly, *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms with Proof Texts* (Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education & Publications, 2007), 8.1, 34-35. Herman Bavinck also closely situates the threefold office of Christ within his mediatorship: “The Son was appointed the mediator from eternity and began his work as mediator immediately after the fall. Already under the Old Testament, he was active as prophet, priest and king.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:365. For more on the genesis of Christ’s threefold office in Reformed thought, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.15.1–6.

⁷² Watts, *Works*, 3:663; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 226–27.

Christ.⁷³

**Hymn 108: Access to the Throne
of Grace by a Mediator**

Watts' hymn, "Access to the Throne of Grace by a Mediator," gives particular attention to the (1) Mediator's divine commission, and (2) the believer's access to God through the Mediator. The hymn celebrates the "mutual nearness" that now exists between the two:

Come let us lift our joyful eyes
Up to the courts above,
And smile to see our Father there
Upon a throne of love.

Once 'twas a seat of dreadful wrath,
And shot devouring flame;
Our God appear'd consuming fire,
And vengeance was his name.

Rich were the drops of Jesus' blood
That clam'd his frowning face,
That sprinkled o'er the flashing throne,
And quench'd it into grace.

Now we may bow before his feet,
And venture near the Lord;
No fiery cherub guards his seat,
Nor double flaming sword.

The peaceful gates of heavenly bliss
Are open'd by the Son;
High let us raise our notes of praise,
And reach the almighty throne.

⁷³ Watts, *Works*, 3:664; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 227.

To thee ten thousand thanks we bring,
Great Advocate on high,
And glory to th' Eternal King,
That lays his fury by.⁷⁴

This hymn serves to demonstrate Watts' understanding of what it means to draw near to God through Christ's mediation. First, the central theme, and one that frames the entire flow of the hymn, is access to God. As mentioned, God's approach to man is necessitated by man's sinful condition. Watts conveys this need in the second and third stanzas. The throne of God, without Christ's mediation, is a "seat of dreadful wrath" and a "devouring flame." Furthermore, God maintains a "frowning face" toward the sinner. Next, the hymn moves to the commission of the Mediator to the work of propitiation. It is Christ's "rich blood" that turns away God's wrath. Without this commissioning, the "fiery cherub" and "flaming sword" would remain between man and the throne of God. Watts is explaining man's complete inability to approach God apart from a divine mediator. Finally, it is Christ alone who enables the sinner to "venture near the Lord." He opens the "gates of heavenly bliss"; as a result, we "reach the almighty throne" of God through the richness of Christ's blood. It is Christ who transforms the throne of wrath into a throne of love. The hymn closes on a joyful note, due to the sinner's newfound access to God. This access prompts a response of praise and thanksgiving. Accordingly, the hymn closes with the success of Christ the Mediator. His mediation is the "appointment of the blessed God" to ensure that we dwell "in the presence of God...with all *holy* and *happy* tribes of mankind."⁷⁵

Christ's Atonement

As examined in the preceding section, Watts' emphasis on Christ's

⁷⁴ Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 178–79. The original publication is utilized here due to the altering of works in third stanza of the hymn within the 1810 publication. For the 1810 edition, with slight changes to wording in the third stanza only, see Watts, *Works*, 4:329.

⁷⁵ Watts, *Works*, 3:664; Watts, *Orthodoxy and Charity United*, 228. Italics added.

mediatorship is a “great requisite of salvation,” and the only means to draw near to God.⁷⁶ Obviously, pivotal to this is Watts’ view on the doctrine of Christ’s atonement. Faith in the blood of Christ shows “that we must trust him particularly as a Mediator of atonement.”⁷⁷ Accordingly, Watts views the doctrine of the atonement as “a golden thread” that runs through the whole of Christianity. It unites the faith “in a sweet harmony” and “casts a lustre” over it.⁷⁸ Watts rebukes those “who continue to profess the religion of the Bible,” yet “deny the propitiatory virtue of the blood of Christ!”⁷⁹ To uphold Scripture is to uphold the necessity and beauty of Christ’s atoning work.

This emphasis on the atonement is evident throughout his hymns. They contain exhortations to behold Christ’s “bleeding love,”⁸⁰ find security “beneath [his] blood,”⁸¹ sing of “the dear drops of sacred blood,”⁸² and to “hear...[the] Saviour’s blood.”⁸³ As such, an appreciation of Christ’s atonement is foundational to Watts’ theology and spirituality.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Watts, *Works*, 4:52; Watts, *A Caveat Against Infidelity*, 16.

⁷⁷ Watts, *Works*, 4:52; Watts, *A Caveat Against Infidelity*, 16.

⁷⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:386; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:165.

⁷⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:385; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:161.

⁸⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:383; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:468. The hymn is entitled “Faith and Repentance Encouraged by the Sacrifice of Christ.”

⁸¹ Watts, *Works*, 4:298; Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 82. See “Hymn 4: Salvation at the Cross.”

⁸² Watts, *Works*, 4:322; Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 156. See “Hymn 84: The Passion and Exaltation of Christ.”

⁸³ See Hymn 163 “Complaint of Desertion and Temptations,” in Watts, *Works*, 4:343; Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In Three Books. I. Collected from the Scriptures. II. Compos’d on Divine Subjects. III. Prepar’d for the Lord’s Supper*, 2nd ed. (London: J. H. for John Lawrence, 1709), 273–74. This hymn did not appear in Watts’ first edition of the work, but was first published in the corrected and expanded edition in 1709.

⁸⁴ The scope of this research does not examine the extent of the atonement in Watts’ thought. It was, however, a major theological issue during his time. Watts has been labeled a moderate Calvinist, or Baxterian, with respect to his position on limited atonement. Thomas Milner says that Watts “seems inclined to halt midway under the standard of Baxter” and was hesitant to “become more Calvinist than Calvin.” Milner, *Life, Times, and Correspondence of the Rev Isaac Watts*, 618–19. In Watts’ discourse, *Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, he clearly states that “the texts which support this doctrine [limited atonement] are more in number, and more plain, and express, and unanswerable.” He even directs the

The Nature of the Atonement: Satisfaction

Watts' doctrine of the atonement is informed by his understanding of satisfaction.⁸⁵ This is related to his view of man's recovery from the "relative" evil of sin. When Christ becomes the propitiation for sin "by his bloody death," the honor of the broken law is vindicated and the sinner is reconciled to God.⁸⁶ In other words, Watts understands satisfaction as "the very life of [the] soul" because it clears the way for the "transactions of the great God...with all the children of men."⁸⁷ This is similar to John Owen's understanding. He views the atonement as "the centre wherein most, if not all,

reader to John Calvin, James Ussher, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Richard Baxter for proof of the doctrine of particular election. However, Watts desires to "represent a plain and defensible scheme, wherein this doctrine will sit easy on the minds of men, without straining or torturing any text of Scripture" Watts, *Works*, 6:143; Isaac Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind: Or An Attempt to Vindicate the Scriptural Account of These Great Evens Upon the Plain Principles of Reason*, 2nd ed. (London: James Brackstone, 1742), 239–40. Therefore, Watts did not like either extreme of the atonement debate, and instead argued for a moderate view. In short, he held that Christ "suffered sufficiently for the whole world, but effectually for the elect alone." He believed that Christ should be offered to all because he, in some sense, died for all. Watts even appeals to Calvin's writings in support of his position on the universal offer of the gospel. According to Watts, Calvin in his "riper years and maturer judgement...plainly declared in his writings that there is a sense in which Christ died for the sins of the whole world." Watts, *Works*, 6:152–53; Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind*, 265–66. This position caused issue with Watts' contemporaries like John Gill (1697–1771) and John Brine (1703–1765). For example, in 1743, Brine, an English Particular Baptist from Kettering, Northamptonshire, published a work in direct repudiation of Watts' position. See John Brine, *The Certain Efficacy of the Death of Christ, Asserted: Or, The Necessity, Reality, and Perfection, of His Satisfaction are Pleaded for: The Objections of the Socinians and Arminians are Answered: The Moral Law Proved to be in Full Force: And the Inconditional Nature of the New Covenant is Demonstrated, in Answer to a Book, Called, The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind* (London: Aaron Ward, 1743). For a discussion on the rise of moderate Calvinism in eighteenth-century English Dissent, see Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 63–64.

⁸⁵ In this sermon on atonement, Watts recommends "the most learned and pious" Dr. Owen's "short treatise of the satisfaction of Christ." Watts, *Works*, 1:366; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:112. Owen notes that the word satisfaction is not actually used in Scripture, yet there are words and phrases which "express the matter of the thing intended by it." Furthermore, he defines satisfaction as "the voluntary obedience unto death, and the passion or suffering, of our Lord Jesus Christ, God and man, whereby and wherein he offered himself, through the eternal Spirit, for a propitiatory sacrifice, that he might fulfil the law, or answer all its universal postulate; and as our sponsor, undertaking our cause, when we were under the sentence of condemnation, underwent the punishment due to us from the justice of God, being transferred on him; whereby having made a perfect and absolute propitiation or atonement for our sins, he procured for us deliverance from death and the curse, and a right unto life everlasting." John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, ed. William H. Gould (1850-53; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 2:442. Flavel defines satisfaction as the "act of Christ, God-man, presenting himself as our surety in obedience to God and love to us; to do and to suffer all that the law required of us: thereby freeing us from the wrath and curse due to us for sins." Flavel, *Works*, 1:179.

⁸⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:362; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:100.

⁸⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:368; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:118.

the lines of the gospel promises and precepts do meet, and the great medium of all our communion with God in faith and obedience.”⁸⁸ Three categories will help clarify Watts’ understanding of the nature of the atonement.

The first is the appointment of satisfaction. God “did not think fit to pardon sinful man, without some compensation for his broken law.”⁸⁹ Watts provides four reasons why God appointed “compensation” as the means of removing guilt. First, pardoning sin without satisfaction disparages the law. It implies that God’s law is “not worth the vindicating.”⁹⁰ Second, pardoning without satisfaction leads to greater rebellion. The requirement of satisfaction creates an “awful fear of [God’s] governing justice” in order to “deter and affright men from sinning.”⁹¹ Third, pardoning without satisfaction implies that God’s governance is a “trifling and useless formality.” It encourages sinners to “deceive themselves” and “dress up the great God in their own imaginations.”⁹² Fourth, pardoning without satisfaction hides God’s mercy from view. Satisfaction is the means God chooses to display the glory of his justice and mercy as the “solemn spectacle and wonder of the worlds.”⁹³

The second category is the work of satisfaction. It does not involve our obedience or suffering.⁹⁴ As Watts argues, punishment is proportionate to the person against whom the crime is committed. Sin against God incurs guilt with a “sort of infinity

⁸⁸ Owen, *Works*, 2:419.

⁸⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:362; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:102.

⁹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:363; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:102.

⁹¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:363; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:103.

⁹² Watts, *Works*, 1:363; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:103.

⁹³ Watts, *Works*, 1:363; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:104.

⁹⁴ Watts appeals to the Roman Catholic Church as an example of those who trust in human merit. He calls the “doctrine of the papists” the “most strange vain doctrine” that is “made up of folly pride, and absurdity!” Man is so broken, according to Watts, that he cannot “answer the present demands of duty, much less...bring an offering of righteousness to atone for past iniquities.” Watts, *Works*, 1:364; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:105.

in it” because God is an infinite being.⁹⁵ For this reason, God demands infinite satisfaction, which means that man is unable to pay it. This means that the work of satisfaction requires a third party. The Father appoints the Son as a “proper sacrifice of expiation.”⁹⁶ This includes (1) putting him in the place of transgressors, and (2) transferring the sinner’s just punishment to him.⁹⁷ Watts explains,

When the guilt was thus transferred to him, as far as it was possible for the Son of God to sustain it, he then became liable to punishment; and indeed that seems to me to be the truest and justest idea of transferred or imputed guilt, *viz.* when a surety is accepted to suffer in the room of the offender, then the pain or penalty is due to him by consent: and as this is the true original and foundation of expiatory sacrifices...so this seems to be the foundation of that particular manner, wherein scripture teaches us this doctrine.⁹⁸

According to Watts, Christ’s incarnation was necessary so that “he might be a more proper surety, substitute, and representative of man.”⁹⁹ Accordingly, he was capable of pain, suffering, anguish, and death. The Father withdrew “his comfortable influences” in order for Christ’s body and soul to experience an “exquisite sight and sense of that indignation and wrath that was due to sin.”¹⁰⁰ However, humanity and “the dignity of the godhead” were united in Christ to place “an infinite value over his sufferings and merit,” equal to the infinite guilt of sin.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:364; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:106–07.

⁹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:365; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:109.

⁹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:365–66; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:100–10. Watts adds, “God ordained that he should put himself into their circumstances, as far as was possible, with a due condescendency to his superior charters, and that he should sustain, as near as possible, the very same pains and penalties which sinful man had incurred. Since tribulation and anguish of the soul and body, as sense of the wrath of God, and death, were the appointed penalties of the sin of man; therefore he determined that his own Son should pass through all these.”

⁹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:366; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:112. Watts references 2 Cor 5:21, 1 Pet 2:24, and Isa 53:5. Likewise, John Owen notes that all the expressions in the aforementioned verses “undeniably evince a substitution of Christ as to suffering in the stead of them whom he was to save; which, in general is all that we intend by his satisfaction.” Owen, *Works*, 2:422.

⁹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:366; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:111.

¹⁰⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:366; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:112–13.

¹⁰¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:367; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:114.

The third category is the result of satisfaction. In short, God can “pardon sinners without dishonor to himself or his government.”¹⁰² This is the case because justice and mercy are perfectly united in Christ’s atonement. As a result, God offers “plain and explicit” reconciliation to the sinner, and he indicates his willingness to receive all those who “trust in the virtue of the blood of Christ.”¹⁰³ In response, we approach through faith, which carries “in it the springs and seeds of love and holiness.”¹⁰⁴

The Use of the Atonement: The “Golden Mine”

Watts believes the doctrine of Christ’s atonement is the “golden mine” in which we discover “treasures of divine grace” for the purpose of practical godliness.¹⁰⁵ Bebbington notes that, for evangelicals in Watts’ day, there “was a bond between the atonement and the quest for sanctification.”¹⁰⁶ Watts asserts that the doctrine of the atonement is the “daily food” to “support the life of [the Christian’s] soul.”¹⁰⁷ He views it as central to advancing practical godliness, and therefore employs it in both spiritual exhortation and reflection. In other words, the atonement is useful beyond its forensic aspects (i.e., justification). Watts highlights eleven uses.

First, the atonement is the “solid foundation” and “reviving cordial” for the person who struggles with despair.¹⁰⁸ The blood of Christ heals the soul from (1) the deepest wounds against the conscience, (2) the greatest sins, and (3) the repeated

¹⁰² Watts, *Works*, 1:367; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:115.

¹⁰³ Watts, *Works*, 1:368; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:116.

¹⁰⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:368; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:116.

¹⁰⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:389; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:175.

¹⁰⁶ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:383; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:157.

¹⁰⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:386; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:165.

backslidings of the “blackest aggravations.”¹⁰⁹ This is the case because it assures us of our acceptance with God through Christ’s satisfaction on the cross. Watts exhorts,

Awake, arise, O sinner, fly to the hope that is set before thee! In vain will you try a thousand remedies, [the atonement of Christ] is the only relief. A soul stung with the guilt of sin, as with the fiery serpent, must look up to Jesus hanging on the cross, there alone can he find healing and life.¹¹⁰

Despair arises from our on-going struggle with indwelling sin. However, Christ is the “effectual Advocate” who pleads for us “in the virtue of his own blood.”¹¹¹ We must, therefore, maintain “a lively and delightful sense” of Christ’s atonement upon the soul, so that we do not fall into seasons of sin and despair.¹¹²

Second, the atonement is a “powerful motive to excite repentance in every heart where sin hath dwelt.”¹¹³ It is the basis of forgiveness, which according to Watts, is the “sweet and constraining motive” to repent of sin.¹¹⁴ Appealing to 1 John 1:9,¹¹⁵ Watts explains that the faithfulness of a forgiving God and the blood of a dying Savior lead to a “sweet experience” of repentance.¹¹⁶ God is able to “speak peace and forgiveness” to the troubled sinner lost in shame, because of the blood of Christ.¹¹⁷

Third, the atonement is the “constant way of access to God in all our

¹⁰⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:386; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:166.

¹¹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:387; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:166–67.

¹¹¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:387; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:169.

¹¹² Watts, *Works*, 1:387; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:169.

¹¹³ Watts, *Works*, 1:387; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:169.

¹¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:387; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:169.

¹¹⁵ “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

¹¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:388; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:170.

¹¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:388; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:170. Watts writes, “Let my soul mourn for all her follies, all her past iniquities. Let me be covered with shame, and lie in the dust at the foot of God.”

prayers.”¹¹⁸ Watts believes the atonement is what makes Christ’s mediation effective as he intercedes on our behalf. All that he asks of the Father through prayer is done “in the name and virtue of his great atonement.”¹¹⁹ Watts writes,

Dare not approach him [God] therefore, but under the protection of the blood of his Son: Christ is set forth as our propitiation through faith in his blood. If thou bring the atonement of Christ in the hand of thy faith, thou shalt find sweet and easy access...my offences cry for vengeance, but the blood of Jesus speaks better things, and cries louder for peace and pardon. Let the voice of that blood which has made full satisfaction for the vilest sins, prevail over all my unworthiness.¹²⁰

Fourth, the atonement is “a divine guard against temptation and sin.”¹²¹ For us to return to the “reign and tyranny of sin” is a “scandal and reproach” to the atonement because we are washed “in so precious a laver as the blood of the Son of God.”¹²²

Fifth, the atonement is related to the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. Watts explains, “The atonement of Christ is an argument of prevailing force to be used in prayer, when we plead for the aids of the blessed Spirit; when we ask for his sacred influences to enlighten, to sanctify, or to comfort our souls. The Spirit flows down to us in the blood of Christ.”¹²³ The Holy Spirit provides peace, hope, joy, and light, in order to strengthen us against sin. All of these works are made possible by Christ’s atoning work.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:388; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:170.

¹¹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:388; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:171.

¹²⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:388; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:171–72.

¹²¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:389; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:172. Watts appeals to 1 Pet 1:15–19 as the basis of this proposition.

¹²² Watts, *Works*, 1:389; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:173.

¹²³ Watts, *Works*, 1:389; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:173.

¹²⁴ For more on Watts’ thinking on the relationship between Christ’s atonement and the work of the Holy Spirit, see Watts, *The Redeemer and the Sanctifier, or the Sacrifice of Christ*, in *Works*, 3:742–99; Isaac Watts, *The Redeemer and the Sanctifier: Of the Sacrifice of Christ and the Operations of the Spirit Vindicated: With a Free Debate about the Importance of those Doctrines, Represented in a Friendly Conversation Between Persons of Different Sentiments* (London: J. Oswald, 1736). For secondary sources on this relationship, see Christopher R. J. Holmes, “The Atonement and the Holy Spirit,” in *T&T Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 77–94; Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing

Sixth, the atonement is the “everlasting spring of holy love.”¹²⁵ Based on 1 John 5:10, Ephesians 3:18, and Romans 5:10, Watts declares that the Son is the greatest manifestation of God’s love.¹²⁶ The Father sends forth the Son to make atonement, and the Son willingly offers himself for sin. These two works are the “spring of divine love,” which “runs through all the length of time into a long eternity.”¹²⁷ They figure prominently in Watts’ thought. God reveals his love in the atonement, and this should “melt and soften our hearts into returns of love to the great God, and to his Son.”¹²⁸ Such love leads to obedience, for the “condescensions of divine love” inflame the affections to “exert their utmost diligence in the service of the Son of God.”¹²⁹

Seven, the atonement “carries in it a strong persuasive” to love our neighbor.¹³⁰ God’s forgiveness through Christ compels us to love and forgive others. Christ’s propitiation “demands of us the duties of forbearance and forgiveness, of kindness and tenderness to men.”¹³¹ Unity flourishes among those who have “known and tasted such divine compassion” as Christ’s death on the cross.¹³²

Eighth, the atonement stirs “patience under heavy afflictions” and “holy joy in the midst of earthly sorrows.”¹³³ The sufferings of this life cannot be compared to what

Company, 1941), 102–06.

¹²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:389; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:175.

¹²⁶ In his other works on the Trinity, Watts often appeals to John Flavel when describing the love between the Father and the Son. In a sermon on John 3:16, Flavel comments, “The gift of Christ is the highest and fullest manifestation of the love of God to sinners, that ever was made from eternity to them.” Flavel, *Works*, 1:64. For the entire sermon, see Flavel, *Works*, 1:62–72.

¹²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:389; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:175.

¹²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:390; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:175.

¹²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:390; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:176.

¹³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:390; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:177.

¹³¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:390; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:177.

¹³² Watts, *Works*, 1:390; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:178.

¹³³ Watts, *Works*, 1:391; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:179.

Christ endured for us. His “anguish and terror” are “a powerful argument” to “compose [the] soul” and “raise [it] to holy joy.”¹³⁴

Ninth, the atonement is remembered in the Lord’s Supper.¹³⁵ Christ did not leave us without “some sensible tokens and signs” of the atonement, which are to be frequently repeated until his return.¹³⁶ Based on the commands in Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:29,¹³⁷ Watts argues that Christ does not give “such a peculiar memorial of any of his other actions or offices” as he does for the atonement.¹³⁸ The office of his priesthood and the action of his sacrifice are uniquely bound to the practice of the Lord’s Supper. Watts notes,

I have learned by the gospel, the excellency and virtue of the propitiation of Christ, to cancel my iniquities, and shall I not receive this propitiation in all the methods of his own appointment? Shall I dare to say, it is enough for me to read it [the doctrine of atonement] in the Bible, and to hear it in the ministry of the word, and to meditate on it in private, when my Lord has given me an express command to receive it also in those emblems and sensible figures of bread and wine, and has sanctified them for this very purpose?¹³⁹

Tenth, the atonement is an “effectual defence against the terrors of dying” and it is “our joyful hope of our blessed resurrection.”¹⁴⁰ The sting of death is mitigated by the atonement of Christ. At the hour of death, we take “fresh hold of the atonement,” so that we venture into the presence of God “sprinkled with the blood of Christ.”¹⁴¹ On the brink of death, we experience (1) the memories of past iniquities, (2) the horror of Satan’s

¹³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:391; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:180.

¹³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:392; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:181.

¹³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:392; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:181.

¹³⁷ “And he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.”

¹³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:392; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:181.

¹³⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:392; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:182.

¹⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:392; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:182.

¹⁴¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:392; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:183.

“assault upon the conscience,” and (3) the torments of the soul through agony.¹⁴² Watts argues that these “stings of death” are removed by Christ because he answers the demands of the law by his atoning sacrifice. This brings hope in the hour of death. It is by the “blood of his cross” that Christ has “opened an effectual way for our rising from the death, and our final admission into the place of blessedness.”¹⁴³ Because of the virtue of Christ’s blood, the “grave shall obey the voice of him that died for us; for he has ransomed us from the power of it.”¹⁴⁴

Eleventh, the atonement is a “divine allurements toward the upper world.”¹⁴⁵ It reminds us that Christ resides on the throne of heaven, and that we should desire to be in his presence. “Signals of his death” should “open our springs of love” for him and the subsequent desire to be present with him.¹⁴⁶ Watts explains,

Alas! My soul is too patient of this long distance and separation. O for the wings of love, to bear my spirit upward in holy breathings! Methinks I would long to be near him, to be with him, to give him my highest praises and thanks for my share in his dying love. I would rise to join with the blessed acclamations, the holy songs of the saints on high, while they behold their exalted Saviour. How sweet their songs! How loud their acclamations! This is the man, the God-man who died for me! This is the Son of God, who has buffeted, who was crowned with thorns, who endured exquisite anguish, and unknown sorrows for me, who was scourged, and wounded, and crucified for me!¹⁴⁷

Holiness, Happiness, and the Beauty of Christ

This chapter has examined various aspects of Watts’ understanding of Christ’s mediatorial work. It is important to note three implications for his spirituality.

¹⁴² Watts, *Works*, 1:392; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:183.

¹⁴³ Watts, *Works*, 1:393; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:184.

¹⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:393; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:184–85. Watts employs the word “virtue” in the sense of sacrificing self-interest as a type of civic duty. For more on this in Puritan thought, see Stephen Charnock, *A Discourse of the Cleansing Virtue of Christ’s Blood*, ed. Thomas Smith, vol. 3, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 3:501–34.

¹⁴⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:394; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:186.

¹⁴⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:394; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:187.

¹⁴⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:394; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:187–88.

To begin with, the recovery of man from the “relative” and “real” evils of sin is theologically grounded in our access to God through Christ’s atonement. As mentioned in the previous chapter, justification is the “relative” change whereby the believer is freed from the penalty of sin, whereas sanctification is the “real” change whereby the believer is freed from the dominion sin. For Watts, justification and sanctification are inseparably linked to Christ’s atoning work; therefore, both are integral to the spiritual life.

The second implication is that by means of Christ’s mediation, we draw near to God. “Nearness to God,” writes Watts, “is the foundation of a creature’s happiness.”¹⁴⁸ He makes this observation on the basis of Psalm 65:4,¹⁴⁹ where the psalmist “makes the blessedness of man to depend upon his near approaches to God.”¹⁵⁰ Christ’s mediation alone secures these “near approaches.” Watts contends that the enjoyment of God is central to a life of holiness, yet he insists that man cannot enjoy God apart from Christ. Foundationally, it is Christ’s atonement that procures nearness to God. This leads to a “solid and substantial felicity.”¹⁵¹

The third implication is that Christ’s mediatorial work shapes Watts’ understanding of eternal life. Since the spiritual life is “eternal life begun” (in terms of holiness and happiness), Christ’s work in our lives is the realized beginning of eternal life. Watts explains, “By believing in Christ, we have a glorious testimony, or witness, within ourselves, that Christ is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, and the author of eternal life; that his person is divine, that his doctrine is true, for eternal life is begun in us.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Watts, *Works*, 1:122; Watts, Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 1 (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1721), 1:351.

¹⁴⁹ “Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.”

¹⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:122; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:350–51.

¹⁵¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:133; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:381.

¹⁵² Watts, *Works*, 1:5; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:14.

CHAPTER 5
THE EXCELLENCY OF HEAVEN

Introduction

Upon the death of Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729),¹ New England pastor Benjamin Colman (1673–1747),² preached of how eternity provides the motivation for the spiritual life.³ Colman noted that a “lively apprehension of death and eternity” enables ministers to be “instrumental in the spiritual life of their people.”⁴ Success in ministry is grounded in a desire to “live most in the views of eternity.”⁵ Watts agreed with Colman’s assessment. In April 1729, he wrote a letter to Colman, in which he

¹ Stoddard was a pastor in Northampton and the grandfather to Jonathan Edwards. For some of Stoddard’s more popular works, see Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ. Or, The Way of Directing Souls that are Under the Work of Conversion. Compiled for the Help of Young Ministers: And May be Serviceable to Private Christians, Who are Enquiring the Way to Zion* (Boston: J. Allen, 1714); Solomon Stoddard, *A Treatise Concerning Conversion: Shewing the Nature of Saving Conversion to God, and the Way Wherein it is Wrought; Together with an Exhortation to Labour After it* (Boston: James Franklin, 1719). For brief introduction to Stoddard, see Keith Hardman, *The Spiritual Awakeners: American Revivalists from Solomon Stoddard to D. L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 34–38.

² Colman was a close friend of Watts, via transatlantic written correspondence, and the first pastor of Brattle Street Church, a Congregational church located in Boston, Massachusetts. For a brief introduction Benjamin Colman, see Francis J. Bremer and Tom Webster, eds., *Puritans and Puritanism in Europe and America: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 166; Ebenezer Turell, *The Life and Character of the Reverend Benjamin Colman, D.D.: Late Pastor of a Church in Boston New-England, Who Deceased August 29th 1747* (Boston, New England: Rogers and Fowle, 1749).

³ Benjamin Colman, *The Faithful Ministers of Christ Mindful of Their Own Death. A Sermon Preached at the Lecture in Boston; Upon the Death of the Learned and Venerable Solomon Stoddard Late Pastor of the Church of Christ in Northampton: Who Departed in this Life February 11, 1729.* (Boston: D. Henchman, J. Phillips, and T. Hancock, 1729).

⁴ Colman, *The Faithful Ministers of Christ*, 20. In addition to Stoddard, Colman also references Richard Baxter in this sermon and alludes to his famous quip about being a dying man preaching to dying men. Colman, *The Faithful Ministers of Christ*, 21. For direct reference to this particular quote in one of Baxter’s poems, see Richard Baxter, *The Poetical Fragments of Richard Baxter*, 4th ed. (London: W. Pickering, 1821), 35.

⁵ Colman, *The Faithful Ministers of Christ*, 20.

mentioned that he had received a copy of the aforementioned sermon.⁶ He was struck by Colman's exhortation regarding eternity. It was his description of Stoddard's eternal perspective that most resonated with Watts, leading him to conclude: "A constant inwrought sense of standing on the borders of eternity" is one of the "most effectual motives to our...sacred work."⁷ He concluded his letter with his own exhortation: "May divine grace render *survivors* more compleat images of the venerable man whom you mourn!"⁸ Eternity was central to Watts' vision of the spiritual life. In the preface of the German translation of Watts' *Death and Heaven*,⁹ Johann Jacob Rambach (1693–1735)¹⁰ asserts, "It is plain the author's mind was so taken up with the beauty of heaven that his mouth could not but speak from the abundance of his heart."¹¹ Watts' focus on the

⁶ Watts, "Letters," in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 343–44.

⁷ Watts, "Letters" in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 344.

⁸ Watts, "Letters" in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 344. Emphasis added.

⁹ Isaac Watts, *Death and Heaven; or The Last Enemy Conquer'd, and Separate Spirits Made Perfect: With an Account of The Rich Variety of Their Employments and Pleasures; Attempted in Two Funeral Discourses, In Memory of Sir John Hartopp Bart. And His Lady, Deceased*, 2nd ed. (London: John and Barham Clark, Eman Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1724). This work was first published in 1722. There were four editions in circulation by 1737, and sixteen editions by 1818. As previously mentioned, the context of these sermons were the deaths of Sir John Hartopp and his wife Lady Hartopp. Hartopp was a politician and ardent supporter of nonconformity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For the most comprehensive sketch of Hartopp, see Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Reve. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev. George Burder* (London: J. Barfield, 1810), 2:71–74. For more on the Hartopp's family, see William Robinson, *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Stoke Newington in the County of Middlesex; Containing an Account of The Prebendal Manor, the Church Charities, Schools, Meeting Houses, &c.* (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1842), 78–81, 195–96.

¹⁰ August Hermann Francke (1663–1727), a Lutheran scholar from Germany, and Professor of Theology at the University of Halle, translated Watts' work into German in 1727. Rambach was Francke's successor at Halle and wrote the preface to the German edition. For a brief introduction to Francke, see Gary R. Sattler, *God's Glory, Neighbor's Good: A Brief Introduction to the Life and Writings of August Hermann Francke* (Chicago: Covenant Press, 1982). For biographical information on Rambach, see Richard A. Muller, "J. J. Rambach and the Dogmatics of Scholastic Pietism," *Consensus* 16, no. 2 (1990): 7–27; Benjamin T. G. Mayes, "The Mystical Sense of Scripture According to Johann Jacob Rambach," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2008): 45–70; and Ulrich Bister and Martin Zeim, eds., *Johann Jakob Rambach: Leben, Briefe, Schriften* (Giessen, Germany: Brunnen Verlag, 1993).

¹¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:6. The third edition of *Death and Heaven*, printed in 1736, was the first reprint of the work that included the translation of the 1727 German edition's preface. See, Isaac Watts, *Death and Heaven; or The Last Enemy Conquer'd, and Separate Spirits Made Perfect: With an Account of The Rich Variety of Their Employments and Pleasures; Attempted in Two Funeral Discourses, In Memory*

excellency of heaven was central to his concept of the spiritual life as eternal life begun.

It is, for this reason, that much of his writing focuses on death, hell, and heaven. He labored to provide a lively apprehension of these “last things.” This has led some to describe his writing as “highly experimental and enthusiastic,” even boarding on the “mystical.”¹² Watts inherits this emphasis from the Puritans.¹³ John Flavel for example, in *Treatise of the Soul of Man*, describes the benefits of a lively perception of heaven and hell: “It is certainly our ignorance of the life of heaven” that causes us to “dote...upon the present life.”¹⁴ Flavel believes that descriptions of the “horrid estate” of those who descend to hell should awaken us to our “wretched condition.”¹⁵

This chapter details how Watts’ understanding of the last things influences his spirituality of holiness and happiness. The first section highlights his view on the state of the soul after death. The second specifies how this view shapes his concept of heavenly perfection. The third addresses how Watts uses his reflections on the last things to prepare the soul for eternity.

The Last Enemy

In his publication, *An Humble Attempt Towards the Revival of Practical*

of Sir John Hartopp Bart. And His Lady, Deceased, 3rd ed. (London: J. Oswald, 1736), x–xiv.

¹² See Arthur Paul Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works* (London: Independent Press, 1948), 136. Davis uses the word “mystical” to describe Watts’ eschatological writings. However, Davis overstates the case. Mysticism is a broad term that arises from a number of different schools of spirituality. He likely uses the term to describe an unmediated (versus mediated) knowledge of God.

¹³ See Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 773–842. Elsewhere, Joel Beeke argues that heaven was the most important theme in meditation for the Puritans. Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study From Our Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2006), 90. Additionally, Mark Noll remarks, “Despite the signal contributions of Doddridge, Watts and a few other Dissenters...Nonconformity was declining as a movement and weakening as a theological force.” Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys*, in *A History of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 1:42–43. This decline may have factored into Watts’ emphasis upon eternity.

¹⁴ John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 2:486.

¹⁵ Flavel, *Works*, 2:486–87.

Religion Among Christians, Watts gives directives to ministers as to how to preach. Their sermons must be “wrought in the head and heart by review and meditation.”¹⁶ Such preparation enables them to preach “like a messenger sent from heaven” and “allure souls to God and happiness.”¹⁷ This is central to the work of ministry. But it necessitates a firm conviction as to the certainty of death.¹⁸

According to Watts, death is best understood as the Christian’s last enemy to be destroyed.¹⁹ It is an enemy because it (1) separates the soul and body, (2) keeps us from enjoying the perfection of heaven until the resurrection, (3) separates us from our earthly friends, and (4) fills the mind with terror.²⁰ It is the believer’s final experience of evil in this world. It “brings up the rear” to the three enemies of the Christian life: the

¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 3:30; Isaac Watts, *An Humble Attempt Toward the Revival of Practical Religion Among Christians, and Particularly the Protestant Dissenters, By a Serious Address to Ministers and People, In Some Occasional Discourses* (London: printed for E. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1731), 93.

¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 3:30; Watts, *An Humble Attempt*, 93.

¹⁸ A brief survey of his publication, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, supports this statement. There are at least twenty-seven explicit references to death, covering an array of doctrinal topics. Some of these topics include God’s presence at death, fear of death, delight at death, preparation for death, triumph over death, death of sinners, death and eternity, and death made easy by Christ. For table on contents on hymns relating to death, see Watts, *Works*, 4:359; Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In Three Books. I. Collected from the Scriptures. II. Compos’d on Divine Subjects. III. Prepar’d for the Lord’s Supper*, 2nd ed. (London: J.H. for John Lawrence, 1709), 324. By way of other examples: Thomas Gibbons provides the details of a first-hand account of Watts’ death. See Thomas Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts* (London: n.p., 1780), 311–21. Second, for Watts, a firm realization as to the certainty of death is of pivotal importance for preaching the gospel to unbelievers. Interestingly, in a letter to Colman in 1740, Watts notes that George Whitefield had come to visit him on several occasions. Watts voices his ambivalence toward some of the “uncommon” aspects of Whitefield’s ministry, particularly his “extraordinary ministrations” and “prophetical speeches.” Yet, Watts acknowledges that Whitefield’s zeal for the conversion of souls was commendable. He writes, “Since God has done great service in awakening many people by his labors and (I hope) in the real conversion of several, I could not but say, *Go on and prosper*, and if St. Paul rejoiced when the name of Christ was preached, tho it were out of strife and envy, Phil. 1. 19, I had much more reason to rejoice in his success, and wish’d him the presence of God wheresoever he went with this pious and zealous spirit, and I heartily recommended to him such caution and prudence that his good might not be evil spoken of.” Isaac Watts, “Letters” in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 9 (1894), 374–75.

¹⁹ See 1 Cor 15:26. Most of this section is taken from Watts’ funeral sermon (*The Conquest Over Death*) for Lady Hartopp, preached on November 25, 1711.

²⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:9–12; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 8–20. Watts expounds two aspects of heaven: (1) the business of heaven, and (2) the blessedness of heaven. Until the resurrection, the body (although redeemed) does not engage in the business of heaven. Watts, *Works*, 2:9; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 11–12.

flesh, the world, and the devil.²¹ Upon conversion, we enter the “battlefield” against these three enemies, and we ultimately conquer them at death.²² Death will be “utterly destroyed” at the resurrection.²³ Until then, it “holds one part of the saint in his prison, the grave.”²⁴

As for the manner in which death is destroyed, Watts believes it is gradual.²⁵ Though Christ’s “mediation for sinners was sufficient to have prevailed with God to destroy death at once,” there is a gradual path to destruction.²⁶ The first step is the removal of the guilt of sin (i.e., its sting) by means of Christ’s death.²⁷ The second step is the subjugation of death whereby it is “made to serve [Christ’s] holy purposes.”²⁸ Although death is still a painful experience for the Christian, it does not possess the same destructive power. According to Watts, “the name of death is altered into [the name of] sleep,” so that it no longer has “a frightful sound in the ears of [Christ’s] beloved.”²⁹ The third step is the return of Christ and the bodily resurrection. This marks the “complete

²¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:13; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 24. See Eph 2:1–3. For these three enemies in Puritan thought, see William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, ed. J. C. Ryle (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964). For a modern treatment, see Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 32–38; William F. Cook and Chuck Lawless, *Spiritual Warfare in the Storyline of Scripture: A Biblical, Theological, and Practical Approach* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2019).

²² Watts, *Works*, 2:13; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 25.

²³ Watts, *Works*, 2:13; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 41.

²⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:14; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 28.

²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:15; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 33–34. In addition to Christ’s mediation, Watts emphasizes Christ’s atonement, stating that his “blood was of sufficient value to have procured for his elect a deliverance from every enemy at once, and a translation to heaven as soon as they were born.” Watts, *Works*, 2:15; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 34.

²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:15; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 33.

²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:15; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 34.

²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:16; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 36.

²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:17; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 40. Watts argues that, in the Old Testament, death was described as silence, darkness, and inactivity. See Dan 7.

enjoyment of all that is included in the name of LIFE.”³⁰

The blessings that arise from the destruction of death are numerous. First, it brings about a shared victory with Christ. We are his “humble partners” in this warfare and, therefore, we experience eternal joy at death, for “all our enemies” are “subdued, destroyed, and abolished for ever.”³¹ Second, the destruction of the last enemy relieves the soul and body of weariness and weakness. There is a heaviness to the Christian journey because of the “clog of this flesh” and the “inconveniences that attend mortality.”³² Yet, the destruction of the last enemy (at the resurrection) results in the uniting of the body and soul, thereby rendering “the felicity of the creature perfect.”³³ Third, the destruction of the last enemy brings about the perfection of the saints in glory. Watts details,

Then shall we enjoy the constant society of our best friends and dearest acquaintance; those that have arrived at the New Jerusalem themselves, and have assisted us in our travels thither. And we shall delightfully entertain and be entertained with the mutual narratives of divine grace, and the wise and holy methods of providence, whereby we have been conducted safe through all the fatigues and dangers of the wilderness to that heavenly country. And that which shall add an unknown relish to all the former blessings, is the full assurance that we shall possess them for ever; for every one of our enemies are then destroy, and the last of them death.³⁴

There are two important implications of Watts’ theology of death. First, death is the culmination of the Christian’s warfare. In other words, it is the final hurdle to holiness and happiness. Second, the destruction of death is necessary for the recovery of man from the “real” evil of sin.

³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:17; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 41. See John 5:25–26; Rev 10:6; 20:14.

³¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:19; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 49.

³² Watts, *Works*, 2:20; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 51.

³³ Watts, *Works*, 2:20; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 52.

³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:20; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 53–54.

The Intermediate State

Watts gives particular attention to the soul's state between death and the resurrection.³⁵ The immediacy of its entrance into heaven or hell shapes his approach to the spiritual life.³⁶ If the time between death and the resurrection is simply a "long sweet nap before [the] sorrows begin" then the individual might be tempted to "indulge his sensualities" with little concern.³⁷ Watts clarifies,

I think the doctrine of the separate state of souls to be of much importance to Christianity, and that the denial of it carries great inconveniences and *weakens the motives to virtue and piety* by putting off all manner of rewards and punishments to such a distance as the general resurrection...they who deny this doctrine, seem to have need of stronger inward zeal to guard against temptation, and to keep their hearts always alive and watchful to God and religion, since *their motives to strict piety and virtue are sensibly weakened*, by renouncing all belief of this nearer and more immediate commencement of heaven and hell.³⁸

The Horror of Hell: Punishment

In 1744, Thomas Secker (1693–1768),³⁹ the Bishop of Oxford, wrote a letter

³⁵ Much of this section is taken from Isaac Watts, *The World to Come: or, Discourses on the Joys or Sorrows of Departed Souls at Death, and the Glory or Terror of the Resurrection. Whereto is Prefix'd, An Essay Towards the Proof of a Separate State of Souls after Death*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Longman and J. Brackstone, 1745). The second edition, published during Watts' lifetime, is used because it was expanded to include a second volume of essays. Furthermore, this publication was likely influenced by Richard Baxter's *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*. Arthur Davis notes that, although "the world to come was a typical puritan theme, it is highly probable that Watts took some hints from Baxter's work." Arthur Paul Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works* (London: Independent Press, 1948), 261n22. For Baxter's publication, see Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Late Reverend and Pious Mr. Richard Baxter* (London: T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, and J. Lawrence, 1707), 3:10–337. For a historical introduction, see John T. Wilkinson, introduction to *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, by Richard Baxter (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 9–14.

³⁶ Baxter notes that full perfection is not complete when the soul is separated from the body, though "the separated souls of the believers do enjoy inconceivable blessedness and glory, even while they remain thus separated from the body." Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:112.

³⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:82; Watts, *The World to Come*, 1:17.

³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:111; Watts, *The World to Come*, 1:105. Emphasis added. In this particular essay entitled, "An Essay Toward the Proof of the Separate State of Souls, Between Death and the Resurrection," Watts meticulously defends the doctrine of the intermediate state, answering fifteen objections. Watts, *Works*, 2:84–111; Watts, *The World to Come*, 1:13–105.

³⁹ See Thomas Secker, *The Autobiography of Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. John S. Macauley and R.W. Greaves (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1988); Leslie W. Barnard, *Thomas Secker: An Eighteenth-Century Primate* (Sussex, England: The Book Guild Ltd., 1998); James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield, and Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). For his writings, see Thomas Secker, *The Works of Thomas Secker, LLD. Late Lord Archbishop of Canterbury. To Which is Prefixed, A Review of His Graces Life and Character, by Beilby Porteus, D.D. Late Lord Bishop of London*. 6 vols. 3rd ed. (London:

to Watts, to thank him for the copy of his work, *The World to Come*.⁴⁰ Secker commends Watts for his “service to religion” in articulating a “strong and awful, yet compassionate and good-natured...defence of the scripture-doctrine concerning the duration of future punishment.”⁴¹ Watts believed that a vivid description of hell is beneficial to both the unregenerate and the regenerate,⁴² because it fills the soul with “holy dread” and excites “the powerful passion of fear.”⁴³ According to Watts, this keeps Christians “in a holy and watchful frame” and serves “to affright them” from sin, folly, and temptation.⁴⁴

Watts most detailed description of hell is found in the discourses “The Nature of the Punishments of Hell” and “The Eternal Duration of the Punishments of Hell.”⁴⁵ Here, Watts focuses on two biblical metaphors for judgment—the worm and fire.⁴⁶

[T]his metaphor of a worm happily represents the inward torments and the teasing [sic] and vexing of passions which shall arise in the souls of those unhappy creatures, who are the just objects of this punishment; and it is called their worm, that worm that belongs to them, and is bred within them by the foul vices and diseases of their souls; But the fire which shall never be quenched refers rather to the pains and anguish which come from without, and that chiefly from the hand of God, the righteous avenger of sin, and from his indignation which is compared to

J Williams, 1775).

⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 1:lxii.

⁴¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:lxii.

⁴² Watts employs vivid New Testament language in his portrayal of hell and damnation. “They kindle their flames of hell in their epistles, they thunder through the very hearts and consciences of men with the voice of damnation and eternal misery, to make stupid sinners feel as much of these terrors in the present prospect as is possible, in order to escape the actual sensation of them in time to come.” Watts, *Works*, 2:267; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:200.

⁴³ Watts, *Works*, 2:267; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:200.

⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:267; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:200.

⁴⁵ These two discourses are part of the second volume of Watts, *The World to Come*. For the first, see 2:199–260. For the second, see 2:261–335.

⁴⁶ See Mark 9:46, 48. Watts argues that Christ likely employed these figures of the worm and fire for three reasons. (1) Worms and fire are the two “most general ways” in which dead bodies are destroyed. Watts believes that Christ may have had Isa 66:24 in mind when he uttered the words. (2) Gnawing of worms and burning fire are “some of the most smart and severe torments that a living man can feel in the flesh...[and] upon the soul.” Watts bases this observation upon the apocryphal Judith 16:17 and Eccl 7:16–17. (3) The worm comes from within and the fire comes from without. The first is a form of self-inflicted punishment because worms breed in man’s flesh. The second is imposed by the hand of God. Watts, *Works*, 2:268; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:201–02.

fire.⁴⁷

Two observations are important. First, Watts interprets the metaphors in terms of inward experience. In other words, they describe the condition of the soul after death. Second, Watts sees the worm and fire as representing torment and misery. Each metaphor emphasizes a particular type of punishment. Watts highlights a collection of “agonies and uneasy passions” derived specifically from the metaphor of the worm.⁴⁸ These are of particular importance because they emphasize Watts’ view on the nature of hell.⁴⁹

The nature of hell. There is, for starters, “remorse and terrible anguish of conscience which shall never be relieved.”⁵⁰ In this life, the conscience receives intervals of relief, but in the intermediate state, sorrow never subsides. There is a “fretting” that arises from the “vexatious worm,” which “stings” the heart “without intermission.”⁵¹ Past sins continually strike the mind and heart because there is no diversion to distract, no darkness to hide, and no place to rest.

Second, the worm represents an “overwhelming sense of an angry God, and utter despair of his love which is lost for ever.”⁵² Happiness is rooted in God’s presence,

⁴⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:268; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:203.

⁴⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:268; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:203.

⁴⁹ In his interpretation of the worm and fire, Watts stands in a tradition which affirms the eternal punishment of hell. For more on history of interpretation of the fire and worm, as traced through the writings of Tertullian, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Whitefield, and Wesley, see David Hilborn, ed., *The Nature of Hell: A Report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth Among Evangelicals (ACUTE)* (London, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 2000); Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 287–359. By way of example, Augustine interprets the worm and fire as both physical and metaphorical. See Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, 302. For a modern defense of the traditional position, including interpretations of the worm and fire, see D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 515–36; Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995). For a general overview of the debate surrounding annihilationism, see Robert A. Peterson, “Undying Worm Unquenchable Fire,” *Christianity Today* 44, no. 12 (October 23, 200): 30–37.

⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:269; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:204.

⁵¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:269; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:206.

⁵² Watts, *Works*, 2:270; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:207.

but in hell happiness is completely lost because “God is gone with all his graces and pardons.”⁵³ God’s love gives way to his vengeance, as he withdraws all possibility of reconciliation.

Third, the worm represents constant malice and hatred for God. Man is at enmity with God and in a state of rebellion. In hell, this disposition is intensified, but never satisfied, as the sinner’s “malice cannot reach [God] in the heights of his glory.”⁵⁴ Enmity, malice, revenge, and hatred all are antithetical to the peace and happiness found in heaven.

Fourth, the worm represents a “fixed and eternal hardness of the heart as will never be softened” and leads to a relentless “impenitence and obstinacy of soul.”⁵⁵ Watts depicts obstinacy as a “sort of madness of rage” or an “inward vexation of the soul” that makes the sinner miserable and “self-cursing,” while creating a “growing aversion to God and his holiness.”⁵⁶ This type of torment is often experienced briefly in this life. When we are severely corrected or wronged by parent, neighbor, or peer, we experience resentment and “revengeful temper.”⁵⁷ These moments are a foretaste of that hardness of heart which plagues sinners in hell.

Fifth, the worm represents an “intense sorrow and wild impatience at the loss of present comforts.”⁵⁸ Watts writes,

If this world, O sinful creature, with the riches, or the honours, or the pleasures of it be all thy chosen happiness, what universal grief and vexation will overspread all the powers of thy nature, when thou shalt be torn away from them all, even from all thy happiness by death, and have nothing come in the room of them, nothing to relieve thy piercing grief, nothing to divert or amuse this vexation, nothing to soothe

⁵³ Watts, *Works*, 2:270; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:209.

⁵⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:271; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:210.

⁵⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:271; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:212.

⁵⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:272; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:213.

⁵⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:272; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:213–14.

⁵⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:272; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:215.

or ease this eternal pain at the heart?⁵⁹

This removal of happiness causes sorrow to flood through the hardened heart. For Watts, the loss of present comforts leads to what Christ describes in Matthew 13:42, namely, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. For Watts, “The tongue [becomes] almost dried with long wailings and outcries, and the teeth gnashing with madness of thought.”⁶⁰

Sixth, the worm represents unsatisfied “raging desires of ease and pleasure,” which include “perpetual disappointment and endless confusion.”⁶¹ Because of his desire for happiness, man will adopt various schemes and efforts to pursue it in hell. But all his efforts will prove futile. Watts speaks of “men of wicked sensuality” who “drenched their souls in fleshly appetite” by placing their chief satisfaction in temporal lusts.⁶² These appetites continue in hell, but they go unsatisfied. Watts believes the soul has desires for ease and happiness in hell. Since “God...the only true source of happiness...is forever departed and gone...the natural appetite of felicity will be ever wakeful and violent.”⁶³

Seventh, the worm represents ungratified “vexing envy” against the “saints in glory.”⁶⁴ “[L]ike a viper,” envy “preys upon their own entrails.”⁶⁵

Eighth, the worm represents the “perpetual expectation and dread of new and

⁵⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:272; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:215.

⁶⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:272; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:216.

⁶¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:273; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:216.

⁶² Watts, *Works*, 2:273; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:216.

⁶³ Watts, *Works*, 2:273; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:217. Watts makes a passing reference to the English poet John Milton (1608–1674) in this section. Though he does not provide a citation, he says that Milton has “represented this part of misery...in a beautiful manner.” It is most likely a reference to Book X of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* wherein sinners are changed into serpents and brought back to the garden to eat from the tree of life. When they begin to fulfill their desires, the fruit turns into ashes. See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. David Scott Kastan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), 306–46. For more on this, see Leyland Ryken, “Paradise Lost by John Milton (1608–1674),” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, eds. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 138–51.

⁶⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:273; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:218.

⁶⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:274; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:219.

increasing punishments without end.”⁶⁶ Just as the saints grow in their experience of holiness and happiness in heaven, sinners grow in their experience of judgment and vengeance in hell. “There are none,” says Watts, “whose souls will be filled so high with the dread and horror of increasing woes, as lewd and profane writers, profane and immoral princes, or cruel persecutors of religion.”⁶⁷

The duration of hell. Watts believes that hell is an eternal reality for four main reasons.⁶⁸ First, Christ and his apostles teach it in a “plain and unanswerable” manner, thereby making it part of the “foundation of our faith and practice.”⁶⁹ Second, the duration of punishment must be proportionate to God’s nature. Because he is infinite being, all sin is “an affront to the divine authority, and therefore its aggravations arise in that proportion to a sort of infinity.”⁷⁰ Third, the duration of punishment must be proportionate to God’s law. Sinners in hell cannot meet the demands of the law because of their own inability. If a sinner has “nothing found in the heart...but obstinacy, and malice, and revenge, cursing and blasphemy against the Almighty...[how can] the prisoners [be] released from vengeance?”⁷¹ Fourth, the duration of punishment must be

⁶⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:274; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:220.

⁶⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:274; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:221. Watts references Jeroboam as an example (1 Kgs 14–16).

⁶⁸ See also Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992), 3:607. For discussions on the controversy over the eternity of hell, see D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964); Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). For a modern argument in support of eternal torment, see Denny Burk, “Eternal Conscious Torment,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. Preston M. Sprinkle, Counterpoint Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 17–60.

⁶⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:289; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:263–64

⁷⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:289; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:266. In this section, Watts argues for degrees of sin in terms of severity and torture; however, regardless of the degree of torture, the punishment is perpetual. He writes, “Sodom and Gomorrah, Capernaum and Bethsaida, may all suffer infinite or everlasting sorrow, and yet the degrees of their pain may be exceeding different all the while. They may have the same infinity of duration.” Watts, *Works*, 2:289; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:268.

⁷¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:291; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:270. Watts supports this statement by cautioning that a sinner’s practice on earth is related to his practice in hell. Obstinacy, for example, is often increased as a punishment. Watts appeals to Pharaoh as an example. Watts, *Works*, 2:291; Watts, *The*

proportionate to the nature of the soul. It is immortal. God does not change the immortality of the soul. As such, he cannot make the immortal soul in hell “happy without giving him a new temper of holiness, which he is not obligated to do by any perfection of his nature.”⁷²

The Excellency of Heaven: Perfection

Richard Baxter (1615–1691) maintained that the “spiritual Christian” should “bend [his] soul to study eternity” and “bathe [his] soul in heaven’s delight.”⁷³ He believed this was important because heaven is “the very business he lives for, and the place he must be in forever.”⁷⁴ Watts would agree wholeheartedly.⁷⁵ Our entrance into heaven will mark the perfection of the soul. This perfection is not to “be taken here in its most extensive, absolute, and sublime sense.”⁷⁶ Watts does not believe that the soul will be perfect like God in his infinite nature. Rather, perfection is to “be taken in a comparative sense.”⁷⁷ Such perfection includes varying kinds and degrees of “employments and pleasures,”⁷⁸ whereby we increase in knowledge, holiness, and joy.⁷⁹

World to Come, 2:271.

⁷² Watts, *Works*, 2:292; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:274.

⁷³ Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:243.

⁷⁴ Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:244.

⁷⁵ Watts’ contemporary Philip Doddridge was deeply influenced by Baxter as well. It is probable that Watts is in some measure responsible for extending Baxterian influence into eighteenth-century dissent. For more on this, see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge: A Study in a Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); Robert Strivens, *Philip Doddridge and the Shaping of Evangelical Dissent* (London: Routledge, 2016), 121–23.

⁷⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:26; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 70.

⁷⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:26; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 71–72.

⁷⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:32; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 96.

⁷⁹ The published title of this discourse affirms this statement: “The Happiness of Separate Spirits, &c. Attempted in a Funeral Discourse in Memory of Sr John Hartopp, Bart Deceased.” Watts, *Works*, 2:23; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 60. Likewise, Baxter links happiness directly to heavenly perfection. He calls rest in heaven the “most happy estate of a Christian.” Like Watts, Baxter believes the heavenly state is both active and passive. In heaven, “our title will be perfect, and perfectly clear; ourselves,

The state of perfection. Knowledge without any mixture of sin is the first aspect of perfection. This is central to the soul's happiness in heaven. "Part of the happiness," explains Watts, "consists in contemplation; and the more excellent the object in which we contemplate, the more perfect our acquaintance with it, the greater is our happiness."⁸⁰ For the Christian, the most excellent object of all knowledge is God.⁸¹ True happiness, then, is dependent upon the knowledge of him.⁸² Watts remarks,

We shall have a more immediate and intuitive view of God and Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, without such mediums as are now necessary for our instruction. We shall know them in a manner something akin to the way whereby God knows us, though not in the same degree of perfection, for that is impossible. Yet in these respects our knowledge shall bear some resemblance to the knowledge of God himself, *viz.* that it shall be not merely a rational knowledge, by inferences drawn from his works, not merely a knowledge by narration, or report and testimony, such as we now enjoy by his word, but it shall be such a sort of knowledge as we have of a man when we see his face, and it shall also be a certain and unwavering knowledge, without remaining doubts, without error or mistake.⁸³

By way of example, Watts mentions the eternal relations between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, as a truth that will shine brighter in heaven. Knowledge of the triune God "in their sublime and mysterious relations...their most amazing contrivances and transactions" will be the "most pleasing enquiry and delicious contemplation."⁸⁴

The second aspect of perfection is "a glorious degree of holiness, without the

and so our capacity, perfect; our possession and security for its perpetuity perfect; our reception of [God] perfect; our motion or action in and upon him perfect: and, therefore our fruition of him, and consequently our happiness, will be perfect." Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:10.

⁸⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:26; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 72.

⁸¹ Francis Turretin notes, "The beatific vision implies the most perfect and clear knowledge of God and of divine things." Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:610. For a survey of the beatific vision in Reformed thought see, Hans Borsma, *Seeing God: The Beatific Vision in Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 315–53.

⁸² Watts, *Works*, 2:26; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 73. Watts lists the attributes of self-sufficiency, eternity, wisdom, power, justice, holiness, goodness, and truth. For an example of the connection between the attributes of God and knowledge of God in Puritan thought, see George Swinnock, *The Blessed and Boundless God*, ed. J. Stephen Yuille (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2014).

⁸³ Watts, *Works*, 2:27; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 76.

⁸⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:26; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 74.

mixture of the least sin.”⁸⁵ We will love God without the least imperfection. According to Watts, this perfect love is grounded in the love of the triune God. “An eternal stream of love” flows “through every member, and blesseth all the inhabitants of that land with its divine refreshment.”⁸⁶ In addition, we will love our neighbor. In the “happy mansions” of eternity, there is no envy, malice, slander, discord, anger, injury, or resentment.⁸⁷

The third aspect of perfection is joy. As in the case of knowledge and holiness, joy in this world is marred by sin. In heaven, however, joy is perfected because the saints can “feel and enjoy...the warmest and sweetest affection of their hearts...for every moment they taste his love.”⁸⁸ According to Watts, this joy includes satisfaction, full assurance, and sacred pleasures from “immediate impressions” of God’s love.⁸⁹ Because God is never absent, the saints “cannot be unhappy.”⁹⁰

The nature of perfection. Having explained heavenly perfection in terms of knowledge, holiness, and joy, Watts shares several “pleasing speculations,” which ought to give our “thoughts a sacred entertainment.”⁹¹ First, perfection does not mean uniformity among the saints. Perfection in heaven “admits...a great variety of employments and pleasures” and “real diversities of genius among the spirits.”⁹² Watts

⁸⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:27; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 77.

⁸⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:29; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 84.

⁸⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:29; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 82–83.

⁸⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:29; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 89. Baxter argues that God’s love through Christ is the “most singular honour and ornament” of the heavenly state. He writes, “Surely, love is the most precious ingredient to the whole composition...to have this our Redeemer ever before our eyes, and the liveliest sense and freshest remembrance of that dying bleeding love upon our souls!” Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:34.

⁸⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:31; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 89.

⁹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:31; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 91.

⁹¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:32; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 96.

⁹² Watts, *Works*, 2:36; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 97–98.

speculates that “the church on earth is but a training school for the church on high.”⁹³ This means, for instance, that those of extraordinary intellect on earth will assume a similar state in glory. A historian, such as Eusebius, will entertain heaven with the new histories of divine providence.⁹⁴ The correspondence between earth and heaven does not only apply to the intellect. Heaven is a place where Christians of all kinds will be “peculiarly fitted for special rewards.”⁹⁵

Second, perfection allows for different degrees of blessedness. This is “according to the different capacities of spirits, and their different degrees of preparation.”⁹⁶ Those in heaven enjoy varying degrees of happiness based upon their labor and faithfulness in the “race” appointed to them.⁹⁷ For Watts, there is an “equitable proportion” in the reward of happiness according to the “labours of the race.”⁹⁸ Therefore, we can be “trained up by [our] stations and sacred services on earth for more elevated employments and joys.”⁹⁹

Third, perfection arrives in “rich and endless variety” because the soul enjoys “perpetual changes of business and delights.”¹⁰⁰ Watts does not believe that heaven is confined to a “sedentary state of inactive contemplation”; rather, it will include

⁹³ Watts, *Works*, 2:36; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 109.

⁹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:36; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 108–09. See, Eusebius, *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. F. Crusé (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998). For more on Burnet, see Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, 2 vols. (London: Printed by T.H. for Richard Chiswel, 1679-81); and T. E. S. Clarke and H. C. Foxcroft, *A Life of Gilbert Brunet: Bishop of Salisbury* (Cambridge: University Press, 1907).

⁹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:36; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 109.

⁹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:36; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 111.

⁹⁷ Watts bases this argument on Matt. 10:40–42; Dan 8:2–3; 1 Cor 3:8; and 2 Cor 4:17. See Watts, *Works*, 2:37; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 112–16.

⁹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:39; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 121. See 1 Cor 11:24; Gal 5:7; Phil 3:13; 2 Tim 4:7; and Heb 11:1.

⁹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:39; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 122. Watts appeals to David, Deborah, Abraham, Moses, and Paul as examples of this claim, due to the magnitude of their earthy labors and trials.

¹⁰⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:41; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 129. Watts argues this is the meaning of the expression “seeing God” in Matt 5:8 and 1 Cor 13:12.

activity.¹⁰¹ He writes,

Contemplation indeed is a noble pleasure, and the joy of it rises high when it is fixed on the sublimest objects, and when the faculties are all exalted and refined. But surely such a sight of God and our dear Redeemer, as we shall enjoy above, will awaken and animate all the active and sprightly powers of the soul, and set all the springs of love and zeal at work in the most illustrious instances of unknown and glorious duty.¹⁰²

The first activity is worship, including praise, prayer, and preaching.¹⁰³ Watts imagines Christ summoning “all heaven to hear him publish some new and surprising discoveries.”¹⁰⁴ It also includes “spiritual pleasure” that arise in the soul from “melodious joys” of praise.¹⁰⁵ The second activity is the “immediate addressing” of the throne of Christ:

[The saints will be] engaged, millions at once, in social worship; and sometimes acting apart, and raised in sublime meditation of God, or in a fixed vision of his blissful face, with an act of sacred adoration, while their intellectual powers are almost lost in sweet amazement... But at other times they may be making a report to him [Christ Jesus] of their faithful execution of some divine commission they received from him, to be fulfilled either in heaven or in earth, or in unknown and distant worlds.¹⁰⁶

The third activity is recounting the acts of God’s providence, wisdom, and mercy. The “darkness and entanglement” of furious theological disputes will be replaced by “delightful instruction” from superior spirits to “those of lower rank, or on souls lately

¹⁰¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:42; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 132.

¹⁰² Watts, *Works*, 2:42; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 132.

¹⁰³ Watts, *Works*, 2:42; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 134–39. Watts describes praise in heaven in terms of (1) a most glorious and perfect celebration, (2) a harmony of language (without tongue or ear), and (3) a melody of the soul (prior to the resurrection). With respect to prayer, Watts writes, “What is prayer, but the desire of a created spirit in an humble manner made known to its Creator? Does not every saint above desire to know God, to love and serve him, to be employed for his honour, and to enjoy the eternal continuance of his love and its own felicity? May not each happy spirit in heaven exert theses desires in a way of solemn address to the divine Majesty?” Watts, *Works*, 2:43; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 136.

¹⁰⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:43; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:43; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 136.

¹⁰⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:44–45; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 142.

arrived” to heaven.¹⁰⁷ The fourth activity is visiting new regions of the earth. “Sometimes we may entertain our holy curiosity there...and bring back from thence new lectures of divine wisdom, or tidings of the affairs of those provinces, to entertain our fellow-spirits.”¹⁰⁸ The fifth activity is governing “whole provinces of intelligent beings.”¹⁰⁹

The increase of perfection. Perfection in heaven leaves “room for large additions and continual improvement.”¹¹⁰ For starters, we will increase in knowledge. The faculty of reason is not lost in heaven. On the contrary, it is essential to happiness because it is the instrument by which we know God’s glory, work, and nature. This knowledge cannot be exhausted; therefore, we will continually increase in knowledge.¹¹¹ There is an “incomprehensible variety of objects” to be “proposed to our minds in the future state.”¹¹² The communication of God’s infinite wisdom, goodness, faithfulness, and power is done “as he sees necessary for our business and blessedness.”¹¹³

Second, we will increase in holiness. Watts clarifies, “holiness of an innocent creature consists in attaining the knowledge of the nature and will of God...in the various exercises of love to God in an exact proportion to its knowledge.”¹¹⁴ Again,

The degrees of [the soul’s] grace and holiness, or conformity to God, may grow brighter, and much improve by nearer approaches to God, longer acquaintance with him, and the continued influences of his majesty and love...The rule and measure of their duty is their knowledge, and the rule and measure of their knowledge is their

¹⁰⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:45; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 144. Watts describes these times of instruction as “special seasons for the holy conference of the saints” which result in “sweet conversations.”

¹⁰⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:45; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 145.

¹⁰⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:46; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 147. Watts supports this claim based upon (1) the angels Gabriel and Michael who managed the affairs of Greece (Dan 8–9), and (2) the angels who lead the multitude of heavenly hosts (Luke 2:9–13).

¹¹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:46; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 148.

¹¹¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:48; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 152–53.

¹¹² Watts, *Works*, 2:48; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 156.

¹¹³ Watts, *Works*, 2:48; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 156.

¹¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:57; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 188.

own capacity, and their means of discovery. They never fall short of their duty, and therefore, they have no sin: And thus their holiness may be every moment perfect, and yet perhaps every moment increasing, as their capacities are enlarged, and receive new discoveries through all the ages of their immortality.¹¹⁵

In sum, for Watts, the excellency of heaven is best expressed by the soul's perfection in the intermediate state. This perfection is summed up in holiness and happiness. From here, Watts works backwards. If the perfection of heaven is holiness and happiness, then the essence of the spiritual life at present is holiness and happiness begun.

Preparation for Heavenly Felicity

Watts argues that “those who shall enjoy the heavenly blessedness hereafter, must be prepared for it here in this world, by the operation of the blessed God.”¹¹⁶ There are two ways in which this happens. The first is justification—recovery from the “relative” evil of sin. The second is sanctification—recovery from the “real” evil of sin. The first is positional, whereas the second is practical. It is the second that occupies the believer's main focus. God “works up” the soul to a “fitness for heaven” by way of “gradual operations.”¹¹⁷

First, God prepares the soul for heavenly felicity, by assuring us of the reality and blessedness of heaven.¹¹⁸ Watts writes,

Now the blessed God himself prepares his own people for this heaven of happiness by giving them a full conviction and assurance of the truth of all these divine discoveries [i.e., vision of heaven]; he impresses them upon their heart with power, and makes them attend to those divine impressions. Every true Christian has learned to say within himself, ‘This celestial blessedness is no dream, is no painted vision, no gay scene of flattering fancy, nor is it a matter of doubtful dispute, or of uncertain opinion. I am assured of it from the words of Christ, the Son of God.’”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:57; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 188, 190.

¹¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:199; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:2. The title to this discourse is: “A Soul Prepared for Heaven.” It is based on 2 Cor 5:5, “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God.” Baxter emphasizes the preparation of the Christian for the heavenly state. See *Practical Works*, 3:266–72.

¹¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:200; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:4.

¹¹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:200; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:4–5

¹¹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:201–02; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:8.

Second, God prepares his people by “purifying them from every defilement that might unfit them from the blessedness of heaven.”¹²⁰ Watts contends that sins such as pride, envy, malice, and revenge are “slain by the work of the Spirit of God” over the course of our lives.¹²¹ While perfection is not obtainable prior to heaven, there is a great deal of purifying work that can be done. The soul can “be wrought up to a temper in some measure fit to enter into that blessedness.”¹²² Watts believes God is training the soul for the happiness of heaven by way of sanctification. “Happy souls, who feel themselves more and more released from the bonds of...[sinful] iniquities.”¹²³

Third, God prepares the soul by “loosening and weaning our hearts from all those lawful things in this life, which are not to be enjoyed in heaven.”¹²⁴ Sensual appetites and carnal desires will no longer trouble us in the perfected state. God reorders the affections and weans the soul from worldly amusements and entertainments. He readies the soul for heaven by “sharp strokes of affliction, making our interest in the creature bitter to us...[or] by permitting our earthy enjoyments to plunge us into difficulties.”¹²⁵

Fourth, God prepares the soul by providing “a holy appetite...suited to the provisions of the heavenly world,” which in turn raises the “desires and tendencies of the soul” toward the perfect heavenly state.¹²⁶ This change is manifested in three particular

¹²⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:202; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:9.

¹²¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:202; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:11.

¹²² Watts, *Works*, 2:202; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:11.

¹²³ Watts, *Works*, 2:202; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:11.

¹²⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:203; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:11. Likewise, Baxter writes, “A heart in heaven is the highest excellency of your spirits here, and the noblest part of your Christian disposition...Three is not only a common excellency, whereby a Christian differs from the world, but also a peculiar nobleness of spirit, where-by the more excellent differ from the rest; and this lies especially in a higher and more heavenly frame of spirit.” Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:245.

¹²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:203; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:13

¹²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:204; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:14.

“wishes” in the heart of a Christian. First, we wish for the “felicitating presence of God.”¹²⁷ Second, we wish for the “sweet society of Jesus.”¹²⁸ Third, we wish to be free from sin, pain, and sorrow. The “soul discovers a degree of preparation” for heavenly felicity when it says “with a holy groan and grief of the heart, O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?”¹²⁹ All of these wishes are “divine breathings in the soul” which are “working up the Christian to a blessed meetness of [heavenly] felicity.”¹³⁰

Fifth, God prepares the soul by conforming it to the likeness of Christ. God works to form “the temper of our minds into a likeness to the inhabitants of heaven.”¹³¹ For Watts, it is hard to imagine being a friend or having “free conversation” with the “blessed inhabitants of paradise” without the same degree of holiness.¹³²

Sixth, God prepares the soul by walking with us through trials, sufferings, and conflicts.¹³³ Watts writes,

When the spirits of a creature are almost worn out with the toilsome labours of the day, what an additional sweetness does he find in rest and repose! What an inward relish and satisfaction to the soul, that has been fatigued under a long and tedious war with sins and temptations, to be transported to such a place where sin cannot follow them, and temptation can never reach them! How will it enhance all the felicities of the heavenly world when we enter into it, to feel ourselves released from all the trials and distresses, and sufferings, which we have sustained in our travels thitherwards!¹³⁴

¹²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:204; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:15. Watts references Pss 17:15; 27:4; 42:2.

¹²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:204; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:16. See Phil 1:23.

¹²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:204; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:16.

¹³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:204; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:16–17. Watts exhorts, “Happy [is the] heart, which feels these holy aspirations, these divine breathings.”

¹³¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:205; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:17. These inhabitants include God, Christ, angels, and saints.

¹³² Watts, *Works*, 2:205; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:17–18.

¹³³ Watts, *Works*, 2:205; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:18.

¹³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:205; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:18–19.

Seventh, God prepares the soul by providing “employments of the heavenly world” and initiating their practice in this world.”¹³⁵ These “employments” include contemplation, praise, service, and friendship.¹³⁶ Watts believed that God is training Christians for the blessedness of the “sweet society” in heaven. This society of saints is marked by “fervent love to each other” and “mutual delight in holy converse.”¹³⁷ The happiness of this society is realized currently in this world in the body of Christ.

Eighth, God prepares the soul by giving “a pledge and earnest of the blessedness of heaven.”¹³⁸ This pledge is the Holy Spirit, who grants us a foretaste of the heavenly world.¹³⁹ These operations of the Spirit are “too joyful and glorious to be fully expressed in mortal language.”¹⁴⁰

Holiness, Happiness, and the Excellency of Heaven

This chapter detailed how Watts’ understanding of the last things influences his spirituality of holiness and happiness. There are two important implications.

First, Watts sees the soul’s perfection as central to holiness and happiness.

While the bodily resurrection shapes his eschatological hope, it is the condition of the

¹³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:206; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:20–21. In the fifth “motive to a heavenly life,” Baxter notes, “the diligent keeping of your hearts on heaven, will preserve the vigor of all your graces, and put life into all your duties.” Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:249.

¹³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:206; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:21–23. Baxter states, “The work of praising God, being the most heavenly work, is likely to raise us to the most heavenly temper. This is the work of those saints and angels, and this will be our everlasting work. If we were more taken up with this employment now, we should be liker [sp.] to what we shall be then.” *Practical Works*, 3:270.

¹³⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:207; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:23. Baxter also speaks of friendship in heaven: “If it be a happiness to live with the saints in their imperfection, when they have sin to embitter, as well as holiness to sweeten their society, what will it be to live with them in their perfection, where the saints are wholly and only saints?” Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:39–40.

¹³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:20; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:24.

¹³⁹ Baxter likewise notes the importance of the Holy Spirit under what he terms “general helps to a heavenly life.” He exhorts his readers to be “a careful observer of the drawings of the Spirit, and fearful of quenching its motions, of resisting its workings... If thou wilt not follow the Spirit while it would draw thee to Christ and to thy duty how should it lead thee to heaven, and bring thy heart into the presence of God?” Baxter, *Practical Works*, 3:271.

¹⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:207; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:24.

soul in its intermediate state (in heaven) that receives most of his attention. To be in heaven is to be holy and happy. This shapes our approach to the spiritual life at present. Happiness is tied directly to raising “our thoughts, and wonder at the blessedness of the saints and angels in the upper world.”¹⁴¹ This blessedness consists of knowledge, holiness, and joy. Holiness consists of “contempt of this world, a sacred disregard of temporal things raised by the sight of eternal things.”¹⁴² Watts explains,

If we look upwards to heaven, we shall behold there all the inhabitants looking down with a sacred contempt upon the trifles, amusements, businesses, and cares of this present life, that engross our affections, awaken our desires, fill our hearts with pleasure or pain, and our flesh with constant labour. With what holy scorn do you think those souls, who are dismissed from flesh, look down upon the hurries and bustles of this present state, in which we are engaged? They dwell in the full sight of those glories which they hoped for here on earth, and their intimate acquaintance with the pleasures of that upper world, and the divine sensations that are raised in them there, make them contemn all the pleasures of this state, and every thing below heaven. *This is a part of eternal life, this belongs in some degree to every believer; for he is not a believer that is not got above this world in a good measure; he is not a Christian, who is not weaned, in some degree, from this world.*¹⁴³

Second, Watts sees the excellency of heaven (holiness and happiness) as the main motivation for pursuing godliness now. God is preparing us at present for what awaits us in glory. With respect to holiness, Watts writes,

Though the highest and holiest saint in heaven can claim nothing there by the way of merit, for it is our Lord Jesus Christ alone who has purchased all the unknown blessings, yet he will distribute them according to the different characters and degrees of holiness which his saints possessed on earth... grace fits the soul for glory, so a larger degree of grace advances and widens the capacity of the soul and prepares it to receive a larger degree of glory.¹⁴⁴

It is important to note those aspects of Watts’ eschatology which impact his spirituality. For example, Watts uses death as a motivating factor in the Christian life.¹⁴⁵ He argues that

¹⁴¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:133; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 1 (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1721), 1:382.

¹⁴² Watts, *Works*, 1:13; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:35.

¹⁴³ Watts, *Works*, 1:13; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:35–36. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:39; Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 120–21.

¹⁴⁵ Watts published three sermons on death as a blessing to the saints. See Watts, *Works*,

the gospel causes death to be “rendered useful and beneficial to every Christian.”¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere, he notes that death “awakens our soul to the actual preparation for its departure.”¹⁴⁷ In addition to death, Watts likewise uses hell as a motivation to grow in godliness.¹⁴⁸ These “last things”¹⁴⁹ ought to be made a present reality in the believer’s life. When this is so, there will be holiness and happiness.

1:429–77; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 3 (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1729), 3:280–410.

¹⁴⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:443; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:319–22.

¹⁴⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:446; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:329.

¹⁴⁸ See the six reflections on the nature of hell in Section III of Watts’ discourse, “The Nature of the Punishments of Hell.” Watts, *Works*, 2:282–87; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:241–60. As an example, Watts argues the imminent danger of hell teaches the Christian “the infinite value and worth of the gospel of Christ.” Watts, *Works*, 2:286; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:256.

¹⁴⁹ Watts understands this phrase to include four specific aspects: death, judgement, heaven, and hell. See Watts, *Works*, 5:220; Isaac Watts, *The Improvement of the Mind: Or, a Supplement to the Art of Logick: Containing a Variety of Remarks and Rules for The Attainment and Communication of Useful Knowledge, in Religion, in Sciences, and in Common Life* (London: James Brackstone, 1741), 97. For more on Reformed and Puritan understanding of the four last things, see J. Stephen Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 203; H. Quistorp, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Last Things* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1955); William Bates, *The Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell, Practically Considered and Applied in Several Discourses* (London: Brabazon Aylmer, 1691); John Bunyan, *Serious Meditations Upon the Four Last Things, Death, Judgement, Heaven, and Hell*, 3rd ed. (London: Francis Smith, 1680); and Robert Bolton, *Four Last Things, Death, Judgement, Hell, and Heaven* (London: George Miller, 1632).

CHAPTER 6

THE TRI-UNITY OF GOD

Introduction

We are to “seek the Lord and his strength” because of the “wondrous works that he has done” (Ps 105:3–4).¹ That is to say, we are to pursue the knowledge of God by way of his wondrous works. The quest begins with the doctrine of God’s tri-unity.² It is the most dynamic component of the Christian faith. Augustine noted, “Nowhere else is a mistake more dangerous, or the search more laborious, or discovery more advantageous.”³ Watts understood this complexity, and over the course of his life he wrestled deeply with the triune nature of God. The details of Watts’ thoughts on the Trinity have produced doubts regarding his consistency with confessional Trinitarianism, and in turn, has impacted his legacy.⁴

This chapter examines Watts’ understanding of the triune God, in his historical

¹ This text is foundational to Augustine’s writing on the Triune God. See Augustine, *The Trinity*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991). In his introduction to this work, Edmund Hill notes, “Three times, at key points of his [Augustine’s] work, he quotes Psalm 105:3–4...It is a summons addressed in the plural to all who fear the Lord. We are reminded of it at the beginning of the quest [quest to understand and communicate the person and work of the Trinity] at the crucial turn it takes halfway through...and at the end, when he is about to sum up and declare the quest a magnificent, a most successful failure.” Edmund Hill, introduction to *The Trinity*, by Augustine, ed. John E. Rotelle (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 21.

² For an overview of the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity, see Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), 87–450.

³ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 1.1, 68.

⁴ Scott Aniol, “Was Isaac Watts Unitarian?: Athanasian Trinitarianism and the Boundary of Christian Fellowship,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 22 (2017): 91–103. For brief histories of the controversy surrounding Watts, see Arthur Paul Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works* (London: Independent Press, 1948) 103–26; Edwin Paxton Hood, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Writings, His Homes and Friends* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1875), 308–13; Thomas Gibbons, *Memoirs of Isaac Watts* (London: n.p., 1780), 42–112; Thomas Milner, *The Life, Times and Correspondence of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1834), 585–606; Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 44–46.

and theological context, for the purpose of determining its impact on his spirituality.⁵ The first section surveys the Trinitarian controversies of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England. The second section details Watts' understanding of the Trinity as found in his major published works on the subject. It evaluates Watts' Trinitarianism in order to determine (1) how it differs from confessional formulae, and (2) how it relates specifically to the formulations of John Flavel and Thomas Goodwin. The third section summarizes Watts' Trinitarianism and assesses its impact on his spirituality.

Trinitarian Controversy

Disputes surrounding the Trinity have been common throughout church history. The historical development of Trinitarian thought has led to a number of dissenting opinions within various theological communities.⁶ Arius argued that the Son was a created being, and that "God's revelation in human history tells us nothing about

⁵ The person and work of the Holy Spirit factor into Watts' Trinitarian thought. However, a full treatment of his pneumatology is beyond the scope of this dissertation and requires additional research. Furthermore, most of Watts' unique Trinitarian formulae is related to the Son. There are specific areas in which Watts deals with the Spirit that are important to note. First, Watts writes on the ordinary and extraordinary witness of the Spirit. See Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Rev. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev. George Burder* (London: J. Barfield, 1810), 1:703–21; Isaac Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects. To Which is Added, An Essay on the Powers and Contests of the Flesh and Spirit*, (London: J. Oswald and J. Buckland, 1747), 227–78; Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 50. Another important work on the Spirit is "The First Fruits of the Spirit, or a Foretaste of Heaven." See Watts, *Works*, 2:238–51; Isaac Watts, *The World to Come: Or, Discourses on the Joys or Sorrows of Departed Souls at Death, and the Glory or Terror of the Resurrection* 2nd ed. (London: T. Longman and J. Brackstone, 1745), 2:113–53. A third important work is his treatment of the biblical language regarding prayer to the Spirit. Watts struggles with why Scripture does not give any clear and direct examples of praying to the Spirit. See Watts, *Works*, 6:347–354; Isaac Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity: Or, Father, Son, and Spirit, Three Persons and One God, Asserted and Prov'd, With Their Divine Rights and Honors Vindicated by Plain Evidence of Scripture, Without Aid or Incumbrances of Humans Schemes. Written Chiefly for the Use of Private Christians* (London: J. Clark, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1722), 212–33. Fourthly, Watts follows a general Puritan understanding of the Spirit's work in holiness. See Watts, *Works*, 1:530–39; J. Guyse, et al., *Faith and Practice Represented in Fifty-four Sermons on the Principal Heads of Christian Religion; Preached at Berry-Street, 1733. Published for the Use of Families, Especially on the Lord's-Day Evenings* (London: R. Hett and J. Oswald, 1735), 1:403–27; Isaac Watts, *The Redeemer and the Sanctifier: Or the Sacrifice of Christ and the Operations of the Spirit Vindicated* (London: J. Oswald, 1736); Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 195.

⁶ These early controversies were multidimensional. They included significant doctrinal debates surrounding Adoptionism, Arianism, Nestorianism, and Marcionism. For details, see Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 245.

who he is eternally.”⁷ The result of this controversy was a confessional statement at the Council of Nicaea (325), which condemned Arianism while articulating that the Son is of the same substance as the Father.⁸ The Creed of Nicaea, and subsequently the Chalcedon Definition, set the bounds for orthodox confessional Trinitarianism.

Since then, there have been various challenges to the doctrine of the Trinity. One of the most serious is associated with the name Fausto Paolo Sozzini (1539–1604). His view became known as “Socinianism,” and was popularized in the *Racovian Catechism* of 1605.⁹ John Biddle (1615–1662), a schoolmaster in Gloucester, published an English edition.¹⁰ Essentially, Socinianism denies the full deity of the Son and the Spirit; they are not of the same substance as the Father.¹¹ Biddle’s departure from confessional Trinitarianism was complicated by the fact that his “writings are replete with quotations

⁷ Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 109. For details on the Arian controversy, see Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 109–29; R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988); Charles Kannengiesser, *Arius and Athanasius: Two Alexandrian Theologians* (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1991). Athanasius, a prominent theologian during this controversy, rightly argued against Arianism by holding to the indivisibility of the Triune God. Letham argues that Athanasius was instrumental in bringing meaning to both “*ousia* and of *hypostasis*, leading to an agreement at the Council of Alexandria in 362 that God is one being (*ousia*) and three persons (*hypostasis*).” Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 138–43.

⁸ For the subsequent debate focused on the *filioque* clause, see Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 163–77; Thomas F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Perspectives: Toward Doctrinal Agreement* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 21–40; Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen Hildebrand (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011); Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Fredrick Williams and Lionel Wickham (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002).

⁹ Alan P. F. Sell, *Christ and Controversy: The Person of Christ in Nonconformist Thought and Ecclesial Experience, 1600–2000* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 11–12. Sell notes that the catechism arrived in England around 1609. For the *Racovian Catechism*, see Thomas Rees, *The Racovian Catechism, with Notes and Illustrations* (London: Longman, 1818). See also Philip Dixon, “*Nice and Hot Disputes*”: *The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 39–42. For more on Socinianism, see H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Lee Gatiss, “Socinianism and John Owen,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 4 (2016): 43–62.

¹⁰ Sell, *Christ and Controversy*, 12.

¹¹ See John Biddle, *XII Arguments Drawn out of Scripture: Wherein the Commonly-Received Opinion Touching the Deity of the Holy Spirit is Clearly and Fully Refuted* (London, n.p., 1647). Biddle went on to publish two more works, arguing against the eternal generation of the Son and the independence of the Spirit. See John Biddle, *A Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity, according to the Scripture* (London: n.p., 1647); John Biddle, *A Twofold Catechism: The One Simply Called A Scripture Catechism; The Other A Brief Scripture Catechism for Children* (London: Printed by J Cottrel, 1654).

from the Bible, as befits one who stoutly maintained the sufficiency of Scripture.”¹² In 1654, at the request of the Council of State, John Owen formally waded into the controversy. The next year, he published a large volume, in which he directly refuted Biddle’s position.¹³ Socinianism eventually morphed into Unitarianism—a movement that was still prevalent in Watts’ day.

Arians, Socinians, and even Unitarians often appealed “to the sufficiency of Scripture” to defend their positions.¹⁴ Each was in a way “proto-fundamentalist—liberal ones, no doubt, but nevertheless mirror images of later conservative fundamentalist; for...[each] thought they were reading truth straight off the text.”¹⁵ Coupled with their appeal to the sufficiency of Scripture was their creedal antipathy. This had a marked impact on orthodox nonconformists and the debate came to a head in 1719 at the Salters’ Hall Conference.¹⁶ Although convened to address the doctrine of the Trinity,¹⁷ the focal point quickly shifted to the sufficiency of Scripture. The Dissenters were divided into two groups. The first, subscribers, were in favor of adopting a “subscription to the Trinitarian

¹² Sell, *Christ and Controversy*, 14.

¹³ See John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 12, *Vindiciae Evangelicae; or The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, ed. William H. Gould (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009). Owen’s defense of orthodox Trinitarianism is immense. For a study of Owen’s Trinitarianism, see Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1998); and Brian Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007).

¹⁴ Sell, *Christ and Controversy*, 30.

¹⁵ Sell, *Christ and Controversy*, 31.

¹⁶ For more on the debate, see Allan Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter: 1650–1875* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1962); John Shute Barrington, *An Account of the Late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers at Salters Hall, Occasioned by the Difference Among their Brethren in the Country: With Some Thoughts Concerning the Imposition of Human Forms for Articles of Faith. In a Letter to the Reverend Dr. Gale* (London: J. Roberts, 1719); and Alexander Gordan, *Addresses Biographical and Historical* (Strand, London: The Lindsey Press, 1922), 130–53. For a first-hand account, see Thomas Ridgley, *The Unreasonableness of the Charge of Imposition Exhibited Against Several Dissenting Ministers In and About London* (London: John Clark, 1719).

¹⁷ Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life* (London: Colburn and Bentley, 1829), 414.

articles in the *Thirty-Nine Articles* or the *Westminster Catechism*.”¹⁸ The second group, non-subscribers, argued that Christians should not be required to affirm any language that was not found in the Bible. The vote at Salters’ Hall was fifty-three for subscription and fifty-seven for non-subscription. It is important to note that the non-subscribers did not deny the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity but argued for the language of Scripture without any imposition of “human creeds.”¹⁹ Expectedly, the vote led to friction among nonconformist ministers.²⁰ It also set the stage for doctrinal controversy related to the “somewhat narrower question of the eternal generation of the Son.”²¹ It is at this point that Watts entered the fray. His desire was laudable—to reconcile the opposing parties.²² It is in this context that Watts’ Trinitarian writings must be examined.

Trinitarian Orthodoxy

Beginning in 1722, Watts published five works and one sermon, dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity.²³ Each has its own particular context. Together, they confirm the development of Watts’ thought on the subject. Importantly, his final three publications

¹⁸ Xuafang Xu, “Anne Dutton Trinitarian Spirituality” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 54.

¹⁹ Xu, “Anne Dutton Trinitarian Spirituality,” 55. For a brief overview of what led to the Salters’ Hall Conference, see Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works*, 110–11.

²⁰ The eighteenth-century General and Particular Baptists are a case in point. Xu notes, “Only one of the fifteen General Baptists was a Subscriber, all but two of the sixteenth Particular Baptists voted for subscription to a Trinitarian confession of faith. The Particular Baptist Subscribers included Thomas Harrison, John Skepp, William Curtis, David Rees, John Noble, Edward Wallin, Thomas Dewhurst, Mark Key, Edward Ridgway, John Sharpe, Richard Pain, William Benson, John Toms, Richard Glover, and Joseph Matthews. The lone General Baptist Subscriber was Abraham Mulliner of the White’s Alley Church.” Xu, “Anne Dutton Trinitarian Spirituality,” 56.

²¹ Sell, *Christ and Controversy*, 39.

²² Sell, *Christ and Controversy*, 39. Watts’ biographer, Arthur Davis, notes that “a few orthodox ministers of nonconformity tried to impose subscription to the Athanasian Creed upon all dissent...[and] this dispute started Watts on his public discussion of the Trinity.” Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works*, 111.

²³ Watts’ work, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* (1725), was appended to *The Arian Invited to the Orthodox Faith* (1724). Also, his work, *An Essay on the True Importance of Any Human Schemes to Explain the Sacred Doctrine of the Trinity* (1746), was appended to *Useful and Important Questions Concerning Jesus the Son of God Freely Proposed: With a Humble Attempt to Answer Them According to Scripture* (1746).

came within three years of his death.

The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity
(1722)

Watts' first major discourse was *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, published in 1722, within three years of the Salters' Hall controversy.²⁴ In the preface, he states that "the Father, Son, and Spirit are three Persons in one God."²⁵ Watts wrote this discourse out of his desire to instruct the common Christian. He mentions three specific aims: (1) to "declare and confirm" the doctrine of the Trinity by "plain and express testimonies of Scripture"; (2) to describe, based upon Scripture alone, the "divine honours and duties" that might be paid to the "sacred Three;" and (3) to prove all "honours and duties" can be performed "without inquiring into any particular schemes to explain [the] great mystery."²⁶ From these general aims, Watts unfolds twenty-two propositions concerning the Trinity. Several observations will help shed some light on Watts' position as of 1722.

In propositions 1–7, Watts establishes a brief doctrine of God; his goal is to "mark out those distinguishing characters of Godhead, by which he will be known...in many places of Holy Scripture."²⁷ In propositions 8–13, Watts seeks to "prove, that all three [persons] have the peculiar characters of the godhead."²⁸ He stresses the deity of the

²⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:283–360; Isaac Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity: Or, Father, Son, and Spirit, Three Persons and One God, Asserted and Prov'd, With Their Divine Rights and Honors Vindicated by Plain Evidence of Scripture, Without Aid or Incumbrances of Humans Schemes. Written Chiefly for the Use of Private Christians* (London: J. Clark, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1722).

²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:284; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, vi.

²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:285; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, ix–x. Contrary to Watts, John Owen argues that extra-biblical language is necessary in order to articulate a proper doctrine of the Trinity. He writes, "Wherefore, in the declaration of the doctrine of the Trinity, we may lawfully, nay we must necessarily, make use of other words, phrases, and expressions, than what are literally and symbolically contained in the Scripture, but teach no other things." See Owen, *Works*, 2:379.

²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:296; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 34.

²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:297; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 38.

Son and the Spirit in opposition to the heresies of Socinianism and Arianism.²⁹ Because God does not give his glory to another (Isa 42:8), the Son and the Spirit must be one with the true God.³⁰ In other words, inter-Trinitarian communion means each person possesses the same glory and divinity. Watts asserts, “I would take leave to infer, that Arian and Socinian doctrines are not the doctrines of the Bible,”³¹ adding, “I wondered how it was possible for any person to believe the Bible to be the word of God, and yet to believe that Jesus Christ was a mere man.”³²

In the remaining propositions (14–22), Watts wrestles with the issue of how much we must know of the doctrine of the Trinity to be saved. “I infer,” he says, “that it can never be necessary to salvation, to know the precise way and manner how one Godhead subsists in three personal agents, or how these three persons are one God.”³³ It is important to note that Watts is acknowledging a degree of mystery in the Trinity and,

²⁹ For example, in proposition IX he addresses the deity of the Son and Spirit in detail. Watts, *Works*, 6:315–21; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 100–21. Importantly, Watts appeals to others in support of his position, including John Pearson (1613–1686), Isaac Barrow (1630–1677), George Bull (1634–1710), and John Owen (1616–1683). See Watts, *Works*, 6:321; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 120–21. For complete details on the writings Watts references, see Joseph Boyse, *A Vindication of the True Deity of Our Blessed Saviour*, 3rd ed. (London: John Clark, 1719); Daniel Waterland, *Eight Sermons Preach'd at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Defense of the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ; Upon the Encouragement Given by the Lady Moyer, and at the Appointment of the Bishop of London* (London: Crowfield, W. and J. Innys, 1720); John Guyse, *Jesus Christ God-Man or the Constitution of Christ's Person with the Evidence and Importance of the Doctrine of His True and Proper Godhead, Considered in Several Plain and Practical Sermons on Romans IX:V* (London: R. Cruttenden, 1719); John Guyse, *The Holy Spirit a Divine Person or, the Doctrine of His Godhead Represented as Evident and Important, In Several Practical Sermons on 1 Corinthians xii:11* (London: John Clark, 1721); Samuel Mather, *A Discourse Concerning the Godhead of the Holy Ghost, the Third Person in the Eternal Trinity. Wherein the Sentiments of Dr. Clarke are Consider'd* (London: Eman Matthews, 1719); Samuel Mather, *A Discourse Concerning the Necessity of Believing the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity; As Profess'd and Maintain'd by the Establish'd Church of England* (London: Eman Matthews, 1719); James Knight, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity, Vindicated from the Misinterpretation of Dr. Clarke* (London: Richard Smith, 1719).

³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:296–314; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 37–99.

³¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:310; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 83.

³² Watts, *Works*, 6:283; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, iii–iv.

³³ Watts, *Works*, 6:330; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 152. Watts' reluctance to define the “precise way and manner” how God is three in one, is based on his assessment that (1) Scripture never affirms any needful doctrine that is too difficult for unlearned people to grasp, (2) many people with “exemplary piety” have provided “different explications of this doctrine,” and (3) the “duties which were obligated to pay the Father, Son, and Spirit, in order to our own salvation, do not depend upon any particular modes of explication.”

therefore, some allowance must be given when it comes to how much of this doctrine must be understood to be saved. He writes,

It is hard to suppose, that the eternal generation of the Son of God, as a distinct person, yet co-equal and consubstantial, or of the same essence with the Father, should be made a fundamental article of the faith, in that dawn of the gospel, that hour of Jewish twilight between declining Judaism and rising Christianity. It is very hard to imagine, that God should propose so sublime a doctrine of so obscure and doubtful evidence in that day, as a test to the faith of poor ignorant fishermen, and pronounce damnation on the disbelief of it.³⁴

Also worthy of note is that Watts begins to wrestle with a key issue that will take center stage in his more polemical works. It is this: how to reconcile Christ's "divine" and "inferior" qualities as found in Scripture. There are "expressions of Scripture" that "seem much inferior to the dignity of Godhead" and "signify something inferior to Godhead before his incarnation."³⁵ Watts is thinking particularly of Psalm 40:6–8, John 5:19–30, 6:38–39, 17:5, Galatians 4:4, and Hebrews 10:5.³⁶ These verses express some "divine characters, which seem to be too great for any mere creature" and some characters "that seem much inferior to the dignity of Godhead."³⁷ Of particular importance to the trajectory of Watts' argument is what Scripture says about Christ's soul:

Now if we can give ourselves leave to suppose, that the human soul of our Lord Jesus Christ had a being, and was personally united to the divine nature, long before his body was born of the virgin, even from the very foundation of the world, and that this was the Angel who conversed with Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and Co., then we may most easily account for these expressions of Scripture, which signify something inferior to godhead before his incarnation; and we may attribute them to the human soul of Christ; which, though infinitely inferior to God, yet doubles is a spirit of a very excellent and noble nature, as being formed on purpose to be united to God, and never existed but in a personal union with God.³⁸

³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:356; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 241–42. Importantly, Watts appeals to Owen in support of his position. He makes particular use of Owen, *Works*, 2:365–439. See Watts, *Works*, 6:359; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 254.

³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:337; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 177.

³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:337; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 174–75.

³⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:338; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 180–81.

³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:337; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 177. Importantly, Watts footnotes this section as follows: "I do not mention this pre-existence of the human soul of Christ as a point

Watts is not suggesting that the Son is in any way inferior to the Father, but that the Son took to himself a human soul prior to the incarnation. This, for Watts, helps to explain the biblical language that seems to imply the Son's inferiority to the Father; in short, it is referring to Christ's soul.³⁹ He holds to this position while championing an orthodox Trinitarianism: "Whatsoever inferior nature may be united to the godhead in any of the divine persons, or whatsoever inferior characters or offices they may sustain...these do not at all take away or diminish the nature or dignity of the godhead, subsisting in that person...for God must be God for ever, and cannot divest himself of his own real and essential glories."⁴⁰ As of 1722, Watts is adamant that certain biblical descriptions of the Son seem to imply his inferiority to the Father. For him, the proposed remedy is the pre-incarnate existence of Christ's soul.

Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity (1724 and 1725)

Watts' next major writings were two volumes of dissertations on the Trinity:

Three Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity (1724)⁴¹ and

of faith, which I firmly believe, but merely as a matter of opinion, not to be rashly rejected, and well worth our farther inquire; for I have not met with anything yet published against it, that is sufficient to forbid the proposal of it here." Watts, *Works*, 6:337; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 178.

³⁹ Owen is helpful in clarifying Watts' position here. He notes, "The advancement and exaltation of Christ as mediator to any dignity whatever, upon or in reference to the work of our redemption and salvation, is not at all inconsistent with the essential honour, dignity, and worth, which he hath in himself as God blessed forever. Though he humbled himself, and was exalted in *office*, yet in *nature* he was one and the same; he changed not." Owen, *Works*, 2:389. Watts position on the pre-existent soul of Christ was a central issue in his Trinitarianism until the end of his life. For a modern treatment of the term "preexistent" with respect to Christ, see Douglas McCreedy, *He Came Down from Heaven: The Preexistence of Christ and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:340; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 187. Watts again appeals to Owen in support of his position. He seems to paraphrase his thought, writing, "I would express myself here thus, in imitation of Doctor Owen, speaking of Christ. Each nature united in the person of Christ, is entire, and preserves to itself its own natural properties. For he is no less true and perfect God, for being united to man; nor is he less a true perfect man, consisting of soul and body, by being united to God. His divine nature still continues omniscient, omnipotent, infinite, &c...So [also] in the Holy Spirit, the dignity of divine nature is preserved entire." Watts, *Works*, 6:340; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 188.

⁴¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:363–79; Isaac Watts, *Three Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: J. Clark, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1724).

Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part (1725).⁴²

The first contains three main dissertations: (1) an appeal to the Arian to convert to orthodoxy; (2) a consideration of the two natures of Christ; and (3) an explanation of what it means to worship Christ as mediator. The second contains four dissertations: (1) the position of “ancient Jews” and “primitive Christians” on the “Logos” of Scripture; (2) the work of the Holy Spirit; (3) the use of the word “person” in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity;⁴³ and (4) the various analogies used to explain God’s tri-unity. Several preliminary points are worth mentioning. First, Watts emphasizes his hesitancy in handling “the saw of controversy” due to the complexity of the subject matter and the strain on his health.⁴⁴ Yes, despite his misgivings, he writes to correct previous “uncautious sentences,” pointed out by friends, which lacked “that strict accuracy . . . that controversy required.”⁴⁵

In the first publication, Watts attempts “to lead an Arian, by soft and easy steps, into a belief of the divinity of Christ.”⁴⁶ The primary issue is whether or not the true Godhead belongs to Christ. How do we explain the incarnation without diminishing Christ’s full equality in essence with the Father? Watts affirms that the Son is “God of one substance, power, and eternity, or of the same substance, with the Father, and in the

⁴² Watts, *Works*, 6:380–513; Isaac Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part* (London: J. Clark, R. Hett, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1725).

⁴³ For more on the adequacy of the term “person(s)” see, Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 454–60. He writes, “The insuperable problem is trying to define God, eradicating the element of mystery. Person has a vagueness that enables it to function in a variety of ways, especially in popular, pastoral terms.” Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 455.

⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:363; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, v–vi.

⁴⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:366; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, xi–xii. Watts’ gentle manner, and his desire for unity in the church, seems to drive his treatment of the subject. In the preface, he contends that adversaries should be handled gently because of Christ’s model and the fact that not everyone who has doubts about the *modus* of the Godhead are enemies to Christ. Watts, *Works*, 6:367; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, xv–xviii.

⁴⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:378; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 26. Watts defends his position by appealing to (1) Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth and (2) Daniel Waterland, a prominent defender of Orthodox Trinitarianism. Specifically, Watts references Paul’s contextualized motives for the purpose of gospel advancement (1 Cor 9:22–23).

same sense equal with him in power and glory.”⁴⁷ He holds to this orthodox scheme, while attempting to appeal to the Arians. First, Watts defends the divine essence of Christ through what he terms “communication” with the Father. The divine nature is “communicated to Jesus Christ...by the Father’s uniting the human nature of Christ to his own godhead.”⁴⁸ Second, Watts argues that Christ’s soul existed before the incarnation. He believes this is the “most obvious and natural sense of many Scriptures.”⁴⁹ He adds, the “divine perfections always belonged to him [Christ]; his godhead was co-essential and co-eternal with the godhead of the Father, for it was the same divine essence; [yet]...his person as God-man existed before the foundation of the world.”⁵⁰

In the second publication, Watts meticulously researches the views of the “ancient Jews” and “early Christian fathers” to help explain Christ’s two natures. His primary aim is to make sense of biblical expressions concerning Christ that are “below the dignity of Godhead,” which the Arians use to deny the full deity of Christ.⁵¹ Here Watts struggles to

⁴⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:374; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 14.

⁴⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:374; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 16. Watts cites Thomas Goodwin in defense of his position. He uses Goodwin’s discussion of the glory the Father has given to Christ. Goodwin writes, “And it was by personal union that God bestowed on the man Jesus the glory of being his Son.” Thomas Goodwin, *The Knowledge of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ*, in vol. 2 of *The Works of Thomas Goodwin Sometime President of Magdalene College in Oxford* [...] (London: Printed for T.G., 1681), 2:3:146. Likewise, Owen argues for eternal communication between the Father and the Son with respect to both deity and personality. He writes, “[a]ll things that the Father absolutely were the Son’s also; for, receiving his personality from the Father, by the communication of the whole entire divine nature, all the things of the Father must needs be his.” Owen, *Works*, 3:197. Elsewhere, Owen writes, “The person of the Father is the eternal fountain of infinitely divine glorious perfections; and they are all communicated unto the Son by eternal generation.” Owen, *Works*, 4:169. For a detailed study on the nature of communication between the Father and Son in Reformed thought, and in particular the theology of John Owen, see Ryan M. McGraw, *John Owen: Trajectories in Reformation Orthodox Theology* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 139–43. McGraw notes, “both deity and personal subsistence are communicated eternally from the Father to them [the Son and Spirit]. There are no degrees of deity and there is no subordination of the persons to one another. Nevertheless, the Son is related to the Father in terms of ‘eternal generation’ and the Spirit is related to both the Father and to the Son by ‘eternal procession.’” For details of the eternal deity of Christ in historical Reformed thought, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.13.7–13.

⁴⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:375; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 18.

⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:375; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 19.

⁵¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:453–54; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, 82–93.

clarify the mode of union between the two natures of Christ. He first attempts to explain it by examining the meaning of *Logos* in reference to Christ.⁵² Watts defines *Logos* as “a personal representation of some glorious medium of God’s manifestations and operations.”⁵³ This is Christ in his pre-incarnate and incarnate state; he is the medium of God’s manifestation and operation. Watts believes the perplexing expressions, related to Christ’s pre-incarnate state (such as the “Word of God” and “Son of God”), are clarified by examining the term *Logos* as it is understood by “Jews in that [biblical] age” and the “primitive fathers of the Christian church.”⁵⁴ From this analysis, Watts derives the following hypothesis:

Thus Scripture and reason seem to agree to inform us...that the pre-existent nature of Christ, which is called the Logos, is composed, or constituted of God and a creature, or an inferior spirit, personally inhabited by the divine Word, to which the distinct properties of God and creature may be attributed...[this also] lead us to suppose, that our blessed Savior, who is the true Logos, or Word of God, had a double nature before his incarnation, and that his human soul had a real existence as the Son of God and a personal union to deity, before the foundation of the world.⁵⁵

⁵² Watts appeals to several orthodox Trinitarians in support of his position, including Thomas Goodwin, Richard Baxter, Tertullian, and Daniel Waterland.

⁵³ Watts, *Works*, 6:425; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, 7. This second publication by Watts received a formal rebuttal by orthodox Trinitarian, Abraham Taylor in 1728. Taylor is helpful in understanding the challenging and convoluted theological nature of Watts’ argument about the *Logos*. Taylor writes, “Mr. Watts has expressed his notion of the person of Christ God-man to be...only called a person in figurative speech, and is an essential power of God, which has been considered, that this divine, intelligent, volitive [sic] power, assumed into union with himself, a glorious angelic, archangelic, or super-angelic spirit; which was the first creature of God, and formed by him in a way vastly differed from other creatures; that this glorious spirit, or created Logos, when the Word was made flesh, supplied the place of a human soul.” See, Abraham Taylor, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity Vindicated: In Opposition to Mr. Watts’s Scheme of One Divine Person and Two Divine Powers* (London: J. Roberts, 1728), 82–83. This is Taylor’s summation of Watts’ argument about Christ from the Old Testament, wherein Watts says that it is possible for the *Logos* to be the “prince of angels” or the “first begotten of the creation.” Referencing Mal 3:1, Isa 63:9, Gen 47:16, Exod 23:30, and Exod 3:2, Watts’ surmises that the *Logos* could be the “first-born Son of God,” “the glorious, angelic, or supra-angelic spirit, who was often called an angel under the Old Testament, when he appeared before the patriarchs. Furthermore, Watts notes, “May not this be the human soul of our blessed Savior?” Watts answers in the affirmative because it is possible for the “human soul of Christ to be derived from God in some unknown transcendent manner, distinct from other creatures, even as his human body was; and thus, to become the peculiar Son of God, both as to his body and soul.” Watts, *Works*, 6:441; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, 49–50.

⁵⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:427; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, 13.

⁵⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:457, 463; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, 92–93, 108. Watts mentions two advantages of this scheme, which are somewhat

As of 1725, this hypothesis is firmly entrenched in Watts' thinking.⁵⁶

***Useful and Important Questions
Concerning Jesus the Son of God Freely
Proposed (1746)***

Watts' fourth publication on the Trinity appeared in 1746⁵⁷: *Useful and Important Questions Concerning Jesus the Son of God Freely Proposed: With a Humble Attempt to Answer Them According to Scripture*.⁵⁸ It included an appendix: *A Charitable Essay on the True Importance of Any Human Schemes to Explain the Sacred Doctrine of the Trinity*.⁵⁹ The treatise consists of eight questions and explanations. Watts prefaces

ironic, as he uses them to position his hypothesis as supporting and defending the full deity of Christ and giving way to Christian humility or charity. The "advantages" are: (1) that Christ's divine and human nature receive more honor and "exalted dignity"; and (2) it "lays a foundation for reconciling the great and bitter contentions that troubled the church in almost all ages." See Watts, *Works*, 6:463–64; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, 108–13.

⁵⁶ Taylor admits the same when he notes, "It is not very easy to say, what is Mr. Watts's real scheme of the union of the two natures, in the person of Christ." Taylor, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity Vindicated*, 80. This may be a result of Watts' overly transparent battle to understand the Scripture and the odd nature of some of his proposals. For example, in the second dissertation, Watts asserts that God and man are united in the person of Christ but sees nothing "so terrible, or heretical in it, if we should suppose the human nature and the divine nature of Christ, to be in some sense two distinct persons." Watts, *Works*, 6:385; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 44. This position is historically known as Nestorianism. For a brief introduction, see Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms*, 164; and David Christie-Murry, *A History of Heresy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 62–68. In the same dissertation, Watts freely admits the challenge with the aforementioned position because the "frightful sound of Nestorianism may reasonably forbid a man to indulge this language, because it will not be counted orthodox." Watts, *Works*, 6:385; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 44.

⁵⁷ Watts supposedly published a fourth writing on the Trinity, prior to his 1746 publications, in a pamphlet entitled: *A Faithful Enquiry After the Ancient and Original Doctrine of the Trinity, Taught by Christ and His Apostles in Two Parts*. However, the facts surrounding the publication are unclear. See Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works*, 117. George Burder argues that the balance of the pamphlet is included in Watts' *Useful and Important Questions*. For more details on the pamphlet and its history, see Watts, *Works*, 1:xxxvi–xxxvii.

⁵⁸ Isaac Watts, *Useful and Important Questions Concerning Jesus the Son of God Freely Proposed: With a Humble Attempt to Answer Them According to Scripture* (London: J. Oswald and J. Buckland, 1746).

⁵⁹ As previously discussed, Watts is tentative about employing extra-biblical language and schemata to explain the Trinity. He highlights three chief concerns: (1) no scheme regarding the *modus* of the Trinity is clearly revealed in Scripture, therefore the exact *modus* of Trinitarianism is unnecessary for salvation; (2) there are still advantages to the Christian church in attempting to explain the *modus* of the Trinity from Scripture; and (3) any explanation should be proposed with modesty and never imposed upon the conscience of others. It is clear that Watts proposes these considerations for an *inter-orthodox discussion*. In other words, he addresses his orthodox peers and fellow Christians, not heretics or unbelievers. This is a critical distinction, because it aids in understanding that Watts never viewed himself as standing outside of orthodoxy but was trying to relieve tensions and accusations brought against orthodox Trinitarianism. See Watts, *Works*, 6:587–94; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 173–93.

these by “freely and delightfully” confessing part of the Athanasian Creed.⁶⁰ However, having done so, he immediately affirms that he takes “no human writings for a test of the divinity or truth,” but appeals only to the “writers of the holy Scriptures.”⁶¹

Watts opens the discourse with two questions regarding the meaning of Christ’s title “Son of God.”⁶² His aim is to determine the “truest sense” of this title in Scripture. This is important because it demonstrates that Watts’ hermeneutic is based on determining authorial intent.⁶³ He concludes that the phrase “Son of God” points to the person and character of the incarnate Christ, yet it does not “signify true and eternal Godhead.”⁶⁴ That is to say, the phrase “Son of God,” as used in the New Testament, never refers to Christ’s deity.⁶⁵ Watts argues that the disciples and writers of the New Testament did not fully understand the nature of God.⁶⁶ They believed Christ is God, but their understanding was limited to the person and character of Christ.⁶⁷ Watts is not denying the deity of Christ, but attempting to explain how the title “Son of God” (which implies

⁶⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:517; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, v. Watts quotes the Athanasian Creed: “We believe and confess the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is both God and man; God of the same substance with the Father, and man of the substance of his mother, born into the world; perfect God and perfect man; of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting together: Equal to the Father, as touching his godhead, and yet inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood: One, not by conversion of the godhead into the flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God, so as to become one personal agent, or one person: And as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man are one Christ, who suffered for our salvation.”

⁶¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:518; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, vi.

⁶² Importantly, Watts is concerned about this phrase because Arians and Socinians use it to attack the orthodox faith. He writes, “Now if by this exposition of the name, Son of God, I remove any of the great impediments out of the way of the Arians and Socinians, from believing the true deity of Christ, then I shall account myself to have done service and honour to that glorious article [the Trinity] of our faith.” Watts, *Works*, 6:544; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 67.

⁶³ In the first two sections of question one, Watts references only Scripture to explain what the title “Son of God” means. See Watts, *Works*, 6:520–32; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 5–35.

⁶⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:522; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 8.

⁶⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:536; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 45.

⁶⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:520–21; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 5–7.

⁶⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:554; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 87–93.

inferiority) can be reconciled with the Athanasian Creed.⁶⁸ Again, Watts' perception of the tension between Scripture and confessional Trinitarianism comes to the fore. He does not doubt the deity of Christ, but whether the title "Son of God" applies to his deity. This is a critical distinction, and sets the trajectory for Watts' argument moving forward. He states, "I firmly believe him [Christ] to be true God, and in that sense one with the Father, yet I would not place the chief weight of this doctrine on such arguments as will not support it."⁶⁹ How does Watts resolve the tension? Again, he appeals to Christ's pre-incarnate soul.

Watts begins with the following question: "Could the Son of God properly enter into a covenant with his Father, to do and suffer what was necessary to our redemption, without a human soul?"⁷⁰ He argues that when Christian writers "represent the exceeding great love of the Father in sending his Son into our world...they are led by force of truth into such expressions as are indeed hardly consistent with their own professed opinions, but perfectly consistent with the revelation of Scripture, and the doctrine of the pre-existent soul of Christ."⁷¹ Watts seeks to explain his position by examining the relationship between the Father and the Son prior to the incarnation. It is at this point that Watts leans heavily on John Flavel's *The Fountain of Life*. It consists of

⁶⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:535; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 42–45.

⁶⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:543; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 63. Later, in Question IV of the publication, Watts poses the question: "Is the Godhead of Christ and the Godhead of the Father one and the same Godhead?" He affirms the orthodox position: "the godhead of Christ is the same individual godhead with that of the Father." Watts, *Works*, 6:568–72; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 130. Watts proceeds to affirm one God and three persons by means of eight propositions. He concludes the section as follows: "And by this means the great and foundational article of all religion 'the unity of the true God,' is maintained inviolable: And thus we most effectually preclude all the objections and cavils of the Arian and Socinian writers against the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, and the deity of Christ, as though this doctrine introduced more gods than one." Watts, *Works*, 6:572; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 140.

⁷⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:561; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 111.

⁷¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:561; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 111–12. Yet again, Watts articulates the classical orthodox position prior to his argument. He then notes that most Christian writers only believe that the divine nature (or Godhead) exists before the incarnation, but (in his opinion) Scripture plainly teaches that Christ's human soul also existed.

forty-two sermons. In the second sermon, Flavel expounds Proverbs 8:30, and seeks to explain “the condition of the non-incarnate Son of God.”⁷² It is characterized by mutual intimacy, closeness, and delight with the Father.⁷³ Flavel declares that Christ is the “highest, and fullest manifestation of the love of God” due to his departure from the Father’s “very bowels.”⁷⁴ In light of these statements, Watts arrives at a critical conclusion:

Now if we suppose the human soul of our Lord Jesus Christ to have a preexistent state of joy and glory in the bosom of the Father through all former ages of the world, and even before the world was created, then these expressions are great and noble, are just and true, and have a happy aptness and propriety in them to set forth the transcendent love of God the Father in sending his Son, and the transcendent love of Christ, the Son of God, in coming from heaven, and leaving the joys and glories of his Father’s immediate presence in heaven, to take on him such flesh and blood as ours is, and in that flesh and blood to sustain shame, sorrow, pain, anguish of flesh and spirit, sharp agonies, and the pangs of death. And this love is exceedingly enhanced, while we consider that the human soul of Christ was personally united to this divine nature.⁷⁵

The issue for Watts is that these biblical expressions concerning the relationship between the Father and the Son cannot be attributed to Christ’s divine nature. Therefore, he must already possess a human nature (soul) prior to the incarnation. Watts confesses “that by the figure of communication of properties, what is true of one nature may be attributed to the whole person, or sometimes to the other nature.”⁷⁶ He elaborates,

If we suppose nothing but the pure divine nature of Christ to exist before his incarnation, then all these expressions seems to have very little justness or propriety

⁷² Watts, *Works*, 6:562; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 112. See John Flavel, “The Fountain of Life Open’d Up; or, A Display of Christ in His Essential and Mediatorial Glory” in John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (1820; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 1:32–41.

⁷³ Flavel, *Works*, 1:46–47. Flavel notes four positive considerations about Christ’s state in the Father’s bosom prior to the incarnation: (1) mutual happiness and delight, (2) mutual intimacy and communion, (3) purity of delight, and (4) constancy of delight.

⁷⁴ Flavel, *Works*, 1:66–67. For example, Flavel writes, “Never did any child lie so close to a parents’ heart, as Christ did to his Father’s; and yet he willingly parts with him, though his only one, the Son of his delights...if the Father had not loved thee, he had never parted with such a Son for thee.” Flavel, *Works*, 1:49.

⁷⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:563; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 116.

⁷⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:564; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 118.

in them: For the divine nature of Christ, how distinct soever it is supposed to be from God the Father, yet can never leave the Father's bosom, can never divest itself of any one joy or felicity that it was ever possessed of, nor lose even the least degree of it; nor could God the Father ever dismiss the divine nature of his Son from his own bosom. Godhead must have eternal and complete beatitude, joy, and glory, and can never be dispossessed of it...it is plain that the divine nature of Christ could not be separated from the bosom of his Father, when he came into this world and took on flesh upon him, so neither could the human nature leave this bosom of the Father, if it had no prior existence, and was never there.⁷⁷

Watts also wrestles with the contractual relationship between the Father and the Son before the foundation of the world. Referring to Sermon 3 of Flavel's work, Watts argues that Flavel's "representation...agrees with the doctrine of the preexistent soul of Christ."⁷⁸ Flavel's sermon is based on Isaiah 53:12. "The business of man's salvation was transacted upon covenant terms, betwixt the Father and the Son, from all eternity."⁷⁹ Flavel understands the covenant of redemption by way of articles "which they do both agree...[and] that each person doth for himself promise to the other."⁸⁰ These articles include the Father promising to (1) anoint the Son to a threefold office, (2) assist and strengthen him, (3) crown his work with success, (4) accept him in his work, and (5) reward him for his work.⁸¹ It is here that Watts wonders how such transactions can take place apart from Christ's human nature. He writes,

The mere personalities, *viz.* paternity and filiation, cannot consult and transact these affairs in a way of contract, proposal, and consent: It is nothing but two distinct consciousnesses and two distinct wills can enter into such a covenant; but in the common explication of the Trinity, the distinct personalities of the Father and the Son do not make any real distinct consciousnesses or distinct wills in the one infinite Spirit.⁸²

Furthermore, Watts argues that, in order for the Son to receive the Father's "orders,

⁷⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:563–64; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 116–17.

⁷⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:565; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 120.

⁷⁹ Flavel, *Works*, 1:53.

⁸⁰ Flavel, *Works*, 1:55.

⁸¹ Flavel, *Works*, 1:55–57.

⁸² Watts, *Works*, 6:566; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 125.

commission, support, and recompence,” there must be some level of inferiority.⁸³ But this cannot be said of his divine nature. The only feasible explanation, in Watts’ estimation, is Christ’s pre-incarnate soul.

The Glory of Christ as God-Man Displayed in Three Discourses (1746)

The final publication emerged in 1746: *The Glory of Christ as God-Man Displayed in Three Discourses*.⁸⁴ In the first discourse, Watts considers Christ’s divine nature before the incarnation. In the second, he considers Christ’s human nature after the incarnation. In the third, he turns his attention (yet again) to the pre-incarnate soul of Christ.

Discourse 1. Here Watts surveys the various appearances of God in the Old Testament, arguing that he appeared visibly as a “created angel” to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, Micah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, Amos, Jonah, and others.⁸⁵ Watts draws several conclusions. First, God’s voice proceeded from cloud and fire, and the people knew it was him.⁸⁶ Second, God appeared in both the form of a man and an angel.⁸⁷ Third, at times, multiple angels appeared, but there was always one angel who distinguished himself as the “messenger or angel of the covenant.”⁸⁸ Interestingly, after the incarnation, “no angel has ever appeared that durst call himself God, and assume divine titles, or accept of

⁸³ Watts, *Works*, 6:566; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 125.

⁸⁴ Isaac Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man Displayed in Three Discourses. With an Appendix Containing an Abridgement of Dr. Thomas Goodwin’s Discourse of the Glories and Royalties of Christ, in His Works in Folio, Vol. II. Book 3.* (London: J. Oswald and J. Buckland, 1746).

⁸⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:603–23; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 1–41.

⁸⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:623; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 42.

⁸⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:623–24; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 42.

⁸⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:624; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 43. Watts cites Exod 23:20–21; 33:14–15; Isa 63:9; and Mal 3:1.

worship.”⁸⁹ On this basis, Watts contends that this angel “was united to the Godhead in a particular manner.”⁹⁰ Fourth, it is “very probable that Christ was the person who thus often appeared” in the Old Testament.⁹¹ Fifth, there is a difference in the way the Father and the Son appear. The Father is always “represented as invisible,” while the Son “manifests himself.”⁹² Watts concludes,

Thence also I think we may infer, that there is such a peculiar union between the great God and the man Jesus Christ in his angelic, as well as in his incarnate state, as that he is properly represented as God-man in one complex person: he that was the “angel of the presence of God,” and “in whom God dwelt,” under the ancient dispensations, has now taken flesh and blood upon him, and is God manifest in the flesh; he that is of the seed of David, was and is God over all, blessed forever.⁹³

In sum, Watts argues that the Old Testament theophanies are really Christophanies (pre-incarnate appearances of Christ). For him, this proves that he had assumed the human nature (soul) prior to the incarnation (body). But Watts is equally adamant that this in no way diminishes his true and eternal Godhead.

Discourse 2. Here Watts turns his attention to Christ’s human nature. “We are sometimes afraid to exalt the man whom the Father has exalted, lest we should be thought to derogate from his godhead.”⁹⁴ The focus of this discourse is on the “powers and sublime nature” of the man, Jesus Christ, with particular attention given to his incarnated

⁸⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:624; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 44.

⁹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:624; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 43.

⁹¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:624; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 44.

⁹² Watts, *Works*, 6:624; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 44.

⁹³ Watts, *Works*, 6:625; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 45. Overall, Watts addresses the nature of theophanies in the Old Testament. In an appendix to the first discourse, he cites a number of writers at the conclusion of Discourse I, to support his contention that the OT theophanies are actually Christophanies. These include, George Bull, Athanasius, Trypho the Jew, Clemens Alexandrinus, Gregory of Nyssa, Hugo Grotius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and John Owen. See Watts, *Works*, 6:641–43; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 77–82.

⁹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:645; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 87. Watts again affirms the full deity of Jesus Christ. “I grant that the sacred doctrine of the divinity united to the human nature in Christ, ought to be supported by all just expositions of Scripture. It is an article that we cannot part with out of our religion, without shaking the foundation.” Watts, *Works*, 6:646; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 87.

soul.⁹⁵ Watts has two principle aims: (1) to prove that Christ’s human nature was exalted, and (2) to define what this exaltation means. He points to eight instances when unique “power and dignity” was assigned to Christ’s human nature.⁹⁶ For Watts, these raise an important question, namely, How can a human soul possess “powers of so vast an extent?”⁹⁷ In his answer, Watts says we must think of Christ’s soul in three ways. First, there is the “native” sense. Christ’s soul transcends the powers of other souls. “No creature is a fairer image of God than the soul of Christ is, and thereby it becomes the fittest instrument for an indwelling God.”⁹⁸ Second, there is the “glorified” sense. Third, there is the “divine.” Because his soul is united to his Godhead, “its capacities must be enlarged to an unknown degree.”⁹⁹ Watts believes Christ’s miracles confirm this: “Where our soul wills, our limbs always move at its command, so whensoever Christ the man willed to work a miracle, the supernatural effect followed, if not by human, yet by divine agency.”¹⁰⁰ Watts’ reasoning is deductive: Christ manifested himself prior to his incarnation in the form of an angel; Christ’s soul had unique powers after the incarnation;¹⁰¹ therefore, we can turn “our eyes backward to the beginning of all things”

⁹⁵ The Chalcedonian Creed was adopted in the Fourth Ecumenical Council, held at Chalcedon in A.D. 451. The creed established the orthodox position on the two natures of Christ. For more, see John Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 35–36. For a modern analysis of the Chalcedonian Creed, see Sarah Coakley, “What Does Chalcedon Solve and What Does It Not? Some Reflections on the Status and Meaning of the Chalcedonian Definition,” in *The Incarnation: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Incarnation of the Son of God*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 143–63.

⁹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:649–57; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 93–110.

⁹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:657; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 110.

⁹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:661; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 119.

⁹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:665; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 125.

¹⁰⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:666; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 129.

¹⁰¹ Watts concludes the second discourse with “testimonies from other writers” regarding the “extensive powers and capacities his human nature now glorified.” Watts quotes directly from Thomas Goodwin and Richard Baxter to support his arguments about the unique and extensive powers of Christ’s human soul. See Watts, *Works*, 6:673–74; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 144–45.

and “spy some early glories attending his sacred person.”¹⁰²

Discourse 3. All of this sets the stage for Watts’ return to his position concerning the pre-incarnate soul of Christ. “The human soul of our Lord Jesus Christ had an existence, and was personally united to the divine nature, long before it came to dwell in flesh and blood.”¹⁰³ Watts sees confirmation of this in Philippians 2:5–7 and Colossians 1:15–19.¹⁰⁴

Beginning with Philippians 2:5–7,¹⁰⁵ Watts focuses on the expressions “form of God” and “emptying.” He interprets these as “concerning the pre-existent soul of Christ” as opposed to the “abasement of his divine nature”¹⁰⁶ and gives three reasons in defense.¹⁰⁷ First, Paul’s purpose is to set forth an example of humility, but “we never find

¹⁰² Watts, *Works*, 6:675; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 147.

¹⁰³ Watts, *Works*, 6:675; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 147.

¹⁰⁴ It is in the context of Watts’ exegesis of Philippians 2:5–7 and Colossians 1:15–19 that he interacts the most with Thomas Goodwin. Watts goes so far as to appendix the entire publication with various abridgements of Goodwin’s writings on Christ. For the abridgement, see Watts, *Works*, 6:729–38; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 256–75. For full publication of Goodwin’s work, see Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.85–197.

¹⁰⁵ Paul begins the famous Christ hymn by writing, “Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:5–7).

¹⁰⁶ Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 164. In the 1810 publication, the word “divine” is changed to “human,” see Watts, *Works*, 6:683. The original publication is cited here.

¹⁰⁷ This is an important distinction because it is where Watts differs from many in his interpretation. The more orthodox interpretation affirms that the “emptying” does not refer to the divine essence, but to the divine glory. Christ retains full glory due to the Godhead, yet he willingly disguises it. In other words, the passage is not directly referring to Christ’s nature, but to his outward appearance. Paul is dealing with the *concealment* of the divine nature of Christ, not whether or not he retains the ontological form of God prior to and after the incarnation. Calvin, for example, interprets the text in terms of the level of intensity of Christ’s glory. He writes, “This [verse 6] is not a comparison between things similar, but in the way of greater and less. Christ’s humility consisted in his abasing himself from the highest pinnacle of glory to the lowest ignominy...He gave up his right.” Furthermore, Calvin notes, “The form of God means here his majesty...Christ, then, before the creation of the world, was in the form of God, because from the beginning he had his glory with the Father...he could, without doing wrong to any one, shew himself equal with God; but he did not manifest himself to be what he really was, nor did he openly assume in view of men what belonged to him by right.” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, in vol. 21 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1996), 54–55. Likewise, Flavel interprets Christ’s humiliation in terms of glory: “By this his incarnation he was greatly humbled, inasmuch as this so veiled, clouded, and disguised him, that during the time he lived here, he looked not like himself, as God, but as a poor, sorry, contemptible sinner in the eyes of the world...It was a black cloud that for so many years darkened, and shut up his manifested

the divine nature, or godhead, propounded to us, as an example of self-denial or humility, in all the Bible.”¹⁰⁸ Therefore, the humility in view must be related in some way to Christ’s human nature (soul).¹⁰⁹ He writes, “his human soul...was vested with a god-like form and glory in all former ages; thus he oftentimes appeared to the patriarchs, as the angel of the Lord...and spake and acted like God himself.”¹¹⁰ Second, Christ could not divest himself of the divine nature in order to become man, thus his “emptying” must refer to his “god-like appearances” before his incarnation.¹¹¹ Watts reasons that if “nothing but the divine existed” before Christ’s incarnation, then the divine would have to be emptied, but that is not possible.¹¹² Third, Christ’s human nature is the subject of the glorification, and so his human nature must also be the subject of the humiliation.¹¹³ Watts, therefore, interprets the emptying as a debasement of Christ’s soul, which had a God-like glory before the incarnation. For Watts, it is the pre-incarnate soul of Christ, with God-like glory because of its union with the Godhead, that could actually be “emptied” of the form of God.

Watts also appeals to Colossians 1:15–19 to support his doctrine of Christ’s pre-incarnate soul. The core issue is Paul’s reference to Christ as the “image of the

glory, that it could not shine out to the world; only some weak rays of the Godhead shone to some few eyes.” Flavel, *Works*, 1:228–29. For a modern treatment of the text along these same lines, see Joseph H. Helleman, *Philippians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 105–11.

¹⁰⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:684; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 164.

¹⁰⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:684; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 164.

¹¹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:683; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 162.

¹¹¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:684; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 164.

¹¹² Watts, *Works*, 6:680–82; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 157–62. Furthermore, Watts argues that the phrase “form of God” is not utilized anywhere else in Scripture to signify proper divinity or even the divine nature. Watts, *Works*, 6:684; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 164–65. He cites Goodwin in support of this interpretation. Goodwin argues “that nature or creature which he shall assume (be it man or angel) must by inheritance exist in the form of God, Phil. 2:6, which [form of God] I here take not to be put for the essence of God...And so in like manner the [form of God] here, is the God-like glory, and the manifestation of the God-head, which was, and must needs be due to appear in the nature assumed.” Goodwin, *Works*, 3.3.106.

¹¹³ Watts, *Works*, 6:684–85; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 165–66.

invisible God” and the “firstborn of all creation” (v. 15). Is Paul speaking of Christ’s divine nature or human nature? Watts argues that these phrases “cannot refer merely to his divine nature” and, therefore, they seem “to refer to his preexistent soul in union with his Godhead.”¹¹⁴ Interestingly, Watts turns to Thomas Goodwin for support. Goodwin states that Paul is primarily speaking of Christ’s human nature.¹¹⁵ He admits that the phrase “image of the invisible God” has two senses in reference to Christ: (1) he is the “essential” image of God as “he is second person,” and (2) he is the “manifestative” image of God “as man.”¹¹⁶ Goodwin interprets Paul’s words in Colossians as referring to the second.

As Goodwin notes, the phrase is not simply “the image of God” but the “image of the invisible God,” which implies that Christ “is such an image as makes the Godhead, which is in itself invisible and incomprehensible, to be manifest and visible.”¹¹⁷ So the text is not about the “bare communication of properties” or about how Christ “instrumentally useth the attributes of the Godhead.”¹¹⁸ Rather, Paul is giving “a system, or fullness of perfections really inherent and appertaining unto the manhood [of Christ], by virtue of its union with the divine nature.”¹¹⁹ Goodwin is making a careful distinction, arguing that the attributes are not essential to the Godhead, yet they are “such as no mere creature is capable of, and so are as truly incommunicable unto a creature.”¹²⁰ Thus,

¹¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:696; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 191.

¹¹⁵ For example, Goodwin references Calvin’s interpretation of this passage as support for reading it as Christ in his human nature. Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.100–01. Calvin wrote, “Therefore, we may not receive anything but what is solid, let us take notice, that the term image is not made use of in reference to essence, but has a reference to us; for Christ is called the image of the God on this ground...we must not insist upon the essence alone.” Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 149.

¹¹⁶ Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.103.

¹¹⁷ Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.104.

¹¹⁸ Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.104.

¹¹⁹ Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.104.

¹²⁰ Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.104.

Goodwin argues that Paul attributes excellencies (such as wisdom, power, and sovereignty) to Christ's human nature.

Moreover, Goodwin does not believe that the expression, "first born of all creation," refers to Christ's eternal generation.¹²¹ The phrase "only-begotten," not "first begotten," refers to the Son's eternal generation.¹²² Paul does not compare Christ laterally to creation, but sets him above creation because "the very comparison of this high birth of his [incarnation], with the metaphorical generation of every ordinary creature...[would] dishonor him too much."¹²³ Goodwin sees Christ's earthly birth as different from all other creatures because (1) Christ is the Prince of all the creatures (Rev 1:5) and (2) Christ was first-born in the "womb" of God's "eternal decrees and purposes."¹²⁴

In sum, it is Goodwin's emphasis on Christ's human nature that resonates with Watts. More specifically, he is drawn to Goodwin's concept of Christ's preeminence as a man in the foreknowledge of God's decrees.¹²⁵ He notes that Goodwin "gives him most illustrious prerogative, on the account of his virtual union to his divine nature, all which he asserts to be his early due, had he actually then existed."¹²⁶ Since Christ possessed an exalted human nature in God's foreknowledge, Watts sees no issue with inferring the existence of the pre-incarnate soul of Christ. He comments,

¹²¹ Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.110.

¹²² Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.110.

¹²³ Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.110.

¹²⁴ Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.111.

¹²⁵ Confessional Trinitarianism holds that Christ's human nature was part of the foreknowledge of God, in wisdom, before the foundation of the world, but not actually preexistent. Goodwin affirms this position and differs significantly from Watts' scheme in this regard. Goodwin notes, "God's ways, are his works, *ad extra*, wherein he purposed to go forth and manifest himself towards creatures. Now in the beginning of these ways, and the first thoughts of them, did God possess Christ God-man in his foreknowledge, as the richest treasure of all his glory to be manifested in his creations, without which he would not have proceeded in any other work." Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.111. Elsewhere, Goodwin notes, "Therefore, there must be some other womb in which Christ and the creatures all lay, and in respect thereunto he is the first-begotten; and that womb is the eternal decrees and purposes of God. Goodwin, *Works*, 2.3.111.

¹²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:737; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 273–74.

The actual pre-existence of the man Jesus, or the human soul of Christ, and his actual union to his divine nature, can never withhold or diminish any of those sublime characters, those illustrious honours or prerogatives which this author [Goodwin] saith were his due, had he then existed, and which he supposes to be attributed to him in Scripture by the figure prolepsis, and by way of anticipation, and which were given him by God the Father, as supposing him then to exist in his idea long before his actual existence.¹²⁷

Watts believes Goodwin's interpretation sets an "honorable precedent."¹²⁸ He goes so far as to conclude, "What that pious and ingenious author [Goodwin] declares upon the subject almost persuades me to believe that had he lived in our day, he would have been a hearty defender of the doctrine which I propose."¹²⁹

Trinitarian Spirituality

Watts spent close to twenty years wrestling with the doctrine of the Trinity. In 1746, he made his motive clear by mentioning six "advantages."¹³⁰

A Doctrinal Concern (Advantages 1-2)

Watts notes that his doctrinal formulation "casts a surprising light upon many dark passages in the word of God [and] it does very naturally and easily explain and reconcile several difficult places both of the the Old and New Testament."¹³¹ Closely related to this, it "discovers to us many beauties and proprieties of expression in the word of God, and casts a lustre upon some of those passages, whose justness and beauty were

¹²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:737; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 274.

¹²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:738; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 275.

¹²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:697; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 192.

¹³⁰ It has been argued that Watts had formally descended into a Unitarian scheme by the end of his life. Nathaniel Lardner (1684–1768) made the claim in 1768 and asserted Watts' published material that was thoroughly Unitarian before his death but was deemed unfit for publication and subsequently destroyed by Philip Doddridge and others. See Aniol, "Was Isaac Watts Unitarian?" 92. For a repudiation of Lardner's claim, see Samuel Palmer, "An Authentic Account of Dr. Watts' Last Avowed Sentiments Concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, &c.," in *Memoirs of the Lives, Characters and Writings of Those Two Eminently Pious and Useful Ministers of Jesus Christ, Dr. Isaac Watts and Dr. Philip Doddridge* (Boston: Peter Edes for David West, 1793), 114–18.

¹³¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:696; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 190.

not before observed.”¹³² These two advantages were pivotal to Watts’ commitment to the plain and natural reading of Scripture and his aversion to “human schemes.” This observation is critical. Watts was determined to provide an orthodox explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of “plain and express testimonies” of Scripture.¹³³ He was driven in this pursuit by a pastoral concern for his congregants and others:

I then considered with myself, how useful it might be to the private Christians to have the plain naked doctrine of Scripture concerning the Trinity fairly drawn out, and set before their eyes, with all its divine vouchers: how much more easily they would embrace this article when they see the whole of it so expressly revealed; And though they might confess they knew not the way to explain it, yet perhaps they might be more firmly established in the truth, and better guard against temptations to heresy than if it were surrounded and incorporated with hard words and learned explications, which could not be proved with such express evidence from the word of God, which are confessed to be as inconceivable as the doctrine itself, and which had often ministered to strife and controversy.¹³⁴

As early as 1722, Watts made clear: “I do not pretend to instruct the learned world: My design here was to write for private and unlearned Christians.”¹³⁵ Later, in 1746, he made the same point, arguing that many Trinitarian formulae are such that “only learned men can find the meaning.”¹³⁶ He believed that the “actual pre-existence of the soul of Christ” is a more natural way to explain the Trinity, so that “the meanest Christian may read and understand what he reads.”¹³⁷

An Evangelical Concern (Advantages 3-4)

Watts was convinced that his Trinitarian scheme would spread “new lustre of

¹³² Watts, *Works*, 6:702; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 202–03.

¹³³ Watts notes this pastoral aim in multiple places. See Watts, *Works*, 5:356; 6:284, 285, 286, 288, 320; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, viii, x–xi, 5, 120, 241–43.

¹³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:284; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, viii.

¹³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:320; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 120.

¹³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:737; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 274.

¹³⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:737; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 274.

the whole gospel of Christ.”¹³⁸ Specifically, the preexistent soul of Christ “does exceedingly aggrandize the personal glory and dignity of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹³⁹ He states,

This doctrine greatly magnifies the self-denial and the condescending love of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his state of humiliation and death; it casts a thousand rays of glory upon all the scenes of his humbled estate; it makes his subjection and obedience to the will of the Father appear much more illustrious, and his charity and compassion to perishing mankind stand in a very surprising light.¹⁴⁰

These two advantages point to the evangelical impulse behind Watts’ approach to the doctrine of the Trinity. He was concerned about how this doctrine relates to salvation. In short, what must we believe about the Trinity to be saved? Grasping concepts such as eternal generation is beyond what Watts believes is necessary for salvation. He gives three reasons why no human scheme regarding the mode of the union of Christ’s two natures is necessary for salvation: (1) Scripture is clear that God is one in three, but the mode of this union is not clearly revealed; (2) pious and learned men have proposed different schemes; and (3) Scripture lays salvation on “the special divine characters or offices” of each person of the Trinity.¹⁴¹ Elsewhere, Watts asserts that a “gracious God would not put such a difficult test [i.e., the knowledge of the modus] upon the faith of young disciples, poor illiterate men” because it is not “clearly enough revealed in Scripture.”¹⁴² However misguided Watts formulation might be, his desire is laudable—he

¹³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:715; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 228.

¹³⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:710; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 219.

¹⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:712; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 274.

¹⁴¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:587–91; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 173–83. Watts concludes the section with a summation of his position: “To sum up the whole, it is evident to me, that the holy Scripture itself, as I have already proved elsewhere, lays the stress of our salvation upon a belief that Christ is the Messiah, the appointed all-sufficient Saviour, a trust in the proper atonement or sacrifice of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, a dependence on his grace and Spirit for light and holiness, and a submission to his government, much more than it does upon any precise and exact notions or hypotheses concerning his divine and his human nature; even though the union of the divine and the human nature in him are in my judgment necessary to render his salvation complete.” Watts, *Works*, 6:590; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 182.

¹⁴² Watts, *Works*, 6:521; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 6.

is chiefly concerned about the salvation of others.

An Ecumenical Concern (Advantages 5-6)

Watts clearly believed that his doctrine of the Trinity “enables us [orthodox Christians] to defend the doctrine of the deity of Christ with great justice and success against many other cavils of the Socinian and Arian writers.”¹⁴³ Furthermore, he believed that no “point or article of our faith” could ever “receive any evil influence from it [his doctrine of the Trinity], no dangerous consequences, that I know of.”¹⁴⁴ Watts never viewed himself as standing outside the bounds of orthodox confessional Trinitarianism. He could declare, “Now to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons and one God, be all honor, and glory, and everlasting praise. Amen.”¹⁴⁵ Watts never denied the full deity of Christ. In the preface of his second publication, he expresses his appreciation for the works of “Bishop Bull and Bishop Pearson” and the “labours of the reverend Doctor Waterland and Doctor Knight,” all of whom were fierce defenders of confessional Trinitarianism.¹⁴⁶ Watts was convinced that they supported the “same doctrine of the deity of our blessed Lord” as he did.¹⁴⁷ Watts concludes,

¹⁴³ Watts, *Works*, 6:715; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 228. Though he does not give details, Watts note that he has personally discussed the doctrine with “the most zealous and learned defenders of the sacred Trinity” and they all expressed to him that there was no danger of heresy or “injury to sacred truth” in his proposals. Watts, *Works*, 6:715; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 229.

¹⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:715; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 229.

¹⁴⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:360; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 258.

¹⁴⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:421; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, xvi.

¹⁴⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:422; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, xviii. In March 1729, Watts wrote a letter to his Benjamin Colman and it provides a glimpse into his thinking a few years before his final publication on the Trinity. “I hope you have received my Dissertations of the Trinity which I sent you in lieu of that which you gave the College last year. I have not put the 2nd part of my dissertations into the box for Yale College. I would not be charged with leading youth into heresie, tho I am more & more confirmed in the general principal that the deity of Christ is not any other than the deity of the Father which is precise orthodoxy, and I think this very Godhead with which the man Jesus was intimately united in his preexistent soul before the creation, and in his body at his incarnation. *Christ & the Father are one: Tis the Father in him that does thy works. Tis by the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of the Father that he cast out Devills &c.* Tho perhaps there are some distinctions in the Godhead superior to all our thoughts, and the Godhead may be united to the Man Jesus under the peculiar idea of the Logos or Wisdom or Speech, &c. But perhaps also the preexistent soul of Christ is oftener

I think every man may be also permitted, without offence, to solve the objections that are brought against this doctrine, in such a various manner as is most suited to our different apprehensions of things; and by such a variety of solutions the doctrine itself, perhaps, may be better guarded against assaults on every side.¹⁴⁸

Holiness, Happiness, and the Tri-Unity of God

Watts believed he was providing a solid biblical argument that would guard against Arian and Socinian heresies.¹⁴⁹ In particular, he was convinced that his emphasis on Christ's pre-incarnate soul "answers the various expression of Scripture on the subject [John 1:18; Col 1:15; Rev 3:14] without...needless tropes and figures...[so that] every private Christian may understand these early grounds and foundations of his hope."¹⁵⁰ Whatever Watts' perceptions of his own theological orthodoxy, his position on the Trinity was problematic.¹⁵¹ Abraham Taylor concluded, "Mr. Watts scheme...of a super-angelic spirit, supplying the place of a human soul in Christ...is the essence of old Arianism...[and] he does not, indeed, seem to me to know what he has been doing."¹⁵² What Watts hoped would be healing to the divisions among the Dissenters actually proved to be the cause of greater division.¹⁵³

called the Logos than I was wont to think." Isaac Watts, "Letters," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 9 (1894), 333.

¹⁴⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:422; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, xviii.

¹⁴⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:419; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, x.

¹⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:568; Watts, *Useful and Important Questions*, 129. Watts concludes his last publication on the Trinity with a bibliography which he believed supported his Trinitarian positions. See Watts, *Works*, 6:726–27; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 252–53.

¹⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards articulated thirteen points of refutation with respect to Watts' position on the Trinity. Importantly, Edwards continued to publish Watts hymns in New England, even after Watts' publications on the Trinity. Edwards' refutation of Watts was tempered by soft correction and even gratitude for Watts' life and work. See Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 23, *The "Miscellanies": (Entry Nos. 1153–1360)*, ed. Douglas A. Sweeney and Harry S. Stout (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004), 89–92.

¹⁵² Taylor, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity Vindicated*, 112.

¹⁵³ Watts' friends, Thomas Bradbury (1677–1759), Cotton Mather (1663–1728), and Benjamin Colman (1673–1747) wrote to either Watts or others with a general disapproval of Watts' second publication. See Davis, *Isaac Watts: His Life and Works*, 113–15. For more on the controversy and correspondence with Thomas Bradbury, see Samuel Johnson, *The Life of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.*

Watts stressed that the deity of Christ can be preserved, while latitude is given in solving some of the more complex issues related to the subject.¹⁵⁴ He was aware that his hypothesis set him at variance with others, and he remained open to the possibility that he was wrong. “If it appear that I am mistaken in this hypothesis [preexistent soul of Christ], I shall be very ready to receive a happier scheme of explication.”¹⁵⁵ In a letter to his New England friend, Benjamin Colman, Watts humbly stated, “However, as I said, I will neither be a heretick [sic] myself, nor a leader of others afar off, into heresie [sic]. I am ready to receive conviction of any mistake.”¹⁵⁶

Watts was clear that a full knowledge of the triune God awaits us in glory.¹⁵⁷ Any attempt on his part to formulate the doctrine served but one purpose: to “advance [the honour and] the love of God [my Savior], and make heaven the more acceptable to the thoughts and meditations of Christians, [because we have so glorious a Mediator dwelling there].”¹⁵⁸ Watts contends that the source and spring of all happiness is found in

(London: J. F., C. Rivington, and J. Buckland, 1785), 91–92. Abraham Taylor, who did not know Watts personally, was the most detailed in his disapproval. He notes, “I do not think it is on any account necessary to enter into an examination of the fancy of the pre-existence of Christ’s human soul, on the supposition of its being of the same kind with the human spirits. As that hypothesis has not the least countenance from Scripture, and does not, so far as I can perceive, answer any one good purpose, it may, I think, be disregarded as an useless fiction.” Taylor, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity Vindicated*, 89. Taylor outlines twelve areas in which Watts “ought to beg pardon of the Church of Christ” for this publication: (1) giving an unclear scheme of the Trinity, (2) introducing hard and unintelligible terms, (3) giving the Socinian scheme “new dress,” (4) denying Christ’s true humanity, (5) representing Nestorianism in an “innocent notion,” (6) hinting that the human soul of Christ was part of the works of creation and providence, (7) making the Spirit a power or property of God, (8) misunderstanding the New Testament position on the Spirit, (9) misrepresenting the eternal generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit, (10) being indifferent about doxologies to the Spirit, (11) giving false and partial “accounts of antiquity,” and (12) abusing the apostle John. Taylor, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity Vindicated*, 115–16.

¹⁵⁴ For a similar assessment, see Aniol, “Was Isaac Watts Unitarian?” 102–03.

¹⁵⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:422; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, xix.

¹⁵⁶ Watts, “Letters,” 333.

¹⁵⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:728; Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, 255.

¹⁵⁸ Edward Whitaker, *The Future State. Or, A Discourse Attempting Some Display of the Souls Happiness, in Regard to the Eternally Progressive Knowledge, or Eternal Increase of Knowledge, and the Consequences of It, Which is Amongst the Blessed Heaven* (London: J. Greenwood, 1683), 15. As quoted in Watts, *The Glory of Christ as God-Man*, xviii. The 1810 publication does not (1) show this section of the preface as a quote by Watts from the aforementioned work or (2) note explicitly that Watts’ included bracketed additions, included here, to the Whitaker quote. See Watts, *Works*, 6:422.

the communion between the three persons of the Trinity because “knowledge and mutual love make up their heaven.”¹⁵⁹ We enjoy this communion when we draw near to God.¹⁶⁰ The tri-unity of God “is the all-sufficient spring of blessedness, as well as of being, to all the intellectual worlds; as he [the Godhead] is everlastingly self-sufficient for his own being and blessedness.”¹⁶¹

Watts views Christ’s communion with the Father and Spirit as the source of our happiness. He enjoys a higher blessedness because of his superior nearness to God in union, knowledge, and love.¹⁶² Because Christ’s blessedness is “above ours” and “he is nearer to the fountain,” he uniquely conveys holiness and happiness to the Christian soul.¹⁶³ Watts was intellectually consumed with the “sacred constitution of our Lord Jesus Christ, as God and man united in one personal agent” because he believed this “sacred constitution” was a “foretaste of heaven.”¹⁶⁴ It has been given to us as part of the first fruits of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:23) and, therefore, should be contemplated as a “happy design.”¹⁶⁵ For Watts, it is “in the contemplation of God, and in the exercises and

¹⁵⁹ Watts, *Works*, 1:137; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for John Clark, E. M. Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1721), 1:393. See also, Watts, *Works*, 1:137–38; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:392–407. It must be recalled the doctrine that Watts utilizes to ground his entire theology of happiness: “Nearness to God is the foundation of a creature’s happiness.” Watts, *Works*, 1:131; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:376.

¹⁶⁰ Watts writes, “There is another sense also of this phrase, communion of fellowship with God, which has been used by many pious writers, when they make it to significantly the same thing as converse with God; and this also depends upon our nearness, or approach to him: as when a Christian, in secret, pours out his whole heart before God, and is made sensible of his gracious presence, by the sweet influences of instruction, sanctification or comfort.” Watts, *Works*, 1:141; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:404.

¹⁶¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:140; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:400.

¹⁶² Watts, *Works*, 1:135–36; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:386–91.

¹⁶³ Watts, *Works*, 1:137; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:391–92. Robert Letham argues that knowledge of the Trinity, as articulated in Eph 1:17, is what defines communion with God. *The Holy Trinity*, 78–79. In this verse Paul prays “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.” Letham writes, “Knowledge of God is a gift...[that] comes from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit, and is continuous and progressive.” Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 78.

¹⁶⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:247; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:140.

¹⁶⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:247–48; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:140–42.

sensations of divine love, that all supreme felicity consists.”¹⁶⁶ This is ultimately what partially motivated his theological musings on the doctrine of the Trinity,¹⁶⁷ and it is ultimately what became so central in the cultivation of his spirituality:

Happy are the souls above, who see God face to face, who behold the sacred Three in that divine light, where objections and darkness are banished forever, and the shadows are fled away! The noise of controversy and wrangling is never heard in those regions; but if it were possible for the happy inhabitants to differ in sentiment, and controversy could ascend thither, I am persuaded it would be managed without wrangling or noise. The gentleness and benevolence, the sweet serenity and candour, that adorn every spirit there, would reign through all their sacred reasonings; and wheresoever a mistake was found and rectified, among those holy disputants, the voice of joy and triumph would be heard on all sides at the bright and lovely appearance of truth.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:140; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:401.

¹⁶⁷ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 44-46.

¹⁶⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:422; Watts, *Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity, The Second Part*, xix-xx.

CHAPTER 7
EXPERIENCING HOLINESS AND HAPPINESS

Introduction

As the preceding chapters demonstrate, Watts' spirituality is shaped by his understanding of "eternal life begun" as the experience of holiness and happiness. These, in turn, are founded upon four key doctrinal formulations, namely, the depravity of man, the beauty of Christ, the excellency of heaven, and the tri-unity of God. On the basis of this theological foundation, Watts concludes that the spiritual life, in practice, is God's preparation of the soul for heaven. All of this leads to an obvious question: How are holiness and happiness cultivated in the believer's life at present? According to Watts, God "works up" the soul for heavenly holiness and happiness through knowing him and loving him;¹ that is to say, holiness and happiness arise from knowledge of God and love for God.²

Watts' emphasis on the cognitive and affective components of human nature are carefully explored in Graham Beynon's comprehensive study. His work serves as an important guide into understanding how Watts approached the experience of holiness and happiness. In short, Beynon demonstrates that Watts advocates for an "experiential piety"

¹ For more on this in Reformed spirituality, see Alan P. F. Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel: Theological Themes and Thinkers 1550–2000* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 224–26; Tom Schwanda, "Closing the Gap: Recovering the Experiential Nature of Reformed Spirituality," *Reformed Review* 49, no. 2 (Winter 1995–96): 109–25; Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 271–87.

² See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 27–29. McGrath notes that theology "embraces, informs and sustains spirituality...[because] it has a major effect on the way in which Christian people live and behave." See also Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel*, 226. With respect to Reformed spirituality, Sell notes, "When believers contemplate any aspect of Christian doctrine in a devotional spirit, their faith is strengthened. The head undergirds the heart."

or a “passionate religion,” engaging both reason and passion.³ Beynon believes this is particularly evident in Watts’ practical writings on preaching, praise, and prayer. First, in terms of preaching, Beynon concludes that Watts “was thoroughly guided, and indeed driven, by his view of reason and passion.”⁴ He desired for sermons to use “the most convincing argument and appropriate support of natural reason,” yet come from “men who passionately loved God.”⁵ Second, in terms of praise, Beynon maintains that Watts was deeply concerned about integrating both reason and passion,⁶ and that his “genius” and “triumph in hymnody” was a direct result of his “judicious combination” of both.⁷ Third, in terms of prayer, Beynon contends that Watts’ approach was richly informed by reason and passion.⁸ In short, Watts aimed to “defend passionate prayer as eminently reasonable.”⁹

These practical works show how Watts’ emphasis on reason (cognitive) and passion (affective) “continued the Puritan theme of experiential religion” while upholding it “as reasonable.”¹⁰ Obviously, this emphasis deeply impacted his spirituality. Specifically, reason (knowing God) and passion (loving God) are notable in his approach to cultivating eternal life begun. The present chapter analyzes how this is determinative in

³ Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 116.

⁴ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 143.

⁵ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 143.

⁶ For the influence of reason and passion on Watts’ hymnody, see Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 151-55.

⁷ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 163.

⁸ For the influence of reason and passion on Watts’ method of prayer, see Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 177-81. For Watts’ publication on prayer, see Watts, *Works*, 3:107-96; Isaac Watts, *A Guide to Prayer: or, A Free and Rational Account of the Gift, Grace and Spirit of Prayer; With Plain Directions How Every Christian May Attain Them*, 2nd ed. (London: Emanuel Matthews, 1716).

⁹ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 186.

¹⁰ Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 192.

Watts' approach to the spiritual disciplines.¹¹ While a comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this dissertation, this chapter demonstrates that Watts' approach to the means of grace is key to increasing holiness and happiness and thus eternal life begun. The first and second sections provide a brief consideration of Watts' understanding of what it means to love God and know God.¹² The third section examines how Watts positions knowledge and love as "foretastes" of heaven. The fourth and fifth sections survey two examples of how loving God and knowing God intersect in Watts' practice of spiritual disciplines, namely, meditation and worship.

Loving God

Loving God is central to Watts' understanding of happiness and holiness.¹³ A necessary "ingredient" of holiness (see chapter 2) is "delight in the worship and enjoyment of God."¹⁴ These (worship and enjoyment) are the result of drawing near to God through Christ. Worship, therefore, is the integration of both knowledge of God and

¹¹ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Rev. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev. George Burder* (London: J. Barfield, 1810), 3:97; Isaac Watts, *An Humble Attempt Toward the Revival of Practical Religion Among Christians, and Particularly the Protestant Dissenters, By a Serious Address to Ministers and People, In Some Occasional Discourses* (London: E. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1731), 339–40. For example, Watts understands the Lord's Supper as providing five primary spiritual benefits. First, it is an "exercise and establishment" of faith in the crucified Christ. Second, it "encourages and advances" hope and joy in Christ. Third, it is given to "represent and to promote" union and love among fellow Christians. Fourth, it inflames "love to God the Father, in sending his Son to die." Fifth, it places the Christian under the "strongest and most solemn engagements" to fulfill the duties of Christianity. For Watts' corpus of hymns on the Lord's Supper, see Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In Three Books. I. Collected from Scriptures. II. Compos'd on Divine Subjects. III. Prepared for the Lord's Supper. With an Essay Towards the Improvement of Christian Psalmody, by the Use of Evangelical Hymns in Worship, as Well as the Psalms of David* (London: J. Humfreys, 1707), 182–210.

¹² These sections on (1) loving God and (2) knowing God are not comprehensive analyses, but serve to demonstrate the place of both in Watts' spirituality.

¹³ Likewise, Jonathan Edwards states, "A man must first love God, or have his heart united to him, before he will esteem God's good his own, and before he will desire the glorifying and enjoying of God, as his happiness." Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edward*, vol. 2, *The Religious Affections*, ed. John H. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 242.

¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:16; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects* (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1721), 1:42.

love for God, and consequently it is fundamental to how Christians cultivate holiness and happiness. They experience happiness through “love of the chiefest good,” which is a conversing, feeding, and dwelling on the “endless stores and treasures” in the Godhead.¹⁵ Moreover, Christ’s mediatorial work is a “golden mine,” which functions as the “everlasting spring of holy love” in Christian piety.¹⁶

From this discussion it is evident that Watts places tremendous importance on the passions. He highlights various uses of the passions in the context of practical piety. The passions are advantageous to the Christian life because they (1) “render the knowledge of God exceeding desirous”; (2) impress this knowledge deep into the mind; (3) increase the desire for holiness; (4) generate delight in the spiritual practices of religion; (5) aid in spiritual warfare; (6) allow the gospel to shine forth in society; and (7) make us “fitter” for Christ’s “presence and enjoyment in heaven.”¹⁷ The more the passions are “engaged about Divine objects in a proper manner,” the more prepared the Christian becomes for the “business and blessedness of heaven.”¹⁸

While the passions in general are central to Watts’ thought on Christian experience, there is one particular passion that is preeminent—love.¹⁹ Watts’ ruminations

¹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:355.

¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:389; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects* (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1729), 3:175.

¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:657–68; Isaac Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God and the Use and Abuse of the Passions in Religion, with a Devout Meditation Suited to Each Discourse* (London: J. Clark, R. Hett, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1729), 161–87.

¹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:666; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 187.

¹⁹ In Watts’ day, the passions are typically related to those emotions that have a “physical element,” while the affections are “more mental in nature.” Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 76. For a brief history of these terms, see Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 68–71. Watts was aware of the distinction between the passions and the affections; however, he uses the terms interchangeably. See Watts, *Works*, 2:581; Isaac Watts, *The Doctrine of the Passions Explained and Improved: Or, A Brief and Comprehensive Scheme of the Natural Affections of Mankind, Attempted in a Plain and Easy Method; With an Account of Their Names, Nature, Appearances, Effects, and Different uses in Human Life: To Which are Subjoined, Moral and Divine Rules for the Regulation or Government of Them* (London: n.p., 1729), 10–11; Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 76–79. Watts positions love as the chief passion/affection, which then orders the other affections such as joy, desire, fear, and sorrow. This is Augustinian. See Augustine, *The City of*

on love are set in the context of his concept of the “heart,” which functions as the “seat of all passions.”²⁰ The primacy of the heart is foundational to his entire discourse on loving God: “The Lord our God is the proper object of our most sincere affections, and our supreme love.”²¹ Watts believes Scripture emphasizes God’s concern for the heart by way of three facts: (1) God judges the secrets of the heart; (2) God rejects any works void of the heart; and (3) God disregards “outward forms” of worship that lack the inward affections of the heart.²² Accordingly, “the whole train of affections, both the painful and the pleasant ones, are under the power and regulation of love.”²³ For Watts, this reality will be evident in the life of a Christian.²⁴

First, when love for God reigns supreme over all the passions, holy wonder, admiration, delight, and desire become the Christian’s experience.²⁵ For Watts, God is “an immense ocean of glories and wonders...[where] there is nothing in God but what

God Against the Pagans, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XIV:5–6, 588–91. For more on the affections in Augustinian tradition through the Puritan and Reformed tradition, see J. Stephen Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 72–75.

²⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:634; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 107.

²¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:636; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 108.

²² Watts, *Works*, 2:636; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 108.

²³ Watts, *Works*, 2:634. Isaac Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God, And its Influence on all the Passions: With a Discovery of the Right Use and Abuse of Them in Matters of Religion*, 3rd ed. (London: J. Oswald, J. Buckland, 1746), x–xi. See also Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1884), 99. Alexander notes, “Love may be said to be the center around with all the virtues of the Christian revolve, and from which they derive their nature. Love of some kind is familiar to the experience of all people; and all love attended with some pleasure in its exercise; but it varies on account of the different of the objects of affection. Divine love is itself a delightful and soul-satisfying exercise.”

²⁴ Watts is not novel in his position. Jonathan Edwards, for example, identifies love as the distinguishing mark of true Christian practice. See Stephen R. Holmes, “Religious Affections by Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758),” in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 291. Edwards notes, “the affection of love is as it were the fountain of all affection; and particularly, that Christian love...[for the] glory of God, and Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the works of God, and the ways of God.” Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 2:240.

²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:643–45; Isaac Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God and the Use and Abuse of the Passions in Religion, with a Devout Meditation Suited to Each Discourse* (London: J. Clark, R. Hett, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1729), 125–34.

would be marvelous and astonishing to us, if we had our eyes divinely enlightened and our hearts fired with divine love.”²⁶ Moreover, divine love stirs a holy desire for the favor and grace of God, in order that his presence might be experienced. Desire that flows from the love of God creates a hunger and thirst for God. “Hunger and thirst, and all the longing powers and appetites of animal nature, are too few and too feeble to express the holy desires of a soul breathing after the presence of its God.”²⁷ The progression of experience, derived from love for God, unfolds in a rather systematic manner in Watts’ thinking. As love for God is stirred by knowledge of his providential works and gracious dealings with man in Christ, wonder and admiration increase. These, in turn, lead to a holy desire for God’s presence. Conversely, anger, pride, and covetousness create a “bitter uneasiness and pain in the remembrance, because they are offences against a God who is supremely beloved.”²⁸

Second, when love for God reigns supreme over all the passions, it functions as the “invaluable regulator” of sin in the Christian’s life.²⁹ Watts believes this occurs in two ways. First, love for God creates a deep sense of grief on account of sin. Watts declares, “What holy confusion, what meltings of heart in secret sorrow, do the true lovers of God feel, after they have indulged temptation, fallen under some more grievous sin, defiled their consciences, and dishonored their God?”³⁰ Love for God is, therefore, a principal means of conviction and repentance in the life of a believer.³¹ Second, love for God

²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:643; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 127.

²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:645; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 131.

²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:648; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 139.

²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:652; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 151.

³⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:648; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 139.

³¹ See Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 244. According to Demarest, repentance possesses intellectual, emotional, and volitional aspects. He writes, “The repentant soul must understand God’s holiness, righteousness, and displeasure against sin...experience godly sorrow and remorse...for the grief it has cause God and others...[and] confession of known sins followed by a

subdues sinful passions that might manifest themselves toward God and our neighbor.³² It is “divine love” that enables us to mortify wrath, malice, and envy, while igniting holy dispositions such as meekness, gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness. Watts writes,

If divine love be so sovereign and ruling an affection, then the best and noblest method for governing all the passions, is to get the love of God rooted in the heart, and to see that it maintains its supreme dominion there. What uneasy creatures are we made by our various passions! How often do they disquiet and torment the soul? How headstrong is their violence, like a horse unbroken and untamed? How sudden are their starts? Their motions how wild and various! And how unruly are their efforts! Now if one had but one sovereign bridle, that could reach and manage them all! One golden reign, that would hold in all their unruly motions, and would also excite and guide them at pleasure! What an invaluable instrument would this be to mortals! *Surely such an instrument is the love of God*, such an invaluable regulator of all the passionate powers.³³

Third, when love for God reigns supreme over all the passions, it stirs zeal for God. Watts understands Christian zeal as a strong desire for the spread of God’s glory through worship and the pursuit of holiness.³⁴ This naturally leads to the spread of the gospel.³⁵ Watts explains, “All the passions of the man are subject to the government of holy love, and are employed by it for heavenly purposes. When we love God supremely, we shall love men who are made after the image of God.”³⁶ Watts’ life modeled this zeal for the gospel, in that it was “his motive derived from it and the doctrine and example of

forsaking of them.”

³² Watts, *Works*, 2:649–50; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 142–44. In some ways, this is a reflection of the first and greatest commandment, which Watts utilizes as his text for the entire discourse. See Mark 12:30–31.

³³ Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 151–52. Emphasis added. The original publication is used here because the punctuation was altered in the 1810 volume. For the 1810 edition, see Watts, *Works*, 2:652.

³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:647; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 136–38.

³⁵ For an excellent discussion on the love of God and benevolence, see Archibald Alexander, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1884), 99–100. Alexander denotes two primary aspects of love for God: (1) love of delight in his character as revealed in his Word, and (2) love of benevolence, which leads to “intense desire for the salvation of our fellow men, and ardent wish that they may all become interested in that Savior whom we have found to be so precious, is the true source of the missionary spirit, and is the foundation, often, of laborious and long continued exertions to prepare for the holy ministry.”

³⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:669; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 194.

our Redeemer furnished its standard and its measure.”³⁷ In addition to spreading God’s glory, love for God is the means for growing in holiness. Watts describes this love as an “assimilating principle” because it “works more and more, till we have transformed by degrees into his [God’s] image.”³⁸ He adds, “The soul that loves God will always be aspiring after greater degrees of holiness.”³⁹

In sum, loving God occupies a prominent place in Watts’ spirituality. He was convinced that eternal life begun (holiness and happiness) would only be the believer’s experience when love for God reigns supreme in the heart. “Love of the heart implies a strong inclination of the will toward God, a steady bent of soul toward this blessed Author of our being and happiness.”⁴⁰ For Watts, an obvious inference of this reality is that we cannot love what we do not know. This, then, brings us from the affective (loving God) to the cognitive (knowing God).

Knowing God

Much of what contributes to heaven’s excellency, according to Watts, is that our knowledge of God will be perfect (without sin), yet never exhausted. We will increase in knowledge for all eternity because God is infinitely glorious. Our “contemplation of the noblest object” will be the source of our eternal happiness.⁴¹ For Watts, this contemplation should begin at present. He is convinced that we must occupy ourselves with that which stirs our love for God. This means we must pursue active

³⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:xxii.

³⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:647; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 137.

³⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:647; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 137.

⁴⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:637; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 112

⁴¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:131; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:352. See Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2:242. Edwards links happiness to our understanding of God, writing, “A change made in the views of his [a Christian’s] mind” comes “whereby he apprehends a beauty, glory, and supreme good, in God’s nature, as it is in itself. This may be the thing that first draws his heart to him, and causes his heart to be united to him, prior to all considerations of his own interest or happiness, although after this, and as a fruit of this, he necessarily seeks his interest and happiness in God.”

cognitive engagement with those doctrines that most aptly accentuate the glory of God—namely, the depravity of man, the beauty of Christ, the excellency of heaven, and the trinity of God. These are necessary for cultivating love for God and, therefore, indispensable to our enjoyment of eternal life begun—holiness and happiness.⁴²

If God is to be the object of our supreme love (affective), the mind must be preoccupied with God (cognitive).⁴³ In order for the heart to experience love for God, the mind must be engaged with knowledge of God. Watts comments, “It is impossible that we should love anything that we know not: and it is not to be expected that we should love God supremely, or with all our heart, if we have not *known him* to be more excellent, and more desirable than all other things we are acquainted with.”⁴⁴ Love is not simply a result of the knowledge of God; rather, love is *founded* in knowledge.⁴⁵ There is, therefore, an inescapable correlation between knowledge and love. This is critical to Watts’ spirituality. Where there is no knowledge of God, there can be no true love for God. Conversely, where there is true knowledge of God, the heart will be appropriately engaged.⁴⁶ Elsewhere, Watts places “esteem” in close proximity to knowledge in order to emphasize the unique role the mind plays in stirring love. A degree of “knowledge of

⁴² See for example Sell, *Enlightenment, Ecumenism, Evangel*, 226. He notes that doctrines related to “the Last Things (so frequently avoided in pulpits—except at funerals, by which time it is rather later for the deceased), can have a profound effect upon the believer’s daily demeanor.”

⁴³ For an example of the unique coupling of love and knowledge in Scripture, see Edmund Clowney, *Christian Meditation: What the Bible Teaches About Meditation and Spiritual Exercise* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1979), 46–47. Clowney details how Scripture heightens love in a unique manner because love requires (1) response, (2) commitment, and (3) jealousy.

⁴⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:637; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 110. Emphasis added

⁴⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:637–38; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 112. He notes, “If anything in this world be the chosen portion of our souls, if any thing beneath and besides God be made our chief hope, our support, and our life, our hearts will run out in strongest affections toward it, for it is our chief happiness; and then we can never love God as it becomes a creature to love his Creator.”

⁴⁶ See Edmund Clowney, *Christian Meditation*, 46. Clowney captures the unique correlation when he writes, “For Christian piety...knowledge of God is one with love.” Further, he notes that knowing God and loving God are “acts of communion” because they are uniquely identified as such in the Bible.

God,” says Watts, must “raise the highest esteem of him in our mind.”⁴⁷

As love for God takes root in the heart, it in turn compels the mind to a greater pursuit of knowledge. It “sets the powers of the understanding at work, in search of divine truth...and render the knowledge of God exceeding desirable.”⁴⁸ By way of example, he writes, “If I am awakened to a sense of sin, and fear the anger of God, I shall long to know the awful extent of his [God’s] power, and the terrible effects of his anger, as well as the methods of obtaining his grace.”⁴⁹

Watts acknowledges that, at times, the passions (e.g., fear, love, hope, sorrow) overwhelm the mind.⁵⁰ This is due to their intrusive nature and the fact that they are “supremely importunate, and will be heard.”⁵¹ At such times, it is vital to orient the mind towards its proper object, in order to leverage the passions for the purpose of growth in holiness. In other words, if fear, love, hope, or sorrow forcefully seize the mind, Watts affirms that they must be informed and directed by means of the knowledge of God.⁵² Watts remarks, “Those Christians are best prepared for the useful and pious exercises of

⁴⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:637; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 110.

⁴⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:657; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 161.

⁴⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:657–58; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 163. Watts provides another example: “But when the arrows of conviction strike through the soul, when the heart is awakened to a pathetic sense of sin, the fear of divine vengeance possesses and torments the spirit, then it [knowledge of God] is the most importunate enquiry of the heart and the lips...St. Paul learned all the terrors of the Lord, and felt all his painful passion in an uproar, when he was struck down to the dust, with the dreadful and overwhelming glory on his was to Damascus; Acts ix. 3. And with what intense and hasty zeal did he make this enquiry, *Lord, what will though have me to do?* Verse 6. And when he had learned the knowledge of Christ; as the only way to the favour of God and salvation, how highly doth he value it! Phil. iii. 8. *Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord.*” Watts, *Works*, 2:657; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 162–63.

⁵⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:658; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 163–64

⁵¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:659; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 166.

⁵² Jonathan Edwards writes, “Gracious affections do arise from the mind being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine thing. Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge...knowledge is the key that first opens the hard heart and enlarges the affections, and so opens the way for men into the kingdom of heaven.” Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 2:267.

the passions in religion, who have laid the foundations of it in a regular *knowledge of the things of God*.”⁵³

When the passions are thus engaged, we imitate Christ. “Thus, it appears, that the more our affections are tinctured with piety and goodness, and the warmer is their engagement in the things of God, the more nearly shall we imitate our glorious Redeemer. O divine pattern, beyond all our imitation! But blessed are those who are the nearest copiers of it.”⁵⁴ Christ experienced the full range of human passions while here on earth. For example, he had an intense love for his Father (John 14:31); he was angered by hypocrites and blasphemers (Mark 3:5); he loved the church with unmatched fervor (Eph 5:25); and he grieved over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44).⁵⁵ And yet, Christ experienced these passions as governed by the knowledge of God. For Watts, therefore, Christ is the *great archetype* of godliness. His example provides the general framework for understanding how the knowledge of God practically informs piety.

Loving and Knowing God as “Foretastes of Heaven”

Watts links loving and knowing God to “eternal life begun” because they are the “forestates of heaven.” In a discourse on the Romans 8:23, he argues that the “firstfruits of the Spirit” do not “chiefly signify the gifts of the Spirit” because these gifts are “not the employments nor the enjoyments of heaven.”⁵⁶ Rather, the firstfruits of the Spirit are “foretastes of heaven” and include such things as “knowledge and holiness, the

⁵³ Watts, *Works*, 3:688; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 241–42. Emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:666; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 186.

⁵⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:666; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 185–86.

⁵⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:639. He lists the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including (1) the gifts of tongues, (2) healing, (3) miracles, (4) prophecy, (5) preaching, and (6) praying. He writes, “Here let it be observed, that the first fruits of any field, or plant, or tree, are of the same kind with the full product of the harvest: Therefore, it is plain that the first fruits of the Spirit in this place cannot chiefly signify the gifts of the Spirit.”

graces and joys, which are more perfect and glorious in the heavenly state.”⁵⁷ As such, Watts contends that God is pleased to give “several of the foretastes of heavenly blessedness” to his children on earth.⁵⁸ These foretastes are “real visits from heaven” and they are sent in order to make them “more meet for the heavenly glory.”⁵⁹ Watts describes six general categories of heavenly foretastes, all of which are developed around the concepts of knowing and loving God. While heavenly inhabitants experience these aspects of blessedness to their fullest extent, Christians here on earth “taste” them through knowing God and loving God.

The first two sections of heavenly foretastes relate to the “blessedness and enjoyment” of God’s works and attributes.⁶⁰ The saints enjoy the “majesty and greatness of God” through “blessed and extensive surveys of the infinite knowledge of God.”⁶¹ In terms of his works, God’s creation and providence point to his all-sufficiency. He forms and supplies “every creature with all that it can want or desire.”⁶² This imparts a “sense of astonishment and sacred delight.”⁶³ With respect to God’s attributes, Watts mentions (among other things) God’s sovereignty and love. The “sovereignty and dominion of the blessed God [may] so penetrate the soul with a divine sense...as to raise up a heaven of wonder and joy within.”⁶⁴ God’s love “shines in its brightest rays” and “displays its most

⁵⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:639; Isaac Watts, *The World to Come: Or, Discourses on the Joys or Sorrows of Departed Souls at Death, and the Glory or Terror of the Resurrection* 2nd ed. (London: T. Longman and J. Brackstone, 1745), 2:116.

⁵⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:639; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:121.

⁵⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:240; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:120–21.

⁶⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:241; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:121.

⁶¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:241; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:121–23.

⁶² Watts, *Works*, 2:243; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:128.

⁶³ Watts, *Works*, 2:243; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:128.

⁶⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:245; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:134.

triumphant glories...in all the sons of blessedness.”⁶⁵

The third and fourth sections of heavenly foretastes relate to the “transactions” of heaven, which God “harmonized” in eternity and graciously manifested on earth.⁶⁶ There are four specific transactions: (1) the “sacred constitution” of the Godhead, wherein God and man were “united in one personal agent”; (2) the manner of salvation in Christ’s atoning work for sinners; (3) the work of sanctification by means of the Holy Spirit; and (4) the “divine perfections united in the success of the gospel.”⁶⁷ These foretastes of heaven underscore why Watts’ spirituality is founded in the doctrines of the depravity of man, beauty of Christ, excellency of heaven, and tri-unity of God.

The fifth and sixth sections of heavenly foretastes relate to aspects of loving God. First, Watts argues that “foretastes of heaven are sometimes derived from the overflowing sense of the love of God let in upon the soul.”⁶⁸ He explains,

Some have imagined that that “perfect satisfaction of soul which arises from a good conscience, speaking peace inwardly in the survey of its sincere desire to please God in all things, and having with uprightness of heart fulfilled its duty,” is the supreme delight of heaven; but it is my opinion, God has never made the felicity of his creatures to be drawn so entirely out of themselves, or from the spring of their own bosom, as this notion seems to imply. God himself will be all in all to his creatures; and all their original springs of blessedness, as well as being, are in him, and must be derived from him: It is therefore the overflowing sense of being beloved by a God almighty and eternal, that is the supreme fountain of joy and blessedness to every reasonable nature, and the endless security of this happiness is joy everlasting in all the regions of the blessed above. *Now a taste of this kind is heavenly blessedness even on this earth, where God is pleased to bestow it on his creatures; and the glimpses of it bring such extasies [sic] into the soul as can hardly be conceived, or revealed to others, but it is best felt by them who enjoy it.*⁶⁹

Second, Watts contends that foretastes of heaven are experienced in “fervent emotions of

⁶⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:246–47; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:138–39.

⁶⁶ Watts also refers to these transactions as the “business and pleasure of heaven.” See Watts, *Works*, 2:247; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:140.

⁶⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:246–49; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:140–45.

⁶⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:249; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:147.

⁶⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:250; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:148–49. Emphasis added.

[the] soul in love to Jesus Christ.”⁷⁰ Based upon 1 Peter 1:8, Watts holds that, though the saints on earth have not seen Christ, “they love him with the most intense and ardent zeal.”⁷¹ This zeal leads to a devotion that “almost swallows them up, and carries them away captive above all earthly things, and brings them near to the heavenly world.”⁷² For Watts, Christ is the revelation of God’s love on earth. Because he is the “nearest image of God the Father,” no Christian can love nor delight in anything “beneath God equal to their love...[or] delight in Jesus Christ.”⁷³

The foretastes of heaven serve to reiterate Watts’ approach to the spiritual life in terms of knowledge and love. Eternity begun, through holiness and happiness, is part of how he believes the soul is prepared for heaven. Furthermore, these foretastes of heaven serve to highlight the centrality of knowing and loving God. What is more, Watts explicitly links these forestates to the practices of meditation and worship.

Loving and Knowing God Through Meditation

One example of how love and knowledge intersect in Watts’ thought is the spiritual discipline of meditation.⁷⁴ In his discourses on the love of God, Watts concludes the various chapters with homiletical reflections and meditations. The six sections of heavenly foretastes occupy much of his attention. While the inhabitants of heaven enjoy these more perfectly, the saints on earth devote themselves to them by means of meditation, which is a principal means by which love for God is stirred in the heart.

⁷⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:250; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:149.

⁷¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:250; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:149.

⁷² Watts, *Works*, 2:250; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:149. As is noted later, Watts attributes much of this work to the Holy Spirit. He notes, “It is through this divine taste of love, and joy, and glory communicated by the blessed Spirit, revealing the things of Christ to their souls.”

⁷³ Watts, *Works*, 2:250; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:150–51.

⁷⁴ For the Puritan tradition concerning the role of meditation in connecting the head and heart, see Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality*, 190–213.

The Purpose of Meditation

Watts advocates for meditation as a means of advancing the Christian life in holiness and happiness.⁷⁵ With respect to love for God in particular, he views meditation as the means by which Christians experience it as the supreme affection. The mind sets itself upon God's love as revealed in Scripture. As this knowledge takes root in the heart, it produces love for God, which then engages the other affections: joy, desire, fear, and sorrow. As previously mentioned, Watts argues for the supremacy of love for God among the affections. It is the chief affection. But this does not mean that love for God is naturally inherent or easily attained. On the contrary, it must be cultivated by means of meditation. He writes,

How necessary and useful a practice it is for a Christian to meditate often on the transcendent perfection and worth of the blessed God, to survey his attributes, and his grace in Christ Jesus, to keep up in the mind a constant idea of his supreme excellence, and frequently to repeat and confirm the choice of him, as our highest hope, our portion, and our everlasting good! This will keep the love of God warm at heart and maintain the divine affection in its primitive life and vigour. But if our idea of the adorable and supreme excellence of God grows faint and feeble, and sink lower in the mind; if we lose the sight of his amiable glories, the sense of his amazing love in the gospel, his rich promises and his alluring grace, if our will cleave not to him as our chief good, and live not on him daily as our spring of happiness, we shall abate the fervency of this sacred passion, our love to God will grow cold by degrees, and suffer great and guilty decay.⁷⁶

According to Watts, meditation is critical to the spiritual life of holiness and happiness because it brings together the cognitive and affective, namely, intellectual comprehension and heartfelt dedication. He states, "We must meditate frequently on these things, *viz.* what the great and blessed God is in himself, what he has done for us, what he daily does for us, and what he has promised to do, both in this life and the life to come."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:634; Isaac Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God, An its Influence on all the Passions: With a Discovery of the Right Use and Abuse of Them in Matters of Religion*, 3rd ed. (London: J. Oswald, J. Buckland, 1746), xi. The contours of meditation spill over into aspects of Watts writing (such as his poems and hymns).

⁷⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:639; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 115.

⁷⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:699; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 274.

Meditation is also part of how the soul “beholds” the foretastes of heaven through the “heights of [God’s] transcendent majesty.”⁷⁸ This meditation is where knowledge of God and love for God intersect in the actual pursuit of eternal life begun—holiness and happiness.⁷⁹

The Object of Meditation

Watts details several objects worthy of meditation. These include the nature of God, the attributes of God, the works of God, the sinfulness of man, and the foretastes of heaven.⁸⁰ Meditation upon the foretastes of heaven creates a “heavenly-mindedness” of God’s “special favours and enjoyments,” so that we “raise [our] hearts to a greater nearness to God, and more constant converse with him.”⁸¹ Meditation upon the “all-comprehensive knowledge of God” carries the soul away “to such a degree, as to lose and abandon all your former pride and appearances of knowledge and wisdom.”⁸² Watts notes, “Have you never fallen into such a devout and fixed contemplation of the majesty of God, as to be even astonished at his glory and greatness, and to have your souls so swallowed up in this sight, that all the sorrows and the joys of this life, all the businesses and necessities of it have been forgotten for a season, all things below and beneath God have seemed as nothing in your eyes?”⁸³ God’s creation is another foretaste of heaven upon which the Christian should meditate:

Have you never looked upward to the midnight skies, and with amazement sent your

⁷⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:241; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:122.

⁷⁹ For an excellent discussion, see Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from Our Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2006), 74–100.

⁸⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:701–03; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 277–81.

⁸¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:240; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:120.

⁸² Watts, *Works*, 2:241; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:123.

⁸³ Watts, *Works*, 2:241; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:121–22.

thoughts upward to him who calls all the stars by their names, and brings them forth in all their sparkling glories, who marshals them in their nightly ranks and orders, and then stood overwhelmed with sacred astonishment at the wisdom which made and ranged them all in their proper situations, and there appointed them to fulfil ten thousand useful purposes, and that not only towards this little ball of earth, but to a multitude of upper planetary worlds? Have you never enquired into the wonders of his wisdom in framing the bodies, the limbs, and the senses of millions of animals, birds and beasts, fishes, and insects, as well as men all around this globe, and who hath framed all their organs and powers of nature with exquisite skill, to see and hear, to run and fly, and swim, to produce their young in all their proper forms and sizes, furnished with their various powers, and to feed and nourish them in their innumerable shapes and colours, admirable for strength and beauty? And have you not felt your souls filled with devout adoration at the unspeakable and infinite contrivances of a God?⁸⁴

But the most prominent theme in Watts' works is the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is "the "blessed messenger of divine love,"⁸⁵ and therefore he deserves to be the focus of "joyful meditation."⁸⁶ By means of this meditation, the Christian is filled with joy, love, wonder, and thanksgiving. By way of example, Watts declares,

Come, blessed Saviour, set thy holy example before me, in a more illustrious and transforming light: Let all the devout passions of zeal and love, which reigned in thy heart, reign also in mine: O that I might copy out the wonders of thy zeal for honour of God, and thy love to the race of man! With what a divine vehemence were thy holy affections engaged in worship! But alas, how cold are all my attempts of devotion! Kindle, O Jesus, the sacred fire within me: Let it melt down my heart, and mold me into thy likeness. Let my soul be made up of divine love, as a happy preparative for the joys of heaven, and the everlasting presence of God, and my Saviour.⁸⁷

Watts is careful to stress that meditation on the person and work of Christ is always mediated by Scripture. His homiletical meditations are rooted in the biblical text. He weaves Scripture throughout his meditations because he is convinced that divine truth alone can awaken true passion. "We may have our devout passions quickened by converse with those parts of the Holy Bible which contain the most affecting subjects,

⁸⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:241–42; Watts, *The World to Come*, 2:123–24.

⁸⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:642; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 124.

⁸⁶ Watts, *Works*, 2:653; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 154.

⁸⁷ Watts, *Works*, 2:668; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 191–92.

and express them in the most pathetic manner.”⁸⁸ Christians, therefore, must search the Scriptures to fill their minds with objects worthy of meditation: (1) the wonder of God’s love and mercy toward his people; (2) the dreadfulness of God’s wrath toward sinful individuals and nations; (3) the faithful promises of God concerning pardon, grace, life, and salvation; and (4) the wondrous history of Jesus Christ’s life and death.⁸⁹ “Above all,” writes Watts, “I must recommend the specimens of divine meditation and divine worship, the complaints, the supplications, and the songs of praise which are offered to God by holy men in the Old Testament and in the New.”⁹⁰ These “specimens” are featured most prominently in the psalms of David. Thus, Watts exhorts,

Choose a psalm suited to your own case, and frame and temper; compare your hearts with the Psalmist, and your circumstances with his; lift up your souls to God in the words of David, or imitate his language where his words do not so perfectly express your case. Enter into his spirit, form and model your pious affections by that illustrious pattern, and be sure to bring Christ and the sweet discoveries of grace, and the blessings of the gospel, into this sort of devotion.⁹¹

The content of Watts’ homiletical meditations, along with his distinct directives concerning the practice of meditation, reveal his Scripture-based approach to cultivating the knowledge of God. This knowledge, in turn, is the means by which love for God is kindled. When this occurs, the Christian brings together intellectual comprehension (cognitive) and heartfelt dedication (affective) thereby experiencing eternal life begun—holiness and happiness.

Loving and Knowing God Through Worship

As with meditation, Watts’ writings on worship demonstrate his conviction regarding the inseparable relationship between knowing God and loving God. He

⁸⁸ Watts, *Works*, 2:702; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 281.

⁸⁹ Watts, *Works*, 2:702–03; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 281–83.

⁹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 2:703; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 283.

⁹¹ Watts, *Works*, 2:702–03; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 283.

maintains that happiness is cultivated by a “delightful sense of love” from an “Almighty Friend.”⁹² This “delightful sense” entails being loved by God, knowing God, and loving God in return. Happiness, therefore, is realized in a mutual love. This is most vivid in Watts’ understanding of the doctrine of God’s tri-unity. The polemical and controversial elements of his ruminations aside, Watts’ Trinitarianism informed his theology of worship, particularly his view of the relationship between knowledge of God and love for God.

A Theology of Worship

Studies of Watts’ practice of worship have focused exclusively on his hymnody.⁹³ One of his major contributions was his composition of hymns that paraphrased the psalms. He was convinced that this would contribute to a greater gospel focus and a greater affective element in singing.⁹⁴ Watts explains,

The first and chief intent of this part of worship, is to express unto God what sense and apprehension we have of his essential glories, and what notice we take of his works of wisdom and power, vengeance and mercy; it is to vent the inward devotion of our spirits in words of melody, to speak our own experience of divine things, especially our religious joy; it would be tiresome to recount the endless instances out of the Book of Psalms and other divine songs, where this is made the chief business of them.⁹⁵

One important implication is that Watts framed his approach to worship on the basis of the human-to-divine relationship. In other words, he was concerned about revelation,

⁹² Watts, *Works*, 1:124; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 1:355.

⁹³ See Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 144-68; Bernard L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts: Five Informal Papers* (London: Epworth Press, 1942); J. R. Watson, “The Hymns of Isaac Watts and the Tradition of Dissent,” in *Dissenting Praise: Religious Dissent and the Hymn in England and Wales*, ed. Isabel Rivers and David L. Wykes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁹⁴ See Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 148-51.

⁹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 4:380; Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In Three Books. I. Collected From Scriptures. II. Compos’d on Divine Subjects. III. Prepared for the Lord’s Supper. With an Essay Towards the Improvement of Christian Psalmody, by the Use of Evangelical Hymns in Worship, as Well as the Psalms of David* (London: J. Humfreys, 1707), 257.

response, and experience. This paradigm is significant to Watts' theology of worship. The majority of his writings on the subject are of a pastoral nature; that is to say, they are driven by his concern for church renewal. With respect to his hymns specifically, Watts aimed for clarity over brilliance because his primary concern was to make them "suitable to the capacity or experience of plain Christians."⁹⁶ This pastoral bent, with its focus on the "capacity or experience" of the "plain Christian," is readily seen in Watts' general understanding of worship.

In his second major work on the doctrine of the Trinity, *Three Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* (1724), Watts provides the fullest and clearest articulation of the nature of worship. He puts forward four propositions which shape the content of, reason for, and object of worship. In the first, Watts provides a general definition of worship; it is "some peculiar honour or respect paid to an intelligent being, either real or imaginary."⁹⁷ It can be directed toward a relic or image because "there is some [perceived] god, or some inferior spirit or power that dwells in these images."⁹⁸ Such worship consists of inward motions and outward expressions.

In the second proposition, Watts differentiates between "civil" worship (human to human) and "religious" worship (human to God). He notes the first is "that human honour which is paid to any of our fellow-creatures...upon the account of some excellency...or some special relation or character."⁹⁹ By way of example, Watts appeals to David in 1 Chronicles 20:20, stating that "all the assembly...bowed their heads and paid homage to the Lord and to the king." The reason for such worship is rooted in David's personal excellence and special role.

⁹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 4:388; Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 276.

⁹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:388; Isaac Watts, *Three Dissertations Relating to the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: J. Clark, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1724), 50.

⁹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:388; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 50.

⁹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:388; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 51.

In the third proposition, Watts defines religious worship as “the divine honour paid to some superior being, on the account of some supposed divine excellences and powers belonging to it.”¹⁰⁰ Whether it is civil worship or divine worship, Watts maintains that it is motivated by some excellence in the object. In the case of religious worship specifically, this excellence is unique to God.¹⁰¹

In the fourth proposition, Watts contends that religious worship must be defined by Scripture: “God has assumed religious worship to himself in his Word, as his own peculiar prerogative, and with the severest penalties has forbid it to be paid to any inferior being.”¹⁰² God reserves worship for himself to (1) secure his own honor, and (2) guard his people from idolatry.¹⁰³ According to Watts, this worship entails honor and respect, both inward and outward, directed exclusively to God because of his divine excellences and powers. Here we have the *content* of worship (honor and respect), the *reason* for worship (divine excellences and powers), and the *object* of worship (God Almighty). This gives the systematic structure to Watts’ theology of worship.

Trinitarian Worship

The content of, reason for, and object of worship all center on God’s relationship to man;¹⁰⁴ more specifically, a triune God’s relationship with man. Paul

¹⁰⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:388; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 51. Watts cites Daniel Waterland (1683–1740), master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and active participant in the Trinitarian controversies of eighteenth-century England. For more on Waterland’s writing on worship, see Daniel Waterland, “Vindication of Christ’s Divinity, being a Defence of some Queries Relating to Dr. Clarke’s Scheme of the Holy Trinity,” in vol. 1 of *The Works of The Rev. Daniel Waterland, D.D.*, ed. William Van Mildert (Oxford: The University Press, 1856), 407–36.

¹⁰¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:388; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 51.

¹⁰² Watts, *Works*, 6:389; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 56. Watts defends this assertion from Scripture, highlighting the “awful and solemn language” that it uses to express God’s exclusivity in worship. See Exod 34:14; Deut 6:4, 13–15; 10:20; 1 Sam 7:3, Hos 13:4; and Ps 81. Watts, *Works*, 6:389; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 56–57.

¹⁰³ Watts, *Works*, 6:390; Watts, *Three Dissertations*, 56.

¹⁰⁴ For a contemporary defense of a Trinitarian understanding of worship, see Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), 493–513. He writes, “the church’s worship is

writes, “[f]or through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18). Watts interprets this verse to mean that we “have access to the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit.”¹⁰⁵ This access is a form of “return to God from a state of sin, guilt, and distance.”¹⁰⁶ Because it is trinitarian, true worship entails making “returns” or performing “duties” (i.e., worship) to each person of the Triune God.¹⁰⁷

In addition, Watts contends that worship is based upon the “distinct personal characters and operations [of each person in the Trinity], as they are revealed to us in the word of God.”¹⁰⁸ Therefore, worship is not merely honor and respect, both inward and outward, in response to an undifferentiated God’s excellencies and powers; but a response to the distinct roles of each person of the triune God. Access to God is the first cause of worship and the basis for continual “returns” or “duties” to God. These are, according to Watts, acts of worship. Similar to the operations of each person of the Trinity, Watts

grounded on who God is and what he has done. The father has sent the Son ‘for us and our salvation.’ This is prominent in John, Chapters 5, 10, and 17, but Paul also directs our attention to it in Romans 8:32. In turn, the Father together with the Son has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the church. The focus of the Spirit’s ministry is to speak of Christ the Son” Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 499.

¹⁰⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:487; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 3 (London: John Clark, E. M. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1729), 3:435.

¹⁰⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:487; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:435–36.

¹⁰⁷ This paradigm is not unique to Watts. John Owen explores the concept. He writes, “Our communion, then, with God consisteth in his communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him of that which he requireth and accepteth.” John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation; or, The Saints’ Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded*, ed. William H. Gould (1850–53; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 9. Additionally, John Flavel supports a similar position on communion with God, writing, “Communion with God, properly and strictly taken, consists in two things, viz. God’s manifestation of himself to the soul, and the soul’s answerable returns to God.” Flavel, *Works*, 4:436–39. Appealing to the same Scriptures as Watts, Robert Letham argues that “[a]ccess to God is ultimately access to the Father. This is through Christ, the one Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). It is the Spirit who gives us life in place of death (cf. Eph. 2:1), raising us in Christ (vv. 6–7) and graciously granting faith (vv. 8–10). . . it is the cardinal teaching of Scripture that saving faith is the gift of God, given by the Spirit (John 6:44; 1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 2:1–10). Here is the reverse movement to that seen as the ground of the church’s worship—by the Holy Spirit through Christ to the Father.” Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 500–01.

¹⁰⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:341; Isaac Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity: Or, Father, Son, and Spirit, Three Persons and One God, Asserted and Prov’d, With Their Divine Rights and Honors Vindicated by Plain Evidence of Scripture, Without Aid or Incumbrances of Humans Schemes. Written Chiefly for the Use of Private Christians* (London: J. Clark, E. Matthews, and R. Ford, 1722), 190.

organizes these returns of worship. He aims to identify precisely how the Bible argues for distinct expressions of worship to each person of the Trinity, arguing that it is “inconsistent with the whole current of Scripture” to pay the same form of “address and adoration” to each person of the “sacred Three.”¹⁰⁹ It is because of the three persons’ “communion in the divine nature” that we can make appropriate returns to each.¹¹⁰

The Father. According to Watts, it is the Father, as the first and supreme agent, who acts through the Son by the Spirit in the works of (1) creation, (2) providence, (3) redemption, and (4) salvation.¹¹¹ For this reason, Watts affirms that three distinct honors ought to be directed to the Father. The first is adoration whereby we “adore him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹¹² He (1) sits on the throne of government, (2) maintains the dignity of the Godhead, and (3) gives laws and orders to all of creation.¹¹³ The second honor is thanksgiving for “all those adorable instances of his wisdom, power, and goodness which appear in the works of creation, providence, and redemption.”¹¹⁴ Watts defines thanksgiving as inward and outward acts of “gratitude, doxology, blessing, and praise.”¹¹⁵ The third honor is prayer whereby we “give thanks and praises to him for what we receive.”¹¹⁶ Watts summarizes,

¹⁰⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:351; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 226.

¹¹⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:341; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 191.

¹¹¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:341–42; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 191–95. See also John Calvin who notes, “to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.13.18.

¹¹² Watts, *Works*, 6:343; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 197. Watts cites 1 Peter 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

¹¹³ Watts, *Works*, 6:343; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 197. With respect to these three examples, Watts references Revelation 4:9–11 and Luke 15:18.

¹¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 6:343; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 198.

¹¹⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:343; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 198.

¹¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:343; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 198.

Thence it comes to pass, that God the Father is set forth in Scripture as the most proper constant object of our addresses in worship, and that our worship is most generally to be paid to the Father, in the name, or through the mediation of his Son, and by the assistance of his Holy Spirit: For as it is by the mediation of his Son Jesus Christ, he approaches to us, and condescends to be reconciled to us, and by the operations of his blessed Spirit in us, he brings us near to himself; so he expects we should make a return of honour and worship to him in the same order and manner.¹¹⁷

The Son. According to Watts, the Son receives our worship because of his mediatorial office and communion with the Godhead. Like the Father, Christ receives the honors of adoration and thanksgiving. However, these returns are directed to his specific offices; that is, worship is given to him “for all those gracious offices which he has, does, and will sustain and execute for our welfare and everlasting happiness.”¹¹⁸ Christ also receives the honors of prayer and faith. Watts explains, “It is our duty to pray to him, call upon him, and trust in him for those blessings...as our Saviour.”¹¹⁹ This is why the apostle Paul frequently prays for grace and peace from Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 1:3; Rom 1:7; Eph 1:2). But we also receive blessings from Christ by virtue of the “economy of the gospel.”¹²⁰ By this, Watts means that “the Son of God acts toward us in many instances in and by the Spirit, and receives worship on that account; even as the Father acts in and by both the Son and the Spirit, and is accordingly worshiped and praised for the blessing conferred on us by the Spirit or the Son.”¹²¹ Finally, Watts maintains that Christ receives the honor of “self-dedication and subjection of the soul to him.”¹²² This entails fearing

¹¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:343; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 199–200. Watts provides fifteen Scripture references in support of his claim: John 14:16; 16:23–24; Luke 11:13; Rom 7:25; 8:15; 16:27; 1 Cor 15:57; Eph 2:18; 3:14, 20–21; 6:18; Phil 2:11; Col 3:17; Heb 13:15; Jude 20–21.

¹¹⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:346; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 204. As explored in the fourth chapter, Watts is referring to the threefold office of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King.

¹¹⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:346; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 208.

¹²⁰ Watts, *Works*, 6:346; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 210.

¹²¹ Watts, *Works*, 6:346; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 210.

¹²² Watts, *Works*, 6:346; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 209.

him and loving him whereby he becomes the central focus of the Christian's life.¹²³

The Spirit. According to Watts, the Spirit is the recipient of two general acts of honor.¹²⁴ First, we are “devoted to his service.”¹²⁵ Watts understands this in terms of his leading, teaching, strengthening, and assisting in both prayer and good works.¹²⁶ Watts theology of worship (“returns” and “duties”) is again evident. When we are directed, instructed, strengthened, and assisted by the Spirit, it results in the “return” or “duty” of waiting and depending. In this context, we devote ourselves to the Spirit “for instruction, consolation, and assistance.”¹²⁷ Second, we worship the Spirit by not grieving or quenching him. Based on 1 Thessalonians 5:19, Ephesians 4:30, and Acts 7:51, Watts argues that we must “obey and comply with all his holy influence.”¹²⁸ We struggle with this because of our propensity to sin. This necessarily means, for Watts, that our returns to the Spirit will often take the form of humility and confession. He writes, “We may justly be allowed to mourn before him, and confess to him how much we have injured his love, and take shame in ourselves before him, for all these indignities and provocations.”¹²⁹

¹²³ Watts, *Works*, 6:346; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 209–10. Watts cites 2 Cor 5:15; 8:5; John 8:13; 14:15.

¹²⁴ Watts considers whether or not we are permitted to pray directly to the Spirit: “The agency and seat of the Father and the Son, in Scripture...are described as in heaven, where they dwell to receive our homage and worship, and to send down blessings; but the agency of and seat of the Holy Spirit is within us, where he dwells to assist us in paying that homage and worship to the Son and the Father.” For full details on the above summary of Watts’ thought on praise and prayer to the Spirit in Scripture, see Watts, *Works*, 6:349–50; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 212–17.

¹²⁵ Watts, *Works*, 6:349; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 218.

¹²⁶ Watts, *Works*, 6:349; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 219.

¹²⁷ Watts, *Works*, 6:349; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 219.

¹²⁸ Watts, *Works*, 6:349; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 219.

¹²⁹ Watts, *Works*, 6:349; Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*, 219.

Trinitarian Hymnody

For Watts, worship is trinitarian in nature. We make distinct “returns” and perform distinct “duties” to each person of the triune God. This is on full display in Watts’ hymns. In “Access to the Father, Through Christ, by the Holy Spirit,” his emphasis on distinct roles and distinct returns is readily apparent:

Father of glory, to thy name
Immortal praise we give,
Who dost an act of grace proclaim,
And bid us rebels live.

Immortal honour to the Son,
Who makes thy anger cease;
Our lives he ransom’d with his own,
And dy’d, to buy our peace.

To thy almighty Spirit be
Immortal glory giv’n,
Whose influence brings us near to thee
And trains us up for heav’n,

Let men with their united voice
Adore th’ eternal God,
And spread his honours, and their joys
Through nations far abroad.

Let faith, and love, and duty join,
One general song to raise,
And saints in earth and heaven combine
In harmony and praise.¹³⁰

This hymn demonstrates Watts’ theology of worship. Here again, we see the *content* of worship (honor and respect), the *reason* for worship (divine excellences and

¹³⁰ Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:478; Watts, *Works*, 1:497.

powers), and the *object* of worship (God Almighty). More specifically, the hymn reveals Watts' trinitarian worship. Because we enjoy access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit, we make suitable returns to each person according to their distinct roles. It is the Father who orchestrates the "act" of grace and bids "us rebels live" (first stanza). Because of this distinct work of the Father, we make returns of "faith and love and duty" (fifth stanza). In short, we give him "immortal praise" (first stanza). It is the Son who ransoms our lives "with his own...to buy our peace" (second stanza). For this reason, we offer returns of "faith and love and duty" (fifth stanza). Specifically, we offer him "immortal honor" (second stanza).¹³¹ It is the Spirit "whose influence brings us near" to God, and trains "us up for heav'n" (third stanza). He does so by convicting, persuading, guiding, and preserving us. We respond with returns of "faith and love and duty" (fifth stanza). This means we give him "immortal glory" (third stanza).

All this is further evident in Watts' hymn, "A Song of Praise to the Ever-Blessed Trinity, God the Father, Son and Spirit":

Bless'd be the Father and his love,
To whose celestial source we owe
Rivers of endless joy above,
And rills of comfort here below.

Glory to thee, great Son of God,
From whose dear wounded body rolls
A precious stream of vital blood,
Pardon and life for dying souls

We give the sacred Spirit praise,
Who in our hearts of sin and woe
Makes living springs of grace arise,

¹³¹ Importantly, Watts is careful to worship Christ because of his communion with the Father and Spirit as the "eternal God." The unity and equality of the Godhead is clearly articulated elsewhere in Watts' hymns on the Trinity. For more on this, see Michael A. G. Haykin, "The Undivided Three: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Church History," *Reformation & Revival* 10, no. 3 (2001): 63.

And into boundless glory flow.

Thus God the Father, God the Son,
And God the Spirit we adore,
That sea of life and love unknown
Without a bottom or a shore.¹³²

Again, Watts focuses on making “returns” to each person of the triune God in accordance with each one’s distinct role. To begin with, Watts celebrates the Father as the fountainhead of salvation; he is the “celestial source” of love (first stanza). We respond by blessing him. Next, Watts turns to the Son who seals “pardon and life” by virtue of his redeeming work (second stanza). We respond by ascribing glory to him. Finally, Watts celebrates the Spirit who makes “living springs of grace arise” (third stanza). The movement from sin to grace, by way of the Spirit’s help causes “boundless glory to flow” as a return of worship. We respond by praising him. Watts closes the hymn by emphasizing that we adore the triune God. This communion of the three in one means that we worship “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit” who are the “sea of life and love unknown.”

Conclusion

In his treatise on the revival of practical religion, Watts argues that a greater degree of piety and virtue is essential to reversing the decline of Dissenting congregations.¹³³ His remedy focuses on the renewal of “vital religion” in the heart—an experimental piety that engages the heart (cognitive) and heart (affective) in balanced harmony whereby doctrinal truth is applied to every facet of life. Ultimately, this implies knowing God and loving God, and is facilitated by the Word-based means of grace,

¹³² Watts, *Works*, 4:355; Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 206–07.

¹³³ Watts, *Works*, 3:3–4; Watts, *An Humble Attempt Toward the Revival*, i–ix. For more on the decline of Dissent, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 21; and Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 7–10.

especially meditation. Here we see “knowledge and affection” going “hand in hand in all the affairs of religion.”¹³⁴ This is fundamental to Watts’ spirituality, for the “more we know of God, and the things of the upper world,” the more “we shall have a stronger spring for our holy passions” and experience eternal life begun in holiness and happiness.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Watts, *Works*, 2:688; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 242.

¹³⁵ Watts, *Works*, 2:688; Watts, *Discourses of the Love of God*, 242.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

While his writings reveal his deep interest in a vast array of subjects, Watts was intensely occupied with matters of the soul. Much of his ministry was given to explaining the nature of the spiritual life and guiding Christians in their pursuit of it. He believed that we should make it our “business to insist on those subjects which are inward and spiritual, and which go by the name of experimental religion.”¹ He aimed to address the inward realities of religion while seeking to avoid the risk of falling into what many of his contemporaries deemed enthusiasm. At the same time, Watts was careful to guard against the rationalism of the early eighteenth century by maintaining “a key place for the experience of the believer.”² This experimental concern ultimately shaped his spirituality. This dissertation’s thesis is that the experience of happiness and holiness (“eternal life begun”) establishes the primary contours of Watts’ spirituality. His understanding of holiness and happiness is grounded in his formulation of four key theological motifs: (1) the depravity of man; (2) the beauty of Christ; (3) the excellency of heaven; and (4) the tri-unity of God. These are central to knowing and loving God—the means to holiness and happiness.

¹ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D. Containing, Besides His Sermons and Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects Several Additional Pieces, Selected from His Manuscripts by the Reve. Dr. Jennings, and the Rev. Dr. Doddridge, in 1753 to Which are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life of the Author Compiled by the Rev. George Burder* (London: J. Barfield, 1810), 3:19; Watts, *An Humble Attempt Toward the Revival of Practical Religion Among Christians, and Particularly the Protestant Dissenters, By a Serious Address to Ministers and People, In Some Occasional Discourses* (London: E. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1731), 55.

² Graham Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 198. Some insist that Watts’ argued that “nothing but the plain, experimental, and affectionate proclamation of the doctrines of the gospel can preserve a congregation from decay.” David G. Fountain, *Isaac Watts Remembered* (Harpندن, UK: Gospel Standard Baptist Trust, 1974), 84.

First, Watts' doctrine of the depravity of man is foundational to the experience of holiness and happiness because sin is ultimately the chief impediment to both. For Watts, sin is "the character of the children of wrath" whereby "they *fulfill the desires of the flesh*."³ As sinners, therefore, we struggle with the twin realities of the "real" and "relative" evils of sin. The remedying of these is the necessary starting point before holiness and happiness can take root in the soul.

Second, Watts' doctrine of the beauty of Christ is foundational to the experience of holiness and happiness because Christ is the only remedy for man's predicament. Christ's mediatorial work (especially the atonement) is the means by which he recovers man from the real and relative evils of sin, thereby bringing him near to God. Watts declares, "By the influences of the great and precious promises of the gospel," the Christian becomes a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).⁴ Because Christ "crucified the flesh, with its affections and lust," we enjoy at present "the peace and beauty of holiness" while we await our entrance "into a diviner life of glory."⁵

Third, Watts' doctrine of the excellency of heaven is foundational to the experience of holiness and happiness because it shapes his perspective on the present life. Upon entering heaven, the soul of the believer is made perfect (holy) and, therefore, enabled to enjoy God (happy) to its fullest capacity. This future expectation, for Watts, ought to be a present reality. By contemplating the excellency of heaven, the Christian is

³ Watts, *Works*, 1:743; Isaac Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects. To Which is Added, An Essay on the Powers and Contests of the Flesh and Spirit*, (London: J. Oswald and J. Buckland, 1747), 343. Emphasis original. Watts often gives attention to methods for mortifying the flesh and cultivating the spirit. (1) He warns against the compounding dangers of any willful submission to sin. "Compliance with sin is the way to make sin strong: every such indulgence gives it courage to demand more, and makes the inclinations grow into confirmed habit." (2) He insists that we must avoid those temptations that come from particular places, persons, and activities. (3) He encourages self-denial for the governing of the appetites. Watts leans upon the apostle Paul's example of self-denial in his battle with the flesh (1 Cor 9:25–27). (4) He contends for the practice of keeping "the body in such temper and circumstances as may render it fittest for the present duty." This keeping of the body includes a healthy diet, sleep, fasting, prayer, and meditation. Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 343–45.

⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:744; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 346.

⁵ Watts, *Works*, 1:744; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 347.

to cultivate heavenly mindedness—namely, holiness and happiness.

Fourth, Watts' doctrine of the tri-unity of God is foundational to the experience of holiness and happiness because it means that God alone is the source of all happiness. Though he wandered into uncharted territory in his theological ruminations, Watts remained committed to the tri-unity of God. This was of paramount importance to his spirituality.⁶ The Father, the Son, and the Spirit know and love one another eternally. By Christ's mediatorial work, we are brought into this relationship. For Watts, this is happiness.

Potential Areas of Research

There remains much research to be done in the area of Watts' theology and spirituality. This study has touched on many subjects that could be dissertations in their own right.⁷

For the historian, greater attention needs to be given to Watts' role as a transitional figure between Puritanism and Evangelicalism. This dissertation has focused on his understanding of the depravity of man, the beauty of Christ, the excellency of heaven, and the tri-unity of God, thereby providing a glimpse into this important transitional period in early eighteenth-century England. Watts provides valuable insight into how Evangelicalism emerged at this juncture in history. He was among the earliest theologians to navigate the complex contours of the early English Enlightenment. This movement presented immense challenges for the church. These forced Watts (and others) to enter into controversy.⁸ While we might question the precision of some of Watts'

⁶ For a similar assessment, see Scott Aniol, "Was Isaac Watts Unitarian?: Athanasian Trinitarianism and the Boundary of Christian Fellowship," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 22 (2017): 103.

⁷ See Beynon, *Isaac Watts: Reason, Passion and the Revival of Religion*, 198-99.

⁸ Watts' disdain for controversy even appears in his exhortations to preachers. He writes, "but as to the introducing of controversies into the pulpit, be not fond of it, nor frequent in it: in your common course of preaching avoid disputes, especially about things of less importance, without an apparent call of

positions, it is without question that he believed he was preserving the truth in face of Deism and other threats to the church. This is an area of research that requires further study.

For the theologian, a detailed analysis of Watts' Trinitarianism is needed. Chapter 6 considered some of the intricacies of Watts' position, but its main intent was to demonstrate how (for Watts) knowing and loving God triune is the key to blessedness. Important questions remain unanswered. How did Watts' unique doctrinal formulations impact the Dissenting church?⁹ What are the full theological implications of Watts' unique view on the existence of Christ's pre-incarnate soul? Closely related to this, how did Watts understand the person and work of the Holy Spirit? Chapter 6 focused on his articulation of the relationship between the Father and the Son, but what of his thoughts on the Holy Spirit?

Watts' doctrine of the Holy Spirit figures prominently in his understanding of what it means to love God.¹⁰ In short, it is the Holy Spirit's work to kindle, support, and strengthen love for God. Watts notes that the Holy Spirit is sometimes to be considered in terms of his gifts, graces, and influences.¹¹ He is "sent" by the Father and the Son "to perform various offices and operations in the world, and especially in the church."¹² This necessarily implies that the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in the cultivation of holiness and happiness. He does so by helping "our return or access to God the Father,

Providence. Religious controversies, frequently introduced without real necessity, have an unhappy tendency to hurt the spirit of true godliness, both in the hearts of preachers and hearers." Watts, *Works*, 3:19; Watts, *An Humble Attempt Toward the Revival of Practical Religion*, 53.

⁹ For an excellent study of the impact of Watts' trinitarianism on Philip Doddridge, see Robert Strivens, *Philip Doddridge and the Shaping of Evangelical Dissent* (London: Routledge, 2016), 47–66.

¹⁰ The distinction between the *work* and *person* of the Holy Spirit is important to note here. Though Watts deals with both, the work of the Holy Spirit is most prominent. For more, see Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1977), 79–85.

¹¹ Watts, 1:483; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, vol. 3 (London: John Clark, E.M. Matthews, R. Ford, and R. Hett, 1729), 3:425–26.

¹² Watts, 1:483; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:425.

through Jesus Christ.”¹³ First, the Holy Spirit “works” the heavenly “dispositions,” “characters,” and “marks” of sonship in the soul,¹⁴ and then, he testifies to the soul as to the reality of these heavenly graces.¹⁵ This witness enables believers to watch their hearts for “decays and backslidings,”¹⁶ and to keep them “aloof from carnal self-love.”¹⁷ Ultimately, it facilitates greater love for God. This emphasis is evident in several stanzas of Watts’ hymn, “Breathing After the Holy Spirit: or, Fervency of Devotion Desired”:

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,
With all thy quickening powers,
Kindle a flame of sacred love,

¹³ Watts, 1:491; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 3:445. For more on the connection between the Spirit and drawing near to God, see Michael Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Watts, *Works*, 1:704–05; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 232–33. These marks include (1) faith in Christ, (2) avoidance of sin, (3) love of God, (4) justice and charity to others, (5) peacemaking, (6) sanctification of affections, (7) victory over the world, and (8) Christ-likeness. Watts, *Works*, 1:704; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 229–32. For an example of similar logic, see Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, *The Religious Affections*, ed. John H. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 230–40. Edwards utilizes the witness of the Holy Spirit in his presentation of the first of twelve signs of true conversion. Edwards employs the term “holy stamp” in order to characterize the witness of the Spirit and his operation of sealing the believer. This “holy stamp” is effectively the imprint of the Spirit upon the heart of a believer. Edwards maintains, “When God sets his seal on a man’s heart by his Spirit, there is some holy stamp, some image impressed and left upon the heart by the Spirit, as by the seal upon the wax.” Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 2:233. Much like Watts, Edwards proposes that the true child of God has a loving disposition to God as Father, through a spirit of affection. This loving disposition is imprinted by the holy stamp of the Spirit. Edwards clarifies, “The witness of the Spirit of which the Apostle speaks is far from being a whisper, or immediate suggestion, but is that gracious, holy effect of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the saints, the disposition and temper of children, appearing in sweet childlike love to God.” Edwards, *The Religious Affections*, 2:239.

¹⁵ See Watts, *Works*, 1:709–10; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 245–49. For an excellent discussion of the witness of the Holy Spirit and growth in holiness, see John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace, and Consolation; or, The Saints’ Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded*, ed. William H. Gould (1850-53; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 363–408. Watts cites Owen in a number of places in his discourse on the witness of the Holy Spirit. Specifically, Owen’s logic runs parallel to Watts, in the sense that the witness of the Holy Spirit is tied directly to love for God and vital religion. Owen writes, “He [the Spirit] doth it immediately by himself, without consideration of any other acts, or works of his or interposition of any reasoning, or deductions, and conclusions: as in sanctification, he is a well of water springing up in the soul, immediately exerting his efficacy, and refreshment: so in consolation, he immediately works the soul, and minds of men to a joyful rejoicing, and a spiritual frame, filling them with exultation and gladness; not that this arises from our reflex, consideration of the love of God but rather gives occasion thereunto: when he sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts.” Owen, Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:413–15.

¹⁶ Watts, *Works*, 1:709; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 245.

¹⁷ Watts, *Works*, 1:709; Watts, *Evangelical Discourses on Several Subjects*, 245.

In these cold hearts of ours.

Come Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove,
With all thy quickening powers,
Come, shed abroad a Savior's love,
And that shall kindle ours.¹⁸

In the field of biblical spirituality, there is room for additional study of Watts' practice of the means of grace—corporately and privately. Chapter 7 hinted at this by indicating that he viewed the means of grace as essential to knowing God and loving God and, therefore, to cultivating eternal life begun. This was demonstrated by a brief analysis of his practice of mediation. But this requires greater attention. How does this relationship between knowing God and loving God shape Watts' understanding of (among other spiritual duties) preaching, praying, and receiving the Lord's Supper?

Remaining with the field of biblical spirituality, a final area of potential study concerns Watts' view of the relationship between virtue (morality) and eternal life begun.¹⁹ He sees the Christian's pursuit of holiness and happiness as directly related to the pursuit of virtues (or duties).²⁰ He comments, "Faith and practice [or virtue] make up the whole of our religion: a sacred compound and divinely necessary to our happiness and our heaven."²¹ These virtues include humility, equity, justice, temperance, friendship,

¹⁸ Isaac Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In Three Books. I. Collected From Scriptures. II. Compos'd on Divine Subjects. III. Prepared for the Lord's Supper. With an Essay Towards the Improvement of Christian Psalmody, by the Use of Evangelical Hymns in Worship, as Well as the Psalms of David* (London: Printed by J. Humfreys, 1707), 109–10. The original publication was utilized, as the wording in the second stanza was altered in the 1810 edition. For this alteration, see Watts, *Works*, 4:307.

¹⁹ Watts uses the words "virtue" and "morality" interchangeably. See Watts, *Works*, 1:213; Isaac Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects* (London: John and Barham Clark, Eman Matthews, and Richard Ford, 1723), 2:144.

²⁰ See Watts, *Works*, 3:77–85; Watts, *An Humble Attempt Toward the Revival of Practical Religion*, 266–93.

²¹ Watts, *Works*, 1:212; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 2:141. Watts penned an entire treatise on humility in the life of the apostle Paul. See Watts, *Works*, 2:428–60; Isaac Watts, *Humility Represented in the Character of St. Paul, The Chief Springs of It Opened, and Its Various Advantages Displayed; Together with Some Occasional Views of the Contrary Vice* (London: R. Ford and R. Hett, 1737).

and love of neighbor.²² A more thorough examination of these concepts, and their relationship to holiness and happiness, would contribute to a better understanding of Watts' spirituality.

Implications of Watts' Spirituality

Returning to Watts' definition of the spiritual life as "eternal life begun" (holiness and happiness), it only remains to draw out several important implications for the church.

To begin with, Watts' brilliance is that he formulated and championed a theologically rich vision of the spiritual life that is accessible to all Christians. This is perhaps most evident in his hymnody, but it is also apparent in his detailed philosophical and theological treatises and even in those works that are of a more polemical nature. Watts was a pastor, and it was his concern for the spiritual well-being of his fellow believers that provided the impetus to his ministry. As noted at the outset, Watts believed that nurturing his congregants' "spiritual profit and increase" was his principal duty as a minister, and he viewed it as the chief means of bringing about the church's renewal.

Second, Watts' paradigm of holiness and happiness is biblically and confessionally faithful. An underlying implication of this dissertation is that it challenges some of the common misconceptions of Watts. Admittedly, there are elements of his Trinitarianism that ought to give us pause; but his biblical fidelity and pastoral fervency are commendable. Watts longed for Christians to know the God of Scripture. His balance of reason (cognitive) and passion (affective) leads to a spirituality that avoids the major pitfalls of detached rationalism and subjective emotionalism.²³ Moreover, his concept of

²² For more on Watts' sermons on the virtues, see Watts, *Works*, 1:212–324; Watts, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 2:141–456.

²³ For more on the place of subjective experience in Evangelical theology, see J. Stephen Yuille, *Great Spoil: Thomas Manton's Spirituality of the Word* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), xiv–xv; Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality* (Downers

“eternal life begun” is a welcome addition to current discussions of happiness and human flourishing.²⁴ Watts stands in a tradition received from his Puritan forebears, in that he grounds holiness in happiness, within a definite theological framework, which—above all else—points to God alone as the source of both.

Third, Watts’ vision of the spiritual life is a timely message for a world (and, at times, a church) that is consumed with the temporal and material. In the New Testament, we are constantly reminded that God’s kingdom is not of this world.²⁵ We are pilgrims in a foreign land and, as such, we are to “seek the city that is to come” (Heb 13:14). As Augustine declared centuries ago, “the heavenly city...will be redeemed from all evil and filled with every good thing; constant in its enjoyment of the happiness of eternal rejoicing.”²⁶ For Watts, that future expectation is to be our present reality in the enjoyment of eternal life begun.

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 20–27.

²⁴ This discussion is vast and extends well beyond the discipline of biblical spirituality. See Nicholas P. White, *A Brief History of Happiness* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006); Ellen T. Charry, *God and the Art of Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Brent A. Strawn, ed., *The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness: What the Old and New Testaments Teach Us about the Good Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁵ See Rom 12:2; Phil 3:20; John 18:36; 1 John 2:15–17; 1 Pet 2:11–12; Heb 11:16; John 15:19; Matt 16:26.

²⁶ Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), XXII.30, 1180.

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ABSTRACT

“A SOUL PREPARED FOR HEAVEN”: THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF ISAAC WATTS’ SPIRITUALITY

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This dissertation’s thesis is that happiness and holiness (eternal life begun) establish the primary contours of Isaac Watts’ spirituality. His understanding of holiness and happiness is grounded in his formulation of key theological truths: (1) the depravity of man; (2) the beauty of Christ; (3) the excellency of heaven; and (4) the tri-unity of God. Furthermore, his practice of holiness and happiness is linked to two principle means: (1) the knowledge of God; and (2) the love of God.

Chapters 1–2 highlight the main features of Watts’ spirituality. Holiness and happiness are “eternal life begun.” Watts explains this by way of their (1) principles and (2) ingredients. Holiness and happiness are principally spiritual matters (i.e., unseen aspects of the Christian life) and, therefore, grounded in the soul. The ingredients of holiness and happiness are more practical in nature. In sum, Watts explains how the expression of holiness and happiness is seen in the Christian’s life.

Chapters 3–6 provide the theological framework for Watts’ spirituality. An examination of four key doctrines provides a better understanding of how he arrives at happiness and holiness as the basis for his spirituality. For Watts, doctrine leads to the experience of God. In other words, holiness and happiness are grounded in theology.

Chapter 7 examines the two means of cultivating the spiritual life—the knowledge of God and love for God. Watts maintains that knowledge of God is the

foundation of the Christian faith. The mind, therefore, is critical to the pursuit of holiness and happiness. Second, as the Christian grows in the knowledge of God, there is also growth in the appreciation of love of God. This love of God leads, in turn, to love for God. This chapter demonstrates how Watts employs practical approaches to engage the heart with God's love.

Chapter 8 provides a summary of the thesis and argument. Furthermore, the chapter details potential areas of research in Watts with respect to his spirituality. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief assessment of Watts' spiritual legacy and its implications for the church.

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