

Letter VIII

[From A Collection of Letters by Gerhard Tersteegen](#)
[\(1697-1769\)](#)

Dearly beloved brother, in the grace of Jesus Christ!

Although I am so dilatory in replying to your ever welcome letters, so that it would appear to proceed from indifference or the want of esteem, yet I assure you, nothing is further from my thoughts. I love you; your advancement is a subject of importance with me, and I often feel myself induced, in simplicity, to offer you up to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, being in some measure acquainted with your state.

I can easily believe, that you have been exercised, this summer, with a variety of temptations and perplexities. Without trial and exercise, we cannot attain the desired end. It is nevertheless, true, that for much of this, we have ourselves to blame: but the infinite goodness of God in Christ, supports, assists, and again receives us, with wonderful and adorable long-suffering. Blessed be our gracious God in Christ, who hath helped us hitherto! Let us love him! We might often fare better, if we only continued more in simplicity of heart, without desiring, although from a good intention, to be great and wise too early: because it is then more difficult to begin again at A, B, C, after having in vain exerted much time and precious strength. The intention is very laudable: we wish to increase in piety, and with this view, we read, examine, hear, and see a variety of things, which at the time, we do not fully comprehend, and which we cannot harmonize and digest; they must therefore, necessarily occasion much confusion and anxiety to a mind that hungers after God. I know what I have had to pass through in this respect; and to this hour, my soul is thankful to God, for having preserved me in my earliest years, from a multiplicity of acquaintances, and opportunities of hearing and seeing a variety of things.

I am therefore not surprised, that the society and conversation of friends, has occasionally yielded you no satisfaction. I very well remember what I felt, when I first heard of you, and why I gave you no opportunity of associating with this or that particular person, although I observed, that you had an inclination to do so. It was my belief, that you would walk more quietly and safely without such society, and that in due time, the providence of God would send you acquaintance according to your need; and therefore I was not glad to see you procure a multitude of theological works, of various descriptions; not that I have anything against such books or acquaintances, except that not everything that is good in itself, is good for us. Many truths, and very important ones, might confuse or impede us, if we were anxious to know them before the time (John 16: 12). It is therefore my plan, to commit the soul, in a great degree, to the free guidance of divine grace, and lead it to nothing, except that to which God intends to lead it, according to the best of my judgment. I pay attention solely to the dealings of God, and admonish the individual, when I see him in danger of receiving injury. I associate with some, who seek to walk in cordiality and sincerity before God, to whom I have never said a word about books which I myself have published, because I did not think it would be of service to them. God must be the master in all things; and we must continue to be his scholars, and apply strictly to the lesson given us to learn.

We know how his eternal love has sought us, and inwardly met us in Christ. We now find, in our inmost heart, a profound and secret longing and inclination to be freed from, sin, the world, and self, and to be again united with the source from whence we emanated. In order to the attainment of this, we have no need to occupy ourselves with external things, nor make great preparations, or think to carry the point by our own efforts. Sincerity, it is true, is necessary: but a sincerity in mortification, inward retirement, and patient waiting. The power to accomplish this is very near at hand. Let us only cherish this secret and inward desire, and give way to it. For it is by this inclination of the heart, that the power of God and our dear Redeemer is present; from whom we must alone expect help and salvation. Let us cleave unto him in the spirit of children, with humility and confidence, believing in his gracious presence; worshipping him, who is thus present with us, loving him, committing ourselves entirely to him, and, in a word, holding fellowship with him, as our God and our best friend, who is all-sufficient for us. If we act thus, and when he perceives that our only aim is to please him, in the best manner possible, he comes to our aid, and works in us substantial virtues and a thousand blessings, according to our need. He then teaches us, from love to him, to love the cross, to mortify all self-seeking, and to renounce all other life and inclination, in order that everything within us may be solely and simply turned towards him, and he alone be our life and our treasure. In short, he that only exercises himself, with

childlike simplicity, in this important point, without paying much regard to anything else, may rely upon it, that the Lord will provide for him wonderfully. If he requires it, he sends him a book, or a faithful friend to strengthen and encourage him: and as he is willing to remain in childlike ignorance, he is in the very state of mind, that fits him to be led by the Spirit of Jesus, at his pleasure, into all truth, and to be made of him what he pleases.

You will therefore understand, my dear brother, that I do not altogether advise you against associating with friends, or against reading; much less that I regard as suspicious, or of small importance that by which a soul may obtain nourishment in the main point: this would be spiritual pride. I only warn you against a super abundance, and against living in things external, and against judging of everything without due distinction and examination, and against entering too deeply into society and mental reflection. This examination, however, is very simple: that which strengthens us in the main point, that which enters into the mind without constraint, and composes it at the time of retirement and prayer, is of service to us; but nothing else. We ought, however, not to reject other things, but leave them. "What is that to thee?" says Jesus still; "follow thou me!" With reference to associating with others, my advice continues to be, "friendship with all good people, but fellowship with few." And if the providence of God gives us those few, whom we have found faithful, let us love and esteem them the more, the rarer such characters are to be found in the present day: taking care, however, not to idolize them.

Walk with simplicity: go forwards with confidence, my dear brother, attending always to the main thing, prayer, self-denial, loving, and suffering. Be not afraid of the wandering thoughts that infest you against your will: bearing these and other things with disgust, yet at the same time with confidence, is the way to be delivered from them. There is much depravity in us, and both the discovery of it, and our redemption from it, is of grace. It is God, who must work in us inward collectedness and every other blessing, instead of these being the result of our own desires or efforts. Yet still, you must not be too scrupulous in your devotional exercises; good children do what is given them to perform, as well as they are able, and are desirous of improving every day. May filial love govern you in all things! The picking up a straw, with an intention to please God, is of greater value in his sight, than removing mountains without such intention. May our dear Redeemer himself, work in us everything that is well-pleasing in his sight! He is faithful and will do it. Pray for me, even as I do also for you, though in weakness, and remain through grace,

Your obliged fellow-brother.