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**The Life of the
late Rev. Mr. John
Flavel**

John Flavel





The Life of the late Rev. Mr. John Flavel

Author(s): Flavel, John (c. 1630-1691)

Publisher:

Description: Over the course of his life, John Flavel, the 15th century English Puritan, wrote hundreds of sermons and several major devotional books, including *The Method of Grace in the Gospel Redemption* and *Christ Altogether Lovely*. The brief text provided here is Flavel's obituary. It tells the story of his life, celebrating his mind, piety, and charity.

Kathleen O'Bannon

CCEL Staff

Subjects: Christian Denominations

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John Flavel, Life.

The Life of the late Rev. Mr. John Flavel, minister of Dartmouth.

Those of the name of Flavel derive their pedigree from one who was the third great officer that came over with William the Conqueror; but this worthy Divine was far from that weakness and vanity to boast of any thing of that nature, being of the poet's mind, who said,

Et genus, et proavos, et quae non fecimus ipsi,

Vix ea nostra voco ---

His father was Mr. Richard Flavel, a faithful and eminent minister. He was first minister at Broomsgrove, in Worcestershire, then at Hasler, and removed from thence to Willersey, in Gloucestershire, where he continued to 1660, whence he was outed upon the restoration of King Charles II because it was a sequestered living, and the incumbent then alive: this did not so much affect Mr. Flavel, as that he wanted a fixed place for the exercise of his pastoral function. He was a person of such extraordinary piety, that those who conversed with him, said, They never heard one vain word drop from his mouth. A little before the turning out of the Nonconformist ministers, being near Totness, in Devon, he preached from [Hosea 7:6](#). "The days of visitation are come, the days of recompence are come, Israel shall know it". His application was so close, that it offended some people, and occasioned his being carried before some Justices of the Peace; but they could not reach him, so that he was discharged. He afterwards quitted that country, and his son's house, which was his retiring place, and came to London, where he continued in a faithful and acceptable discharge of his office, till the time of the dreadful plague in 1665, that he was taken and imprisoned in the manner following. He was at Mr. Blake's house in Covent-Garden, where some people had met privately for worship: whilst he was at prayer, a party of soldiers brake in upon them, with their swords drawn and demanded their preacher, threatening some, and flattering others to discover him, but in vain. Some of the company threw a coloured cloak over him, and in this disguise he was, together with his hearers, carried to Whitehall; the women were dismissed, but the men were detained and forced to lie all that night upon the bare floor; and, because they would not pay five pounds each, were sent to Newgate, where the pestilence raged most violently, as in other places of the city. Here Mr. Flavel and his wife were shut up, and seized with the sickness: they were bailed out, but died of the contagion; of which their son John had a divine monition given him by a dream, as we shall observe in its proper place. Mr. Richard Flavel left two sons behind him, both ministers of the gospel, viz. John and Phinehas.

John the eldest was born in Worcestershire. It was observable, that whilst his mother lay in with him, a nightingale made her nest in the out-side of the chamber-window, where she used to sing most sweetly. He was religiously educated by his father, and having profited well at the grammar schools, was sent early to Oxford, and settled a commoner in University College. He plied his studies hard, and exceeded many of his contemporaries in university learning.

Soon after his commencing bachelor of arts, Mr. Walplate, the minister of Diptford, in the county of Devon, was rendered incapable of performing his office by reason of his age and infirmity, and sent to Oxford for an assistant; Mr. Flavel, though but young, was commended to him as a son duly qualified, and was accordingly settled there by the standing committee of Devon, April 27, 1650, to preach as a probationer and assistant to Mr. Walplate.

Mr. Flavel considering the weight of his charge, applied himself to the work of his calling with great diligence; and being assiduous in reading, meditation and prayer, he increased in ministerial knowledge daily, (for he found himself that he came raw enough in that respect from the university) so that he attained to an high degree of eminency and reputation for his useful labours in the church.

About six months after his settling at Diptford, he heard of an ordination to be at Salisbury, and therefore went thither with his testimonials, and offered himself to be examined and ordained by the presbyters there: they appointed him a text, upon which he preached to their general satisfaction; and having afterwards examined him as to his learning, &c. they set him apart to the work of the ministry, with prayer and imposition of hands, on the 17th day of October, 1650.

Mr. Flavel being thus ordained, returned to Diptford, and after Mr. Walplate's death succeeded in the rectory. To avoid all encumbrances from the world, and avocations from his studies and ministerial work, he chose a person of worth and reputation in the parish (of whom he had a good assurance that he would be faithful to himself, and kind to his parishioners) and let him the whole tithes much below the real value, which was very pleasing to his people. By this means he was the better able to deal with them in private, since the hire of his labours was no way a hindrance to the success of them.

Whilst he was at Diptford he married one Mrs. Jane Randal, a pious gentlewoman, of a good family, who died in travail of her first child without being delivered. His year of mourning being expired, his acquaintance and intimate friends advised him to marry a second time, wherein he was again very happy. Sometime after this second marriage, the people of Dartmouth (a great and noted sea-port in the county of Devon, formerly under the charge of the Reverend Mr. Anthony Hartford, deceased) unanimously chose Mr. Flavel to succeed him. They urged him to accept their call, (1.) Because there were exceptions made against all the other candidates, but none against him. (2.) Because, being acceptable to the whole town, he was the more like to be an instrument of healing the breaches among the

good people there. (3.) Because Dartmouth, being a considerable and populous town, required an able and eminent minister, which was not so necessary for a country-parish, that might besides be more easily supplied with another pastor than Dartmouth.

That which made them more pressing and earnest with Mr. Flavel, was this; at a provincial synod in that county, Mr. Flavel, though but a young man, was voted into the chair as moderator, where he opened the assembly with a most devout and pertinent prayer; he examined the candidates who offered themselves to their trials for the ministry with great learning, stated the cases and questions proposed to them with much acuteness and judgment, and in the whole demeaned himself with that gravity, piety, and seriousness, during his presidency, that all the ministers of the assembly admired and loved him. The Reverend Mr. Hartford, his predecessor at Dartmouth, took particular notice of him, from that time forward contracted a strict friendship with him, and spoke of him among the magistrates and people of Dartmouth, as an extraordinary person, who was like to be a great light in the church. This, with their having several times heard him preach, occasioned their importunity with Mr. Flavel to come and be their minister; upon which, having spread his case before the Lord, and submitted to the decision of his neighbouring ministers, he was prevailed upon to remove to Dartmouth, to his great loss in temporals, the rectory of Diptford being a much greater benefice.

Mr. Flavel being settled at Dartmouth by the election of people, and an order from Whitehall by the commissioners for approbation of public preachers, of the 10th of December, 1656, he was associated with Mr. Allein Geere, a very worthy, but sickly, man. The ministerial work was thus divided betwixt them; Mr. Flavel was to preach on the Lord's-day at Townstall, the mother-church standing upon a hill without the town; and every fortnight in his turn at the Wednesday's Lecture in Dartmouth. Here God crowned his labours with many conversions. One of his judicious hearers expressed himself thus concerning him; "I could say much, though not enough, of the excellency of his preaching; of his seasonable, suitable and spiritual matter; of his plain expositions of scripture, his taking method, his genuine and natural deductions, his convincing arguments, his clear and powerful demonstrations, his heart searching applications, and his comfortable supports to those that were afflicted in conscience. In short that person must have a very soft head, or a very hard heart, or both, that could sit under his ministry unaffected."

By his unwearied application to study, he had acquired a great stock both of divine and human learning. He was master of the controversies betwixt the Jews and Christians, Papists and Protestants, Lutherans and Calvinists, and betwixt the Orthodox, and the Armenians and Socinians: he was likewise well read in the Controversies about Church-discipline, Infant-Baptism, and Antinomianism. He was well acquainted with the School-divinity, and drew up a judicious and ingenious scheme of the whole body of that Theology in good Latin, which he presented to a person of quality, but it was never printed. He had one way of im-

proving his knowledge, which is very proper for young divines; whatever remarkable passage he heard in private conference, if he was familiar with the relator, he would desire him to repeat it again, and insert it into his Aversaria: by these methods he acquired a vast stock of proper materials for his popular sermons in the pulpit, and his more elaborate works for the press.

He had an excellent gift of prayer, and was never at a loss in all his various occasions for suitable matter and words; and, which was the most remarkable of all, he always brought with him a broken heart and moving affections: his tongue and spirit were touched with a live coal from the altar, and he was evidently assisted by the holy Spirit of grace and supplication in that divine ordinance. Those who lived in his family, say, that he was always full and copious in prayer, seemed constantly to exceed himself, and rarely made use twice of the same expressions.

When the act of uniformity turned him out with the rest of his nonconforming brethren, he did not thereupon quit his relation to his church, he thought the souls of his flock to be more precious than to be so tamely neglected; he took all opportunities of ministering the word and sacraments to them in private meetings, and joined with other ministers in solemn days of fasting and humiliation, to pray that God would once more restore the ark of his covenant unto his afflicted Israel. About four months after that fatal Bartholomew day, his reverend colleague, Mr. Allein Geere, died; so that the whole care of the flock devolved upon Mr. Flavel, which, though a heavy and pressing burden, he undertook very cheerfully.

Upon the execution of the Oxford act, which banished all nonconformist ministers five miles from any towns which sent members to parliament, he was forced to leave Dartmouth, to the great sorrow of his people, who followed him out of town; and at Townstall churchyard they took such a mournful farewell of one another as the place might very well have been called Bochim. He removed to Slapton, a parish five miles from Dartmouth, or any other corporation, which put him out of the legal reach of his adversaries. Here he met with signal instances of God's fatherly care and protection, and preached twice every Lord's-day to such as durst adventure to hear him, which many of his own people and others did, notwithstanding the rigour and severity of the act against conventicles. He many times slipped privately into Dartmouth, where by preaching and conversation he edified his flock, to the great refreshment of his own soul and theirs, though with very much danger, because of his watchful adversaries, who constantly laid wait for him, so that he could not make any long stay in the town.

In those times Mr. Flavel being at Exeter, was invited to preach by many good people of that city, who for safety chose a wood about three miles from the city to be the place of their assembly, where they were broke up by their enemies by that time the sermon was well begun. Mr. Flavel, by the care of the people, made his escape through the middle of his engaging enemies; and though many of his hearers were taken, carried before Justice Tuckfield,

and fined; yet the rest, being nothing discouraged, reassembled, and carrying Mr. Flavel to another wood, he preached to them without any disturbance; and, after he had concluded, rode to a gentleman's house near the wood, who, though an absolute stranger to Mr. Flavel, entertained him with great civility that night, and next day he returned to Exeter in safety. Amongst those taken at this time, there was a Tanner who had a numerous family, and but a small stock; he was fined notwithstanding in forty pounds; at which he was nothing discouraged, but told a friend, who asked him how he bore up under his loss, "That he took the spoiling of his goods joyfully, for the sake of his Lord Jesus for whom his life and all that he had was too little.

As soon as the Nonconformists had any respite from their trouble, Mr. Flavel laid hold of the opportunity, and returned to Dartmouth, where, during the first indulgence granted by King Charles II he kept open doors, and preached freely to all that would come and hear him; and when that liberty was revoked, he made it his business notwithstanding to preach in season and out of season, and seldom missed of an opportunity of preaching on the Lord's-day. During this time, God was pleased to deprive him of his second wife, which was a great affliction, she having been a help meet for him, and such an one he stood much in need of, as being a man of an infirm and weak constitution, who laboured under many infirmities. In convenient time he married a third wife, Mrs. Ann Downs, daughter of Mr. Thomas Downs, minister of Exeter, who lived very happy with him eleven years, and left him two sons, who are youths of great hopes.

The persecution against the Nonconformists being renewed, Mr. Flavel found it unsafe to stay at Dartmouth, and therefore resolved to go to London, where he hoped to be in less danger, and to have more liberty to exercise his function. The night before he embarked for that end, he had the following premonition by a dream; he thought he was on board the ship, and that a storm arose which exceedingly terrified the passengers, during their consternation there sat writing at the table a person of admirable sagacity and gravity, who had a child in a cradle by him that was very froward; he thought he saw the father take up a little whip, and give the child a lash, saying, "Child be quiet, I will discipline, but not hurt thee". Upon this Mr. Flavel awaked, and musing on his dream, he concluded, that he should meet with some trouble in his passage: his friends being at dinner with him, assured him of a pleasant passage, because the wind and weather were very fair; Mr. Flavel replied, "That he was not of their mind, but expected much trouble because of his dream", adding, "that when he had such representations made to him in his sleep, they seldom or never failed.

Accordingly, when they were advanced within five leagues of Portland in their voyage, they were overtaken by a dreadful tempest insomuch that betwixt one and two in the morning, the master and seamen concluded, that, unless God changed the wind, there was no hope of life; it was impossible for them to weather Portland, so that they must of necessity be wrecked on the rocks or on the shore. Upon this Mr. Flavel called all the hands that could

be spared into the cabin to prayer; but the violence of the tempest was such, that they could not prevent themselves from being thrown from the one side unto the other as the ship was tossed; and not only so, but mighty seas broke in upon them, as if they would have drowned them in the very cabin. Mr. Flavel in this danger took hold of the two pillars of the cabin bed, and calling upon God, begged mercy for himself and the rest in the ship. Amongst other arguments in prayer, he made use of this, that if he and his company perished in that storm, the name of God would be blasphemed, the enemies of religion would say, that though he escaped their hands on shore, yet divine vengeance had overtaken him at sea. In the midst of prayer his faith and hope were raised, insomuch that he expected a gracious answer; so that, committing himself and his company to the mercy of God, he concluded the duty. No sooner was prayer ended, but one came down from the deck, crying, "Deliverance! Deliverance! God is a God hearing prayer! In a moment the wind is coming fair west!" And so sailing before it, they were brought safely to London. Mr. Flavel found many of his old friends there; and God raised him new ones, with abundance of work, and extraordinary encouragement in it. During his stay in London, he married his fourth wife, a widow gentlewoman, (daughter to Mr. George Jeffries, formerly minister of King's Bridge) but now his sorrowful relict.

Mr. Flavel, while he was in London, narrowly escaped being taken, with the reverend Mr. Jenkins, at Mr. Fox's in Moorfields, where they were keeping a day of fasting and prayer. He was so near, that he heard the insolence of the officers and soldiers to Mr. Jenkins when they had taken him; and observed it in his diary, that Mr. Jenkins might have escaped as well as himself, had it not been for a piece of vanity in a lady, whose long train hindered his going down stairs, Mr. Jenkins, out of his too great civility having let her pass before him.

Mr. Flavel after this, returned to Dartmouth, where with his family and dear people he blessed God for his mercies towards him. He was in a little time after confined close prisoner to his house, where many of his dear flock stole in over night, or betimes on the Lord's day in the morning, to enjoy the benefit of his labours, and spend the sabbath in hearing, praying, singing of psalms, and holy discourses.

Mr. Jenkins, above mentioned, dying in prison, his people gave Mr. Flavel a call to the pastoral office among them, and Mr. Reeve's people did the like. Mr. Flavel communicated these calls unto his flock, and kept a day of prayer with them to beg direction of God in this important affair; he was graciously pleased to answer them by fixing Mr. Flavel's resolution to stay with his flock at Dartmouth. Many arguments were made use of to persuade him to come to London, as, that since he was turned out by the act of uniformity, he had had but very little maintenance from his church; that those at London were rich and numerous congregations; that he had a family and children to provide for; and that the city was a theatre of honour and reputation. But none of these things could prevail with him to leave his poor people at Dartmouth.

In 1687, when it pleased God so to over-rule affairs, that King James II thought it his interest to dispense with the penal laws against them, Mr. Flavel, who had formerly been confined to a corner, shone brightly, as a flaming beacon upon the top of an hill. His affectionate people prepared a large place for him, where God blessed his labours to the conviction of many people, by his sermons on [Rev. 3:20](#). "Behold I stand at the door and knock". This encouraged him to print those sermons, under the title of England's Duty, &c. hoping that it might do good abroad, as well as in his own congregation. He made a vow to the Lord under his confinement, that if he should be once more entrusted with public liberty, he would improve it to the advantage of the gospel; this he performed in a most conscientious manner, preached twice every Lord's-day, and lectured every Wednesday, in which he went over most of the 3d chapter of St John's gospel, shewing the indispensable necessity of regeneration. He preached likewise every Thursday before the sacrament, and then after examination admitted communicants. He had no assistance on sacrament-days, so that he was many times almost spent before he distributed the elements. When the duty of the day was over, he would often complain of a sore breast, an aking head, and a pained back; yet he would be early at study again next Monday. He allowed himself very little recreation, accounting time a precious jewel that ought to be improved at any rate.

He was not only a zealous preacher in the pulpit, but a sincere Christian in his closet, frequent in self-examination, as well as in pressing it upon others; being afraid, lest while he preached to others he himself should be a cast-away. To prove this, I shall transcribe what follows from his own diary.

"To make sure of eternal life, (said he) is the great business which the sons of death have to do in this world. Whether a man consider the immortality of his own soul, the ineffable joys and glory of heaven, the extreme and endless torments of hell, the inconceivable sweetness of peace of conscience, or the misery of being subject to the terrors thereof; all these put a necessity, a solemnity, a glory upon this work. But, Oh! the difficulties and dangers attending it! How many, and how great are these? What judgement, faithfulness, resolution, and watchfulness does it require? Such is the deceitfulness, darkness, and inconstancy of our hearts, and such the malice, policy and diligence of Satan to manage and improve it, that he who attempts this work had need both to watch his seasons for it, and frequently look up to God for his guidance and illumination, and to spend many sad and serious thoughts before he adventure upon a determination and conclusion of the state of his soul.

To the end therefore that this most important work may not miscarry in my hands, I have collected, with all the care I can, the best and soundest characters I can find in the writings of our modern divines, taken out of the scripture, and by their labours illustrated and prepared for use, that I might make a right application of them.

1. I have earnestly sought the Lord for the assistance of his Spirit, which can only manifest my own heart unto me, and show me the true state thereof, which is that thing my

soul does most earnestly desire to know; and I hope the Lord will answer my desire therein, according to his promises, [Luke 11:13](#). [John 14:26](#).

2. I have endeavoured to cast out and lay aside self-love, lest my heart being prepossessed therewith, my judgement should be perverted, and become partial on passing sentence on my estate. I have, in some measure, brought my heart to be willing to judge and condemn myself for an hypocrite, if such I shall be found on trial, as to approve myself for sincere and upright. Yea, I would have it so far from being grievous to me so to do, that if I have been all this while mistaken and deceived, I shall rejoice and bless the Lord with my soul, that now at last it may be discovered to me, and I may be set right, though I lay the foundation new again. This I have laboured to bring my heart to, knowing that thousands have dashed and split to pieces upon this rock. And indeed he that will own the person of a judge, must put off the person of a friend.

3. It has been my endeavour to keep upon my heart a deep sense of that great judgement-day throughout this work as knowing by experience what a potent influence this has on the conscience, to make it deliberate, serious and faithful in its work, and therefore I have demanded of my sun conscience, before the resolution of each question, O my conscience, deal faithfully with me in this particular, and say no more to me than thou wilt own and stand to in the great day, when the counsels of all hearts shall be made manifest.

4. Having seriously weighed each mark, and considered where in the weight and substance of it lieth, I have gone to the Lord in prayer for his assistance, ere I have drawn up the answer of my conscience, and as my heart has been persuaded therein, so have I determined and resolved: what has been clear to my experience, I have so set down; and what has been dubious, I have here left it so.

5. I have made choice of the fittest seasons I had for this work, and set to it when I have found my heart in the most quiet and serious frame. For as he that would see his face in a glass, must be fixed, not in motion, or in water, must make no commotion in it; so it is in this case.

6. Lastly, To the end I may be successful in this work, I have laboured all along carefully to distinguish betwixt such sins as are grounds of doubting, and such as are only grounds of humiliation; knowing that not every evil is a ground of doubting, though all, even the smallest infirmities, administer matter of humiliation; and thus I have desired to enterprise this great business. O Lord, assist thy servant, that he may not mistake herein; but, if his conscience do now condemn him, he may lay a better foundation whilst he has time; and if it shall now acquit him, he may also have boldness in the day of judgement."

These things being previously dispatched, he tried himself by the scripture marks of sincerity and regeneration; by this means he attained to a well-grounded assurance, the ravishing comforts of which were many times shed abroad in his soul; this made him a powerful and successful preacher, as one who spoke from his own heart to those of others.

He preached what he felt, what he had handled, what he had seen and tasted of the word of life, and they felt it also.

We may guess what a sweet and blessed intercourse he had with heaven, from that history we meet with in his "Pneumatologia", p. 323, which I refer to, and likewise of that revelation he had of his father and mother's death, p. 339. He was a mighty wrestler with God in secret prayer, and particularly begged of him to crown his sermons, printed books and private discourses, with the conversion of poor sinners, a work which his heart was much set upon. It pleased God to answer him by many instances, of which the two that follow deserve peculiar notice.

In 1673, there came into Dartmouth port a ship of Pool, in her return from Virginia; the Surgeon of this ship, a lusty young man of 23 years of age, fell into a deep melancholy, which the Devil improved to make him murder himself. This he attempted on the Lord's-day, early in the morning, when he was in bed with his brother; he first cut his own throat with a knife he had prepared on purpose, and leaping out of the bed, thrust it likewise into his stomach, and so lay wallowing in his own blood, till his brother awaked and cried for help. A Physician and Surgeon were brought, who concluded the wound in his throat mortal; they stitched it up however, and applied a plaister, but without hopes of cure, because he already breathed through the wound, and his voice was become inarticulate. Mr. Flavel came to visit him in this condition, and apprehending him to be within a few minutes of eternity, laboured to prepare him for it; he asked him his own apprehensions of his condition, and the young man answered, that he hoped in God for eternal life. Mr. Flavel replied, that he feared his hopes were ill grounded: the scripture tells us, that "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him: self-murder was the grossest of all murder, &c. Mr. Flavel insisted so much on the aggravations of the crime, that the young man's conscience began to fail, his heart began to melt, and then he broke out into tears, bewailing his sin and misery, and asked Mr. Flavel, If there might yet be any hope for him? he told him there might; and finding him altogether unacquainted with the nature of faith and repentance, he opened them to him. The poor man sucked in this doctrine greedily, prayed with great vehemence to God, that he would work them on his soul, and entreated Mr. Flavel to pray with him, and for him, that he might be, though late, a sincere gospel penitent, and sound believer. Mr. Flavel prayed with him accordingly, and it pleased God exceedingly to melt the young man's heart, during the performance of that duty. He was very loth to part with Mr. Flavel, but the duty of the day obliging him to be gone, in a few words he summed up those counsels that he thought most necessary, and so took his farewell of him, never expecting to see him any more in this world. But it pleased God to order it otherwise; the young man continued alive contrary to all expectation, panted earnestly after the Lord Jesus, and no discourse was pleasing to him, but that of Christ and faith. In this frame Mr. Flavel found him in the evening; he rejoiced greatly when he saw him come again, intreated him to continue his

discourse upon those subjects, and told him, Sir, the Lord has given me repentance for this and for all my other sins; I see the evil of them now, so as I never saw them before! O I loathe myself! I do also believe, Lord, help my unbelief. I am heartily willing to take Christ upon his own terms; hut one thing troubles me, I doubt this bloody sin will not be pardoned. Will Jesus Christ, said he, apply his blood to one, who has shed his own blood? Mr. Flavel told him that the Lord Jesus shad his blood for them who with wicked hands had shed his own blood, which was a greater sin then shedding the blood of his; to which the wounded man replied, I will cast myself upon Christ, let him do what he will. In this condition Mr. Flavel left him that night.

Next morning his wounds were to be opened, and the Surgeon's opinion was, that he would immediately expire: Mr. Flavel was again requested to give him a visit, which he did, found him in a very serious frame, and prayed with him. The wound in his stomach was afterwards opened, when the ventricle was so much swollen, that it came out at the orifice of the wound, and lay like a livid discoloured tripe upon his body, and was also cut through; every one thought it impossible for him to live; however, the Surgeon enlarged the orifice of the wound, fomented it, and wrought the ventricle again into his body, and, stitching up the wound, left his patient to the disposal of providence.

It pleased God that he was cured of those dangerous wounds in his body; and, upon solid grounds of a rational charity, there was ground to believe that he was also cured of that more dangerous wound which sin had made in his soul. Mr. Flavel spent many hours with him during his sickness; and when the Surgeon returned to Pool, after his recovery, Mr. Samuel Hardy, that worthy minister there, thanked Mr. Flavel in a letter, for the great pains he had taken with that young man, and congratulated his success, assuring him, that if ever a great and thorough work was wrought, it was upon that man.

The second instance is this: Mr. Flavel being in London in 1673, his old bookseller, Mr. Boulder, gave him this following relation, viz. That some time before, there came into his shop a sparkish gentle man to enquire for some play-books; Mr. Boulder told him he had none, but shewed him Mr. Flavel's little treatise of "Keeping the Heart", intreated him to read it, and assured him it would do him more good than play books. The gentleman read the title, and glancing upon several pages here and there, broke out into these and such other expressions, What a damnable Fanatic was he who made this book? Mr. Boulter begged of him to buy and read it, and told him he had no cause to censure it so bitterly; at last he bought it, but told him he would not read it. What will you do with it then, said Mr. Boulter? I will tear and burn it, said he, and send it to the Devil. Mr. Boulder told him, that he should not have it. Upon this the gentleman promised to read it; and Mr. Boulder told him, if he disliked it upon reading, he would return him his money. About a month after, the gentleman came to the shop again in a very modest habit, and with a serious countenance, bespoke Mr. Boulder thus; Sir, I most heartily thank you for putting this book into my hands; I bless

God that moved you to do it, it has saved my soul; blessed be God that ever I came into your shop. And then he bought a hundred more of those books of him, and told him he would give them to the poor who could not buy them, and so left him, praising and admiring the goodness of God. Thus it pleased God to bless the sermons, discourses and writings of Mr. Flavel.

He never delighted in controversies, but was obliged, contrary to his inclination, to write against Mr. Cary, the principal Anabaptist in Dartmouth, with whom, however, he maintained a friendly and Christian correspondence. When he wrote his "Planelogia", or, "Blow at the Root", he declared to his friends, that though those studies were very necessary, he took no pleasure in them, but had rather be employed in practical divinity. When he composed his "Reasonableness of Personal Reformation", he told an intimate acquaintance of his, that he seldom had a vain thought to interrupt him, which made him hope it would do the more good in the world. He purposed to have enlarged his book of "Sacramental Meditations", and had most judiciously stated and handled several cases of conscience on that occasion, which he designed to have inserted in the next edition, but lived not to finish them for the press.

Many times, when he preached abroad, he has had letters sent him from unknown persons, informing him how God had blessed his ministry to their souls, and converted them from being bitter enemies to religion. This encouraged him when he rode abroad, not only to accept of invitations to preach, but many times to offer his labours unto those that would be pleased to hear him; though for this he had no occasion where he was known, the people being generally importunate with him. One day after a long and hard journey, an intimate friend of his, out of a tender regard to him, pressed him with cogent arguments to forbear preaching at that season, but could not prevail with him; his bowels of compassion to needy and perishing souls made him overlook all considerations of himself: he preached an excellent sermons by which there was one converted, as he declared himself afterwards upon his admission to the Lord's table.

The last sermon that he preached to his people at Dartmouth, was on a public day of fasting and humiliations; in the close of which he was enlarged in such an extraordinary manner, when offering up praises to God for mercies received, that he seemed to be in ecstasy. This happened about a week before his death, and may justly be accounted a foretaste of those heavenly raptures that he now enjoys among the blessed spirits above.

The last sermon he preached was on the 21st of June, 1691, at Ashburton, from [1 Cor. 10: 12](#). "Wherefore let him that standeth take heed lest he fall". It was a very pathetic discourse, tending to awaken careless professors, and to stir them up to be solicitous about their souls. After having preached this sermon, he went to Exeter; and at Topsham, within three miles of that city, he presided as moderator in an assembly of the Nonconformist ministers of Devonshire, who unanimously voted him into the chair: the occasion of the

meeting was about an union betwixt the Presbyterian and Independents, which Mr. Flavel was very zealous to promote, and brought to so great an issue in those parts, that the ministers declared their satisfaction with the heads of agreement concluded on by the London ministers of those denominations. Mr. Flavel closed the work of the day with prayer and praises, in which his spirit was carried out with wonderful enlargement and affection.

He wrote a letter to an eminent minister in London, with an account of their proceedings, that same day that he died; providence ordering it so, that he should finish that good work his heart was so intent upon, before he finished his course.

The manner of his death was sudden and surprising, his friends thought him as well that day in the evening of which he died, as he had been for many years: towards the end of supper he complained of a deadness in one of his hands, that he could not lift it to his head. This struck his wife and his friends about him with astonishment, they used some means to recover it to its former strength, but instead thereof, to their great grief the distemper seized all upon one side of his body. They put him to bed with all speed, and sent for physicians, but to no purpose; his distemper prevailed upon him so fast, that in a short time it made him speechless. He was sensible of his approaching death, and when they carried him upstairs, expressed his opinion that it would be the last time; but added, I know that it will be well with me; which were some of his last words. Thus died this holy man of God suddenly, and without pain, not giving so much as one groan. He exchanged this life for a better, on the 26th day of June, 1691, in the 64th year of his age.

His corpse was carried from Exeter to Dartmouth, attended by several ministers, and a great many other persons of good quality; abundance of people rode out from Dartmouth, Totness, Newton, Ashburton, and other places, to meet the corpse; when it was taken out of the hearse at the water side, his people and other friends could not forbear expressing the sense of their great loss, by floods of tears, and a bitter lamentation. It was interred the same night in Dartmouth church, and next day Mr. George Trosse, a minister of Exeter, preached his funeral-sermon from Elisha's lamentation upon the translation of Elijah, [2 Kings 2:12](#). "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.

We shall conclude with a character of Mr. Flavel. He was a man of a middle stature, and full of life and activity: he was very thoughtful, and when not discoursing or reading, much taken up in meditation, which made him digest his notions well. He was ready to learn from every body, and as free to communicate what he knew. He was bountiful to his own relations, and very charitable to the poor, but especially to the household of faith, and the necessitous members of his own church, to whom, during their sickness, he always sent suitable supplies. He freely taught academical learning to four young men whom he bred to the ministry, and one of them he maintained all the while at his own charge. He was exceedingly affectionate to all the people of Dartmouth, of which we shall give one remarkable instance. When our fleet was first engaged with the French, he called his people together to a solemn fast, and,

like a man in an agony, wrestled with God in prayer for the church and nation, and particularly for the poor seamen of Dartmouth, that they might obtain mercy; the Lord heard and answered him, for not one of that town was killed in the fight, though many of them were in the engagement. As he was a faithful ambassador to his Master, he made his example the rule of his own practice, and was so far from reviling again, those that reviled him, that he prayed for those that despitefully used him: one remarkable instance of which is as follows: In 1685, some of the people of Dartmouth, accompanied too by some of the magistrates, made up his effigy, carried it through the streets in derision, with the covenant and bill of exclusion pinned to it, and set it upon a bonfire, and burnt it; some of the spectators were so much affected with the reproach and ignominy done to this reverend and pious minister, that they wept, and others scored and jeered: it was observable, that at the very same time, though he knew nothing of the matter, he was heaping coals of fire of another nature upon the heads of those wicked men, for he was then praying for the town of Dartmouth, its magistrates and inhabitants; and when news was brought him, upon the conclusion of his prayer, what they had been doing, he lifted up his prayer unto God for them in our Saviour's words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

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