

Sweet Poisons!

By Thomas Brooks

(From "Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices")

Satan presents the world in such a dress, and in such a garb to the soul—as to ensnare the soul, and to win the affection of the soul.

He represents the world to them in its beauty and finery, which proves a bewitching sight to carnal men. (It is true, this deceived not Christ, because Satan could find no matter in him for his temptation to work upon.) So that he can no sooner cast out his golden bait—but we are ready to play with it, and to nibble at it; he can no sooner throw out his golden ball—but men are apt to run after it, though they lose God and their souls in the pursuit!

Ah! how many professors in these days have for a time followed hard after God, Christ, and ordinances; until the devil has set before them the world in all its beauty and finery, which has so bewitched their souls that they have grown to have low thoughts of holy things, and then to be cold in their affections to holy things, and then to slight them, and at last, with the young man in the Gospel, to turn their backs upon them. Ah! the time, the thoughts, the hearts, the souls, the duties, the services--which the inordinate love of this wicked world eats up and destroys! Where one thousand are destroyed by the world's frowns--ten thousand are destroyed by the world's smiles! The world, siren-like, sings to us, then sinks us! It kisses us, and betrays us, like Judas! It kisses us and stabs us under the rib, like Joab. The honors, splendor, and all the glory of this world, are but sweet poisons, which will much endanger us, if they do not eternally destroy us. Ah! the multitude of souls that have glutted on these sweet baits and died forever!

The inhabitants of Nilus are deaf from the noise of the waters; so the world makes such a noise in men's ears, that they cannot hear the things of heaven. The world is like the swallows' dung that put out Tobias's eyes. The champions could not wring an apple out of Milo's hand by a strong hand—but a fair maid, by fair means, got it presently.

Remedy (1). The first remedy against this device of Satan is, to dwell upon the impotency and weakness of all these things here below. They are not able to secure you from the least evil, they are not able to procure you the least desirable good. The crown of gold cannot cure the headache, nor the velvet slipper ease the gout, nor the jewel about the neck take away the pain of the teeth. The frogs of Egypt entered into the rich men's houses of Egypt, as well as the poor. Our daily experience does evidence this, that all the honors and riches that men enjoy, cannot free them from the cholic, the fever, or lesser diseases. No, that which may seem most strange, is that a great deal of wealth cannot keep men from falling into extreme poverty. You shall find seventy kings, with their fingers and toes cut off, glad, like dogs, to lick up crumbs under another king's table; and shortly after, the same king that brought them to this poverty, is reduced to the same poverty and misery (Judg. 1:6). Why then should that be a bar to keep you out of heaven--which cannot give you the least ease on earth?

Nugas the Scythian, despising the rich presents and ornaments which were sent unto him by the emperor of Constantinople, asked whether those things could drive away calamities, diseases, or death.

Remedy (2). The second remedy against this device of Satan is, to dwell upon the vanity of them as well as upon the impotency of all worldly good. This is the sum of Solomon's sermon, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!' This our first parents found, and therefore named their second son Abel, or 'vanity.' Solomon, who had tried all these things, and could best tell the vanity of them—preaches this sermon over again and again. 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!' It is sad to think how many thousands there are, who can say with the preacher, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' no, swear it, and yet follow after these things as if there were no other glory, nor felicity—but what is to be found in these things they call vanity! **Such men will sell Christ, heaven, and their souls for a trifle**, who *call* these things vanity—but do not cordially believe them to be vanity—but set their hearts upon them as if they were their crown, the top of their royalty and glory. Oh let your souls dwell upon the vanity of all things here below, until your hearts be so thoroughly convinced and persuaded of the vanity of them, as to trample upon them, and make them a footstool for Christ to get up, and ride in a holy triumph in your hearts!

Oh the imperfection, the ingratitude, the levity the inconstancy, the treachery of those creatures we most servilely bow down to. Ah, did we but weigh

man's pain with his payment, his crosses with his mercies, his miseries with his pleasures—we would then see that there is nothing got bargain, and conclude, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!'

Chrysostom once said, That if he were to preach a sermon to the whole world, gathered together in one congregation, and had some high mountain for his pulpit, from whence he might have a prospect of all the world in his view, and were furnished with a voice of brass, a voice as loud as the trumpets of the archangel, that all the world might hear him, he would choose to preach upon no other text than that in the Psalms, O mortal men, "How long will you love what is worthless and pursue a lie?" (Psalm 4:2).

Tell me, you that say all things under the sun are vanity, if you do really believe what you say, why do you spend more thoughts and time on the world, than you do on Christ, heaven and your immortal souls? Why do you then neglect your duty towards God, to get the world? Why do you then so eagerly pursue after the world, and are so cold in your pursuing after God, Christ and holiness? Why then are your hearts so exceedingly raised, when the world comes in, and smiles upon you; and so much dejected, and cast down, when the world frowns upon you, and with Jonah's gourd withers before you?

Remedy (3). The third remedy against this device of Satan is, to dwell much upon the uncertainty, the mutability, and inconstancy of all things under the sun. Man himself is but the dream of a dream—but the generation of imagination—but an empty vanity—but the curious picture of nothing—a poor, feeble, dying shadow. All temporals are as transitory as a rushing current, a shadow, a ship, a bird, an arrow, a runner who passes by. 'Why should you set your eyes upon that which is not?' says Solomon (Prov. 23:5). And says the apostle, 'The fashion of this world passes away' (1 Cor. 7:31). This intimates, that there is nothing of any firmness, or solid consistency, in the creature. Heaven alone, has a foundation—earth has none, 'but is hung upon nothing,' as Job speaks (26:7). The apostle commanded Timothy to 'charge rich men that they be not high-minded, nor put their trust in uncertain riches' (1 Tim. 6:17). Riches were never true to any who trusted to them; they have deceived men, as Job's brook did the poor travelers in the summer season (Job. 6:15). They are like bad servants, who ramble about and will never tarry long with one master.

As a bird hops from tree to tree, so do the honors and riches of this world from man to man. Let Job and Nebuchadnezzar testify this truth, who fell from great wealth to great want. No man can promise himself to be wealthy until the end of the day; one storm at sea, one coal of fire, one false friend, one unadvised word, one false witness—may make you a beggar and a prisoner all at once! All the riches and glory of this world is but as smoke and chaff that vanishes; 'As a dream and vision in the night, that tarries not' (Job 20:8). 'Like a hungry one who dreams he is eating, then wakes and is still hungry; and like a thirsty one who dreams he is drinking, then wakes and is still thirsty, longing for water,' as the prophet Isaiah says (Chap. 29:8). Where is the glory of Solomon? the sumptuous buildings of Nebuchadnezzar? the nine hundred chariots of Sisera? the power of Alexander? the authority of Augustus, who commanded the whole world to be taxed? Those that have been the most glorious, in what men generally account glorious and excellent, have had inglorious ends; as Samson for strength, Absalom for favor, Ahithophel for policy, Haman for favor, Asahel for swiftness, Alexander for great conquest and yet poisoned. The same you may see in the four mighty kingdoms, the Chaldean, Persian, Grecian, and Roman: how soon were they gone and forgotten! The most renowned Frederick lost all, and sued to be made but sexton of the church that himself had built. I have read of a poor fisherman, who, while his nets were a-drying, slept upon the rock, and dreamed that he was made a king, on a sudden starts up, and leaping for joy, fell down from the rock, and in the place of his imaginary felicities loses his little portion of pleasures.

Now rich—now poor; now full—now empty; now in favor—anon out of favor; now honorable—now despised; now health—now sickness; now strength—now weakness. The pomp of this world John compares to the moon, which increases and decreases (Rev. 12:1).

Remedy (4). The fourth remedy against this device of Satan is, seriously to consider, that the great things of this world are very hurtful and dangerous to the outward and inward man, through the corruptions that are in the hearts of men. Oh, the rest, the peace, the comfort, the contentment—that the things of this world strip many men of! Oh, the fears, the cares, the envy, the malice, the dangers, the mischiefs, that they subject men to! They oftentimes make men carnally confident. The rich man's riches are a strong tower in his imagination. 'I said in my prosperity I should never be moved' (Psalm 30:6). They often swell the heart with pride, and make men forget God, and neglect God, and despise the rock of their salvation.

When Jeshurun 'waxed fat, and was grown thick, and covered with fatness, then he forgot God, and forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation,' as Moses spoke (Deut. 32:15).

Ah, the time, the thoughts, the energy—which the things of the world consume and spend! Oh, how do they hinder the actings of faith upon God! how do they interrupt our sweet communion with God! how do they abate our love to the people of God! and cool our love to the things of God! and work us to act like those who are most unlike God! Oh, the deadness, the barrenness, which usually attend men under great outward mercies! Oh, the riches of the world chokes the word; that men live under the most soul-searching, and soul-enriching means with lean souls! Though they have full purses, though their chests are full of silver, yet their hearts are empty of grace. In Genesis 13:2, it is said, that 'Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold.' According to the Hebrew, it is 'Abram was very weary;' to show that riches are a heavy burden, and a hindrance many times to heaven, and happiness.

Four good mothers beget four bad daughters: great familiarity begets contempt; truth begets hatred; virtue begets envy; riches begets ignorance (a French proverb).

Polycrates gave a large sum of money to Anacreon, who for two nights afterwards, was so troubled with worry how to keep it, and how to spend it; that he carried the money back to Polycrates, saying that it was not worth the pains which he had already taken for it.

King Henry the Fourth asked the Duke of Alva if he had observed the great eclipse of the sun, which had lately happened. No, said the duke, I have so much to do on earth, that I have no leisure to look up to heaven. Ah, that this were not true of most professors in these days! It is very sad to think, how their hearts and time are so much taken up with earthly things, that they have scarcely any leisure to look up to heaven, or to look after Christ, and the things that belong to their everlasting peace!

Riches, though justly acquired, yet are but like manna; those who gathered less had no lack, and those who gathered more, it was but a trouble and annoyance to them. **The world is troublesome, and yet it is loved;** what would it be, if it brought true peace? You embrace it, though it be filthy; what would you do if it were beautiful? You cannot keep your hands from

the thorns; how earnest would you be then in gathering the flowers? The world may be fitly likened to the serpent Scytale, whereof it is reported, that when she cannot overtake those passing by, she does with her beautiful colors so astonish and amaze them, that they have no power to leave, until she has stung them! Ah, how many thousands are there now on earth, who have found this true by experience, who have spun a lovely rope to strangle themselves, both temporally and eternally, by being bewitched by the beauty and finery of this world!

Sicily is so full of sweet flowers that dogs cannot hunt there. And what do all the sweet contents of this world—but make us lose the scent of heaven!

Remedy (5). The fifth remedy against this device of Satan is, to consider, that all the felicity of this world is MIXED. Our light is mixed with darkness, our joy with sorrow, our pleasures with pain, our honor with dishonor, our riches with wants. If our minds are spiritual, clear and quick, we may see in the felicity of this world—our wine mixed with water, our honey with gall, our sugar with wormwood, and our roses with prickles. **Surely all the things of this world are but bitter sweets.** Sorrow attends worldly joy, danger attends worldly safety, loss attends worldly labors, tears attend worldly purposes. As to these things, men's hopes are vain, their sorrow certain, and joy feigned. The apostle calls this world 'a sea of glass,' a sea for the trouble of it, and glass for the brittleness and bitterness of it. (Rev. 4:6, 15:2, 21:18). The honors, profits, pleasures and delights of the world are like the gardens of Adonis, where we can gather nothing but trivial flowers, surrounded with many briars.

Remedy (6). The sixth remedy against this device of Satan is, to get better acquaintance and better assurance of more blessed and glorious things. That which raised up their spirits (Heb. 10 and 11) to trample upon all the beauty, finery and glory of the world, was the acquaintance with, 'and assurance of better and more durable things.' You joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.' 'They looked for a house which had foundations, whose builder and maker was God.' 'And they looked for another country, even a heavenly one.' 'They saw him who was invisible, and had an eye to the recompense of reward.' And this made them count all the glory and finery of this world, to be too poor and contemptible for them to set their hearts upon! (Heb. 10:34; 11:10, 16 26).

The main reason why men dote upon the world, and damn their souls to get the world, is, because they are not acquainted with a greater glory! Men ate acorns, until they were acquainted with the use of wheat. Ah, were men more acquainted with what union and communion with God means, what it is to have 'a new name, and a new stone, that none knows but he who has it' (Rev. 2:17); did they but taste more of heaven, and live more in heaven, and had more glorious hopes of going to heaven, ah, how easily would they have the world under their feet!

Let heaven be a man's object, and earth will soon be his abject.

It was an excellent saying of Lewis of Bavaria, emperor of Germany, 'Such goods are worth getting and owning—which will not sink or wash away if a shipwreck happens—but will wade and swim out with us.' It is recorded of Lazarus, that after his resurrection from the dead, he was never seen to laugh, his thoughts and affections were so fixed in heaven, though his body was on earth, and therefore he could not but slight temporal things, his heart being so bent and set upon eternals. There are goods for the **throne** of grace—as God, Christ, the Spirit, adoption, justification, remission of sin, peace with God, and peace with conscience. And there are goods of the **footstool**—as honors, riches, the favor of creatures, and other comforts and accommodation of this life. Now he who has acquaintance with, and assurance of the goods of the throne, will easily trample upon the goods of the footstool.

Ah that you would make it your business, your work, to mind more, and make sure more to your own souls—the great things of eternity—that will yield you joy in life and peace in death, and a crown of righteousness in the day of Christ's appearing, and that will lift up your souls above all the beauty and finery of this bewitching world, that will raise your feet above other men's heads! When a man comes to be assured of a crown, a scepter and the royal robes, he then begins to have low and contemptible thoughts of those base things which before he highly prized. So will assurance of more great and glorious things, breed in the soul a holy scorn and contempt of all these poor, base things, which the soul before valued above God, Christ and heaven.

When Basil was tempted with money and preferment, said he, 'Give me money that may last forever, and glory that may eternally flourish; for the fashion of this world passes away, as the waters of a river that runs by a city.

Remedy (7). The seventh remedy against this device of Satan is, seriously to consider, that true happiness and satisfaction is not to be had in the enjoyment of worldly good. True happiness is too big and too glorious a thing to be found in anything below that glorious God—who is a Christian's *summum bonum*—his chief good. True happiness lies only in our enjoyment of a **suitable** good, a **pure** good, a **total** good and an **eternal** good! God alone is such a good—and such a good can only satisfy the soul of man. Philosophers could say, that he was never a truly happy man—who might afterwards become miserable.

The blessed angels, those glittering courtiers, have all felicities and blessedness, and yet have they neither gold, nor silver, nor jewels, nor none of the beauty and finery of this world. Certainly if happiness was to be found in these earthly things, the Lord Jesus, who is the right and royal heir of all things, would have exchanged his cradle for a crown; his birth chamber, a stable, for a royal palace; his poverty for plenty; his despised followers for shining courtiers; and his poor provisions for the choicest delicacies. Certainly happiness lies not in those things which a man may enjoy—and yet be miserable forever. Now a man may be great and graceless with Pharaoh; honorable and damnable with king Saul; rich and miserable with Dives; therefore happiness lies not in these things.

Certainly happiness lies not in those things which cannot comfort a man upon a dying bed. Is it honors, riches or friends—which can comfort you when you come to die? Or is it not rather faith in the blood of Christ, the witness of the Spirit of Christ, the sense and feeling of the love and favor of Christ, and the hopes of eternally reigning with Christ? Can happiness lie in those things which cannot give us health, or strength, or ease, or a good night's rest, or an hour's sleep, or a good stomach? Why, all the honors, riches and delights of this world cannot give these poor things to us, therefore certainly happiness lies not in the enjoyment of them. Gregory the Great used to say, He is poor whose soul is void of grace—not whose coffers are empty of money. The reasonable soul may be busied about other things—but it cannot be filled with them. And surely happiness is not to be found in those things that cannot satisfy the souls of men.

Now none of these things can satisfy the soul of man. 'He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance with increase; this is also vanity,' said the wise man (Eccles. 5:10). The barren womb, the horseleech's daughter, the grave and hell, will as soon be satisfied—as the

soul of man will by the enjoyment of any worldly good. **Some one thing or another will be forever lacking to that soul, who has nothing but outward good to live upon.** You may as soon fill a bag with wisdom, a chest with virtue—as the heart of man with anything here below. A man may have enough of the world to sink him—but he can never have enough to satisfy him!

Remedy (8). The eighth remedy against this device of Satan is, solemnly to consider the dignity of the soul. Oh, the soul of man is more worth than a thousand worlds! It is the greatest abasing of it that can be—to let it dote upon a little shining earth, upon a little painted beauty and fading glory—when it is capable of union with Christ, of communion with God, and of enjoying the eternal vision of God.

Seneca could say, 'I am too great, and born to greater things, than that I should be a slave to my body.' Oh! do you say my soul is too great, and born to greater things, than that I should confine it to a heap of perishing earth.

Plutarch tells of Themistocles, that he accounted it not to stand with his state to stoop down to take up the spoils the enemies had scattered in flight; but says to one of his followers, 'You may have these things—for you are not Themistocles'. Oh what a sad thing it is that a heathen should set his feet upon those very things upon which most professors set their hearts, and for the gain of which, with Balaam, many run the hazard of losing their immortal souls forever!

I have been the longer upon the remedies that may help us against this dangerous device of Satan, because he does usually more hurt to the souls of men by this device than he does by all other devices. For a close, I wish, as once Chrysostom did, that that sentence (Eccles. 2:11), 'Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun,' were engraved on the door-posts into which you enter, on the tables where you sit, on the dishes out of which you eat, on the cups out of which you drink, on the bed-steads where you lie, on the walls of the house where you dwell, on the garments which you wear, on the heads of the horses on which you ride, and on the foreheads of all whom you meet—that your souls may not, by the beauty and finery of the world, be kept off from those holy and heavenly services that may render you blessed while you live, and happy when you die; that you may breathe out your last into his bosom

who lives forever, and who will make them happy forever—who prefer Christ's spirituals and eternal things above all temporal transitory things.