

# A Treatise of The Whole Armour of God

*“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”*

*“Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*

— Ephesians, chap. 6 vv. 13-20

## Part Second.—DIRECTION EIGHTH.

### THE SEVERAL PIECES OF THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

#### Fourth Piece—The Christian’s Spiritual Shield.






*‘Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.’*

— Ephesians 6:16

The Fourth piece in the Christian’s panoply presents itself in this verse to our consideration —and that is THE SHIELD OF FAITH. A grace of graces it is, and here fitly placed in the midst of her other companions. It stands, methinks, among them, as the heart in the midst of the body; or, if you please, as David when Samuel ‘anointed him in the midst of his brethren,’ 1 Sam. 16:13. The apostle, when he comes to speak of this grace doth, as it were, lift up its head, and anoint it above all its fellows—*‘above all, take the shield of faith.’* The words easily fall into these two general parts. FIRST. An exhortation—*‘above all, take the shield of faith.’* SECOND. A powerful argument pressing the exhortation—*‘whereby ye are able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.’*

#### EXPLICATION OF THE WORDS.

In the exhortation ‘Above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked,’ these four particulars call for our inquiry towards the explication of the words. FIRST. What faith it is that is here commended to the Christian soldier. SECOND. Having found the kind, we are to inquire what his faith is as to its nature. THIRD. Why it is compared to a

shield rather than other pieces. FOURTH. What is the importance of this      , 'above all.'

[THE KIND OF FAITH *here meant.*]

FIRST INQUIRY. *What faith is it that here is commended?* This will soon be known, if we consider the use and end for which it is commended to the Christian, and that is to enable him to 'quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;' *i.e.* of the wicked one, the devil. Now, look upon the several kinds of faith, and that among them must be the faith of this place which enables the creature to quench Satan's fiery darts, yea, all his fiery darts. *Historical faith* cannot do this, and therefore is not it. This is so far from quenching Satan's fiery darts, that the devil himself, that shoots them, hath this faith. 'The devils believe,' James 2:19. *Temporary faith* cannot do it. This is so far from quenching Satan's fiery darts, that itself is quenched by them. It makes a goodly blaze of profession, and 'endures for a while,' Matt. 13:21, but soon disappears. *Miraculous faith*, this falls as short as the former. Judas' miraculous faith, which he had with other of the apostles—for aught that we can read—enabling him to cast devils out of others, left himself possessed of the devil of covetousness, hypocrisy, and treason; yea, a whole legion of lusts, that hurried him down the hill of despair into the bottomless pit of perdition. There is only one kind of faith remains, which is it the apostle means in this place, and that is *justifying faith*. This indeed is the grace that makes him, whoever hath it, the devil's match. Satan hath not so much advantage of the Christian by the transcendency of his natural abilities, as he hath of Satan in this cause and this his weapon. The apostle is confident to give the day to the Christian before the fight is fully over: 'Ye have overcome the wicked one,' 1 John 2:13, that is, ye are as sure to do it as if you were now mounted on your triumphant chariot in heaven. The knight shall overcome the giant; the saint, Satan; and the same apostle tells us what gets him the day. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,' 1 John 5:4.

[*Justifying faith, AS TO ITS NATURE.*]

SECOND INQUIRY. *What is this justifying faith as to its nature?*

I shall answer this, *First.* Negatively. *Second.* Affirmatively.

*First. Negatively*, in two particulars.

1. Justifying faith is *not a naked assent to the truths of the gospel*. This justifying faith doth give; but this doth not make it justifying faith. A dogmatical faith, or historical, is comprehended in justifying faith. But dogmatical faith doth not infer justifying faith. Justifying faith cannot be without a dogmatical; it implies it, as the rational soul in man doth the sensitive. But, the dogmatical may be without the justifying, as the sensitive soul in the beast without the rational. Judas knew the Scriptures, and without doubt did assent to the truth of them, when he was so zealous a preacher of the gospel; but he never had so much as one dram of justifying faith in his soul. 'But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him,' John 6:64. Yea, Judas' master, the devil himself—one far enough, I suppose, from justifying faith—yet he assents to the truth of the word. He goes against his conscience who denies them. When he tempted Christ he did not dispute against the Scripture, but *from* the Scripture, drawing his arrows out of this quiver, Matt. 4:6. And at another time, he makes as full a confession of Christ, for the matter, as Peter himself did, Matt. 8:29, compared with Matt. 16:17. Assent to the truth of the word is but an act of the understanding, which reprobates and devils may exercise; but justifying faith is a compounded habit, and hath its seat both in the understanding and will; and therefore [it is] called a 'believing with the heart,' Rom. 10:10; yea, a 'believing with all the heart,' Acts 8:37. 'Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.' It takes all the powers of the soul. There is a double object in the promise—one proper to the understanding, to move that; another proper to the will, to excite and work upon that. As the promise is true, so it calls for an act of assent from the understanding; and as it is good as well as true, so it calls for an act of the will to embrace and receive it. Therefore, he which only notionally knows the promise, and speculatively assents to the truth of it, without

clinging to it, and embracing of it, doth not believe savingly, and can have no more benefit from the promise, than nourishment from the food he sees and acknowledgeth to be wholesome, but eats none of.

2. Justifying faith is *not assurance*. If it were, St. John might have spared his pains, who wrote to them that 'believed on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life,' 1 John 5:13. They might then have said 'We do this already. What else is our faith, but a believing that we are such as through Christ are pardoned, and shall through him be saved?' But this cannot be so. If faith were assurance, then a man's sins would be pardoned before he believes, for he must necessarily be pardoned before he can know he is pardoned. The candle must be lighted before I can see it is lighted. The child must be born before I can be assured it is born. The object must be before the act. Assurance rather is the fruit of faith. It is in faith as the flower is in the root. Faith, in time, after much communion with God, acquaintance with the word, and experience of his dealings with the soul, may flourish into assurance. But, as the root truly lives before the flower appears, and continues when that hath shed its beautiful leaves, and gone again; so doth true justifying faith live before assurance comes, and after it disappears. Assurance is, as it were, the cream of faith. Now you know there is milk before there is cream, this riseth not but after some time standing, and there remains milk after it is fleted off. How many, alas! of the precious saints of God must we shut out from being believers, if there is no faith but what amounts to assurance? We must needs offend against the generation of God's children, among whom some are babes, not yet come to the use of their reflex act of faith, so as to own the graces of God in them to be true, upon the review that they take of their own actings. And, must not the child be allowed to be a child, till he can speak for himself, and say he is so? Others there are in Christ's family, who are of higher stature and greater experience in the ways of God, yet have lost those apprehensions of pardoning mercy, which once they were, through the goodness of God, able to have shown—shall we say their faith went away in the departure of their assurance? How oft then in a year may a believer be no believer? even as oft as God

withdraws and leaves the creature in the dark. Assurance is like the sun-flower, which opens with the day and shuts with the night. It follows the motion of God's face. If that looks smilingly on the soul, it lives; if that frowns or hides itself, it dies. But faith is a plant that can grow in the shade, a grace that can find the way to heaven in a dark night. It can 'walk in darkness,' and yet 'trust in the name of the Lord,' Isa. 50:10. In a word, by making the essence of faith to lie in assurance, we should not only offend against the generation of God's children, but against the God and Father of these children; for at one clap we turn the greater number of those children he hath here on earth out of doors. Yes, we are cruel to those he is most tender of, and make sad the hearts of those that he would have chiefly comforted. Indeed if this were true, a great part of gospel provision laid up in the promises is of little use. We read of promises to those that mourn, 'they shall be comforted,' to the contrite, 'they shall be revived,' to him that 'walks in darkness,' and the like. These belong to believers, and none else. Surely then there are some believers that are in the dark, under the hatches of sorrow, wounded and broken with their sins, and temptation for them. But they are not such as are assured of the love of God; their water is turned into joy, their night into light, their sighs and sobs into joy and praise.

*Second.* I shall answer *affirmatively*, what justifying faith is, and in the description of it I shall consider it solely as *justifying*. And so take it in these few words—It is the act of the soul whereby it rests on Christ crucified for pardon and life, and that upon the warrant of the promise. In the description observe,

1. The subject where faith is seated, not any single faculty, but the soul. 2. The object of faith as justifying—Christ crucified. 3. The act of faith upon this object, and that is resting on Christ crucified for pardon and life. 4. The warrant and security that faith goes upon in this act.

1. The *subject where faith is seated*, not any single faculty, but *the soul*. Of this I have spoken something before, and so pass on to the second point.

2. Here is the *object of faith as justifying*, and that is *Christ crucified*. The whole truth of God is the object of justifying faith. It trades with the whole word of God, and doth firmly assent unto

it; but, in its justifying act, it singles out Christ crucified for its object. (1.) The person of Christ is the object of faith as justifying. (2.) Christ as crucified.

(1.) *The person of Christ.* Not any axiom or proposition in the word. This is the object of assurance, not of faith. Assurance saith 'I believe my sins are pardoned through Christ.' Faith's language is, 'I believe on Christ for the pardon of them.' The word of God doth direct our faith to Christ, and terminates it upon him; called therefore, a 'coming to Christ,' Matt. 11:28, a 'receiving of him,' John 1:12, a 'believing on him,' John 17:20. The promise is but the dish in which Christ, the true food of the soul, is served up; and, if faith's hand be on the promise, it is but as one that draws the dish to him, that he may come at the dainties in it. The promise is the marriage-ring on the hand of faith. Now we are not married to the ring, but with it unto Christ. 'All the promises,' saith the apostle, 'are yea and amen in him.' They have their excellency from him, and efficacy in him—I mean in a soul's union to him. To run away with a promise, and not to close with Christ, and by faith become one in him, is as if a man should rend a branch from a tree, and lay it up in his chest, expecting it to bear fruit there. Promises are dead branches severed from Christ. But when a soul by faith becomes united to Christ, then he partakes of all his fatness; not a promise but yields sweetness to it.

(2.) As Christ is the primary object of faith, so *Christ as crucified*. Not Christ in his personal excellencies—so he is the object rather of our love than faith—but as bleeding, and that to death, under the hand of divine justice for to make an atonement by God's own appointment for the sins of the world. As the handmaid's eye is to her mistress's hand for direction, so faith's eye is on God revealing himself in his word; which way God by it points the soul, thither it goes. Now there faith finds God, intending to save poor sinners, pitched on Christ, and Christ alone, for the transacting and effecting of it, and him whom God chooseth to trust with the work—him and him alone—will faith choose to lay the burden of her confidence on.

Again, faith observes how Christ performed this great work, and accordingly how the promise holds him forth to be applied for pardon and salvation. Now faith finds that then Christ

made the full payment to the justice of God for sin, when he poured out his blood to death upon the cross. All the precedaneous<sup>clxxxvi</sup> acts of his humiliation were but preparatory to this. He was born to die; he was sent into the world as a lamb bound with the bonds of an irreversible decree for a sacrifice. Christ himself when he came into the world understood this to be the errand he was sent on, Heb. 10:5. 'Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me;' *i.e.* to be an expiatory sacrifice. Without this, all he had done would have been labour undone. No redemption but by his blood, 'In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,' Eph. 1:7. No church without his blood, 'The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,' Acts 20:28. *E latere Christi morientis exstitit ecclesia*—the church is taken out of dying Jesus' side, as Eve out of sleeping Adam's. Christ did not redeem and save poor souls by sitting in majesty on his heavenly throne, but by hanging on the shameful cross, under the tormenting hand of man's fury and God's just wrath. And therefore the poor soul, that would have pardon of sin, is directed to place his faith not only on Christ, but on bleeding Christ, Rom. 3:25: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.'

3. The act of faith upon this object, and that is *resting on Christ crucified for pardon and life*. I know there are many acts of the soul antecedent to this, without which the creature can never truly exercise this. As knowledge, especially of God and Christ, upon whose authority and testimony it relies: 'I know whom I have believed,' II Tim. 1:12. None will readily trust a stranger that he is wholly unacquainted with. Abraham indeed went he knew not whither, but he did not go with he knew not whom. The greatest thing God laboured to instruct Abraham in, and satisfy him with, was—

(1.) *The knowledge of his own glorious self*—who he was—that he might take his word and rely on it, how harsh and improbable, soever it might sound in sense or reason's ear, 'I am Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect.'

(2.) *Assent to the truth of the word of God*. If this foundation-stone be not laid, faith's building cannot go on. Who will trust him that he dares

not think speaks true?

(3.) *A sense of our own vileness and emptiness.*

By the one he means us see our demerit, what we deserve, hell and damnation; by the other, our own impotency, how little we can contribute—yea, just nothing, to our own reconciliation. I join them together, because the one ariseth out of the other. Sense of this emptiness comes from the deep apprehensions a soul hath of the other's fulness in him. You never knew a man full of self-confidence and self-abasement together. The conscience cannot abound with the sense of sin and the heart with self-conceit at the same time. 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died,' Rom. 7:9—that is, when the commandment came, in the accusations of it, to his conscience, sin, like a sleepy lion had lain still, and he secure and confident by it, when that began to roar in his conscience, then he died—that is, his vain-confidence of himself gave up the ghost. Both these are necessary to faith—sense of sin, like the smart of a wound, to make the creature think of a plaster to cure it; and sense of emptiness and insufficiency in himself or any creature to do the cure necessary to make him go out to Christ for cure. We do not go abroad to beg what we have of our own within doors. These, with some other, are necessary to faith. But the receiving of Christ, and resting on Christ, is that act of faith to which justification is promised. 'He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God,' John 3:18. Now every one that assents to the truth of what the Scripture saith of Christ, doth not believe on Christ. No; This believing on Christ implies an union of the soul to Christ and fiduciary recumbency on Christ. Therefore we are bid to take hold of Christ, Isa. 27:5, who is there called God's 'strength,' as elsewhere his arm—'that we may make peace with God, and we shall make peace with him.' It is not the sight of a man's arm stretched out to a man in the water will save him from drowning, but the taking hold of it. Christ is a stone. Faith builds upon Christ for salvation. And how? but by laying its whole weight and expectation of mercy on him. What Paul, II Tim. 1:12, calls 'believing' in the former part of the verse, he calls in the latter part a 'committing to him to be kept against that day.'

(4.) The fourth and last branch in the description, is *the warrant and security that faith goes upon in this act.* And this it takes from the promise. Indeed, there is no way how God can be conceived to contract a debt to his creature but by promise. There are ways for men to become debtors one to another, though never any promise passed from them. The father is a debtor to his child, and owes him love, provision, and nurture. The child is a debtor to his parent, and owes him honour and obedience, though neither of them promised this to each other. Much more doth the creature stand deep in God's debt-book, and owes himself with all he hath to God his Maker, though he hath not the grace voluntarily to make these over to God by promise and covenant. But the great God is so absolute a Sovereign, that none can make a law to bind him but himself. Till he be pleased to pass an act of grace, of his own good-will, to give this or do that good thing to and for his poor creatures, no claim can be laid to the least mercy at his hands. There are two things therefore that are greatly to be heeded by the soul that would believe.

(1.) He must inquire for a promise to bear his faith out, and warrant him to expect such a mercy at God's hand.

(2.) Again, when he hath found a promise, and observed the terms well on which it runs, the Christian is not to stay for any further encouragement, but upon the credit of the naked promise to set his faith on work.

(a) He is to *inquire out a promise, and observe well the terms on which it runs.* Indeed upon the point it comes all to one; to believe without a promise, or to believe on a promise, but not observe the terms of it. Both are presumptuous, and speed alike. A prince hath as much reason to be angry with him that doth not keep close to his commission, as with another that acts without any commission. O how little considered is this by many who make bold of God's arm to lean on for pardon and salvation, but never think that the promise, which presents Christ to leaned on as a Saviour, presents him at the same time to be chosen as a Lord and Prince! Such were the rebellious Israelites, who durst make God and his promise a leaning-stock for their foul elbows to rest on. 'They call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The Lord of hosts is his

name,' Isa. 48:2; but they were more bold than welcome. God rejected their confidence and loathed their sauciness. Though a prince would not disdain to let a poor wounded man, faint with bleeding, and unable to go alone, upon his humble request, make use of his arm, rather than he should perish in the streets; yet he would, with indignation, reject the same motion from a filthy drunkard that is besmeared with his vomit, if he should desire leave to lean on him because he cannot go alone. I am sure, how welcome soever the poor humble soul—that lies bleeding for his sins at the very mouth of hell in his own thoughts—is to God when he comes upon the encouragement of the promise to lean on Christ, yet the profane wretch that emboldens himself to come to Christ, shall be kicked away with infinite disdain and abhorrency by a holy God for abusing his promise.

(b) When a poor sinner hath found a promise, and observes the terms with a heart willing to embrace them, now *he is to put forth an act of faith upon the credit of the naked promise, without staying for any other encouragement elsewhere.* Faith is a right pilgrim-grace; it travels with us to heaven, and when it sees us safe got within our Father's doors—heaven I mean—it takes leave of us. Now, the promise is this pilgrim's staff with which it sets forth, though, like Jacob on his way to Padan-aram, it hath nothing else with it. 'Remember the word unto thy servant,' saith David, 'upon which thou hast caused me to hope,' Ps. 119:49. The word of promise was all he had to show, and he counts that enough to set his faith on work. But alas! some make comfort the ground of faith, and experience their warrant to believe. They will believe when God manifests himself to them, and sends in some sensible demonstration of his love to their souls; but, till this be done, the promise hath little authority to silence their unbelieving cavils, and quiet their misgiving hearts into a waiting on God for the performance of what there is spoken from God's own mouth. It is like old Jacob, who gave no credit to his children when they told him Joseph was yet alive and governor over all the land of Egypt. This news was too good and great to enter into his belief, who had given him {up} for dead {for} so long; it is said, 'his heart fainted, for he believed them not,' Gen. 45:26. But when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him

thither, then it is said, 'the spirit of Jacob revived,' ver. 27. Truly thus, though the promise tells the poor humbled sinner Christ is alive, governor of heaven itself, with all power there and on earth put into his hand, that he may give eternal life unto all that believe on him, and he be therefore exhorted to rest upon Christ in the promise, yet his heart faints and believes not. It is the wagons he would fain see—some sensible expressions of God's love that he listens after—if he did but know that he was an elect person, or were one that God did love, then he would believe. But God hath little reason to thank him in the meantime for suspending his faith till these come. This is, as I may so say, to believe for spiritual loves, and is rather sense than faith.

[WHY *faith* is compared to a SHIELD.]

THIRD INQUIRY. *Why is faith compared to a shield?*

It is so, because of a double resemblance that is between this grace and that piece of armour.

*First Resemblance.* This shield is *not for the defence of any particular part of the body*—as almost all the other pieces are—the helmet fitted for the head, the plate designed for the breast, and so others having their several parts which they are fastened to—but is intended *for the defence of the whole body*. It was used therefore to be made very large, for its broadness called of {from} a gate or door, because so long and large as in a manner to cover the whole body. To this that place alludes, 'For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield,' Ps. 5:12. And if the shield were not large enough at once to cover every part, yet, being a movable piece of armour, the skilful soldier might turn it this way or that way, to latch the blow or arrow from lighting on any part they were directed to. And this indeed doth excellently well set forth the universal use that faith is of to the Christian. It defends the whole man; every part of the Christian by it preserved. Sometimes the temptation is levelled at the head. Satan, he will be disputing against this truth and that, to make the Christian, if he can, call them into question, merely because his reason and understanding cannot comprehend them; and he prevails with some that do not

think themselves the unwise in the world, upon this very account, to blot the deity of Christ, with other mysterious truths of the gospel, quite out of their creed. Now faith interposeth between the Christian and this arrow. It comes into the relief of the Christian's weak understanding as seasonably as Zeruiah did to David, when the giant Ishbi-benob thought to have slain him. I will trust the word of God, saith the believer, rather than my own purblind reason. 'Abraham not being weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead,' Rom. 4:19. If sense should have had the hearing of that business, yea, if that holy man had put it to a reference between sense and reason also, what resolution his thoughts should come to concerning this strange message that was brought him, he would have been in danger of calling the truth of it in question, though God himself was the messenger; but faith brought him honourably off.

Again, Is it *conscience* that the tempter assaults? —and it is not seldom that he is shooting his fiery darts of horror and terror at his mark. Faith receives the shock, and saves the creature harmless: 'I had fainted, unless I had believed,' saith David, Ps. 27:13. He means when false witnesses rose up against him, and such as breathed out cruelty, as appears, ver. 12. Faith was his best fence against man's charge; and so it is against Satan's and conscience's also. Never was a man in a sadder condition than the poor jailer, Acts 16. Much ado he had to keep his own hands from offering violence to himself. Who that had seen him fall trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas, with that sad question in his mouth, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' ver. 30, could have thought this deep wound that was now given his conscience, would so soon have been closed and cured as we find it, ver. 34. The earthquake of horror that did so dreadfully shake his conscience is gone, and his trembling turned into rejoicing. Now mark what made this blessed calm. 'Believe,' saith Paul, 'on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,' ver. 31; and ver. 34, it is said, he 'rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.' It is faith stills the storm which sin had raised—faith that changed his doleful note into joy and gladness. Happy man he was, that had such skilful chirurgeons so near him, who could direct him the nearest way to a cure.





Again, Is it the *will* that the temptation is

laid to catch? Some commands of God cannot be obeyed without much self-denial, because they cross us in that which our own wills are carried forth very strongly to desire; so that we must deny our will before we can do the will of God. Now a temptation comes very forcible, when it runs with the tide of our own wills. 'What,' saith Satan, 'wilt thou serve a God that thus thwarts thee in everything?' If thou lovest anything more than another, presently he must have that from thee. No lamb in all the flock will serve for a sacrifice, but Isaac, Abraham's only child, he must be offered up. No place will content God, that Abraham should serve him in, but where he must live in banishment from his dear relations and acquaintance. 'Wilt thou,' saith Satan, 'yield to such hard terms as these?' Now faith is the grace that doth the soul admirable service at such a pinch as this. It is able to appease the tumult which such a temptation may raise in the soul, and dismiss the rout of all mutinous thoughts, yea, to keep the King of heaven's peace so sweetly in the Christian's bosom, that such a temptation, if it comes, shall find few or none to declare for it, 'By faith,' it saith, 'Abraham obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither,' Heb. 11:8. And we do not read of one fond look that his heart cast back upon his dear native country, as he went from it, so well pleased had faith made him with his journey. It was hard work for Moses to strip himself of the magistrate's robes, and put his hands on his servants head; hard to leave another to enter upon his labours, and reap the honour of lodging the Israelites' colours in Canaan, after it had cost him so many a weary step to bring them within sight of it. Yet, faith made him willing; he saw better robes, that he should put on in heaven, than those he was called on to put off on earth. The lowest place in glory is, beyond all compare, greater preferment than the highest place of honour here below; to stand before the throne there, and minister to God in immediate service, than to sit in a throne on earth and have all the world waiting at his foot.

*Second Resemblance.* The shield doth not only defend the whole body, but is a *defence of the soldier's armour also*. It keeps the arrow from the helmet as well as head, from the breast and breast-plate also. Thus faith it is armour upon armour, a grace that preserves all the other

graces. But of this more hereafter.

[The import of the expression 'ABOVE ALL.']

FOURTH INQUIRY. What doth this   ▶   ▶ ■, 'above all,' import?

There is variety among interpreters about it. Jerome reads it, *in omnibus, sumentes scutum fidei*—in all things taking the shield of faith, *i.e.* in all duties, enterprises, temptations, or afflictions—in whatever you are called to do or suffer, take faith. Indeed, faith to the Christian is like fire to the chemist; nothing can be done without it christianly. 'But without faith it is impossible to please God,' Heb. 11:6. And how can the Christian please himself in that wherein he doth not please his God? Others read it, 'Over all take the shield of faith,' *i.e.* take it over all your graces, as that which will cover them. All other graces have their safety from faith; they lie secure under the shadow of faith, as an army lies safe under the protection and command of a strong castle planted round with cannon. But we shall follow our translation, as being most comprehensive, and that which will take these within its compass. 'Above all, take,' &c., that is, among all the pieces of armour which you are to provide and wear for your defence, let this have the pre-eminence of your care to get; and having got, to keep it. Now, that the apostle meant to give a preeminency to faith above the other graces appears,

*First.* By the piece of armour he compares it to—the shield. This, of old, was prized above all other pieces by soldiers. They counted it greater shame to lose their shield, than to lose the field, and therefore when under the very foot of their enemy, they would not part with it, but esteemed it an honour to die with their shield in their hand. It was the charge that one laid upon her son, going into the wars, when she gave him a shield, 'that he should either bring his shield home with him, or be brought home upon his

shield.' She had rather see him dead with it, than come home alive without it.

*Second.* By the noble effect which is here ascribed to faith—'by which ye shall quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.' The other pieces are nakedly commended, 'take the girdle of truth, breast-plate of righteousness,' and so the rest; but there is nothing singly ascribed to any of them, what they can do, yet, when he speaks of faith, he ascribes the whole victory to it. This quencheth 'all the fiery darts of the wicked.' And why thus? Are the other graces of no use, and doth faith do all? What need then the Christian load himself with more than this one piece? I answer, every piece hath its necessary use in the Christian's warfare: not any one part of the whole suit can be spared in the day of battle. But the reason, I humbly conceive, why no particular effect is annexed severally to each of these, but all ascribed to faith, is, to let us know that all these graces—their efficacy and our benefit from them—is in conjunction with faith, and the influence they receive from faith; so that this is plainly the design of the Spirit of God to give faith the precedency in our care above the rest. Only, take heed that you do not fancy any indifferency or negligence to be allowed you in your endeavours after the other graces, because you are more strongly provoked and excited up to the getting and keeping this. The apostle would intend your care here, but not remit it there. Cannot we bid a soldier above all parts of his body to beware of a wound at his heart, but he must needs think presently he need take no care to guard his head? Truly, such a one would deserve a cracked crown to cure him of his folly. The word thus opened, we shall content ourselves with one general observation from them; and it is this.



## DIRECTION VIII.—FIRST GENERAL PART.

[THE PRE-EMINENCE OF FAITH ABOVE OTHER GRACES.]

THE EXHORTATION—‘*Above all, taking the shield of faith*’ (Eph. 6:16).

Of all graces faith is the chief, and is chiefly to be laboured for. There is a precedency or pre-eminence peculiar to this above all other. It is among graces, as the sun is among the planets, or as Solomon’s ‘virtuous woman among the daughters,’ Prov. 31:29. Though every grace had done virtuously, yet thou, O faith, excellest them all. The apostle indeed give the precedency to love, and sets faith on the lower hand. ‘And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity,’ I Cor. 13:13. Yet, you may observe, that this prelation of it before faith hath a particular respect to the saints’s blissful state in heaven, where love remains, and faith ceaseth. In that regard love indeed is the greater, because it is the end of our faith. We apprehend by faith that we may enjoy by love. But, if we consider the Christian’s present state, while militant on earth, in this respect love must give place to faith. It is true, love is the grace that shall triumph in heaven. But it is faith, not love, which is the conquering grace on earth. ‘This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,’ I John 5:4. Love indeed hath its place in the battle, and doth excellent service, but is under faith its leader. ‘Faith which worketh by love,’ Gal. 5:6. Even as the captain fighteth by his soldiers whom he leads on, so faith works by love which it excites. Love, it is true, is the grace that at last possesseth the inheritance, but it is faith that gives the Christian right unto it. Without this he should never have enjoyed it, John 1:12. In a word, it is love that unites God and glorified saints together in heaven; but it was faith that first united them to Christ while they were on earth—‘That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,’ Eph. 3:17. And if Christ had dwelt in them by faith on earth, they should never have dwelt with God in heaven.

### BRANCH FIRST.

[FOUR PARTICULARS *in which faith stands pre-eminent above other graces.*]

I proceed to show wherein it appears that faith hath such a pre-eminence above other graces as we previously have indicated. This takes in the following particulars.

FIRST PARTICULAR. In the *great inquiry that God makes after faith above all other graces*. Nothing more speaks our esteem of persons or things than our inquiry after them. We ask first and most for those that stand highest in our thoughts. ‘Is your father well?’ said Joseph, ‘the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?’ Gen. 43:27. No doubt there were others of whose welfare Joseph would have been glad to hear also, but being most pent and pained with a natural affection to his father, he easeth himself of this first. And when David asks for Absalom above all others, ‘Is the young man Absalom safe?’ and over again with it to Cush, II Sam. 18, it was easy to guess how highly he valued his life. Now you shall find the great inquiry that God

makes is for faith: ‘When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?’ Luke 18:8—implying that this is the grace which he will especially look for and desires to find. We read, John 9, of a great miracle, a man by Christ restored to his sight that was born blind. This so enraged the malicious Pharisees that they excommunicate the poor man for no other fault but giving his merciful physician a good word. This brings Christ the sooner to him—so tender is he of those that suffer for him, that they shall not long want his sweet company—and he hath no cause to complain for being cast out of man’s society that gains Christ’s presence by the same. Now, observe what Christ saith to him at his first meeting, ver. 35, ‘Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?’ The man had already expressed some zeal for Christ, in vindicating him, and speaking well of him to the head of the bitterest enemies he had on earth, for which he was now made a sufferer at their hands. This was very commendable. But there is one thing Christ

prizeth above all this, and that is faith. This he inquires after, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' As if he had said, 'All this thy zeal in speaking for me, and patience in suffering, are nothing worth in my account except thou hast faith also.' Indeed most of God's dealings with his people, what are they but inquiries after faith? either the truth or strength of it. When he afflicts them, it is 'for the trial of their faith,' 1 Peter 1:7. Afflictions they are God's spade and mattock, by which he digs into his people's hearts to find out this gold of faith. Not but that he inquires for other graces also; but this is named for all as the chief; which found, all the other will soon appear. When God seems to delay, and makes, as it were, a halt in his providence, before he comes with the mercy he promiseth, and we pray for, it is exploratory to faith. 'O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' Matt. 15:28. She had received her answer without so much ado; only Christ had a mercy in store more than she thought of. With the granting of her suit in the cure of her daughter, he had a mind to give her the evidence of her faith also, and the high esteem God hath of his grace, as that which may have of him what it will.

SECOND PARTICULAR. The *commendations that are given to faith above other graces*. You shall observe, that in the same action wherein other graces are eminently exercised as well as faith, even then faith is taken notice of, and the crown set upon faith's head rather than any of the other. We hear nothing almost of any other grace throughout the whole 11<sup>th</sup> of Hebrews but faith. 'By faith Abraham,' 'by faith Jacob,' and the rest of those worthies, did all those famous exploits. There was a concurrence of the other graces with faith in them all. But all goes under the name of faith. The whole army fight, yet the general or the captain hath the honour of the victory ascribed to him. Alexander and Cæsar's names are transmitted to posterity as the great conquerors that overcame so many battles, not the private soldiers that fought under them. Faith is the captain grace. All those famous acts of those saints are recorded as the achievements of faith. Thus concerning the centurion, 'Verily,' saith Christ, 'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,' Matt. 8:10. There were other graces very eminent in the centurion besides his faith;—his conscientious care of his

poor servant, for whom he could have done no more if he had been his own child. There are some that call themselves Christians, yet would not have troubled themselves so much for a sick servant. Such, alas! are oft less regarded in sickness than their master's beast. But, especially his humility; this shined forth very eminently in that self-abasing expression: 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof,' Matt. 8:8. Consider but his calling and degree therein, and it makes his humility more conspicuous. A swordsman, yea, a commander! such use to speak big and high. Power is seldom such a friend to humility. Surely he was a man of a rare humble spirit, that he, whose mouth was used so much to words of command over his soldiers, could so demit<sup>clxxxvii</sup> and humble himself in his address to Christ; yet his faith outshines his humility in its greatest strength. Not, I have not found such humility, but 'such faith' in all Israel. As if Christ had said, 'There is not one believer in all Israel but I know him, and how rich he is in faith also; but I have not found so much of this heavenly treasure in any one hand as in this centurion's.' Indeed the Christian's chief riches is in faith's hand. 'Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith?' James 2:5. Why rich in faith, rather than rich in patience, rich in love, or any other grace? O great reason for it, when the creature comes to lay claim to pardon of sin, the favour of God, and heaven itself. It is not love, patience, &c., but faith alone that lays down the price of all these. Not 'Lord, pardon, save me, here is my love and patience for it;' but 'here is Christ, and the price of his blood, which faith presents thee for the full purchase of them all.' This leads to a third particular, and indeed the chief of all.

THIRD PARTICULAR. The *high office that faith is set in above other graces, in the business of our justification before God*—'being justified by faith, we have peace with God,' Rom. 5:1. Not justified by love, repentance, patience, or any other grace beside faith. O how harsh doth it sound in a Christian ear, justifying patience, justifying repentance! And if they were concerned with the act of justification, as faith is, the name would as well become them as it doth faith itself. But we find this appropriated to faith, and the rest hedged out from having to do in the act of justification, though included and supposed in the person who is justified. It is faith that

justifies without works. This is Paul's task to prove, Rom. 3. But this faith which justifies is not dead or idle, but a lively working faith, which seems to be James' design in the second chapter of his epistle. As God did single Christ out from all others to be the only mediator betwixt him and man, and his righteousness to be the meritorious cause of our justification; so he hath singled faith out from all the other graces, to be the instrument or means for appropriating this righteousness of Christ to ourselves. Therefore, as this righteousness is called 'the righteousness of God,' and opposed to our 'own righteousness,' though wrought by God in us, Rom. 10:3, because it is wrought by Christ for us, but not inherent in us, as the other is; so also it is called 'the righteousness of faith,' Rom. 4:11, 13—not the righteousness of repentance, love, or any other grace. Now, wherefore is it called 'the righteousness of faith,' and not of love, repentance, &c.? Surely, not that faith itself is our righteousness. Then we should be justified by works, while we are justified by faith, contrary to the apostle, who opposeth faith and works, Rom. 4.

In a word, then, we should be justified by a righteousness of our own, for faith is a grace inherent in us, and as much our own work as any grace besides is. But this is contrary to the same apostle's doctrine, Php. 3:9, where our own righteousness, and the righteousness which is by faith, are declared to be inconsistent. It can therefore be called 'the righteousness of faith' for this reason and no other—because faith is the only grace whose office it is to lay hold on Christ, and so to appropriate his righteousness for the justification of our souls. Christ and faith are relatives which must not be severed. Christ, he is the treasure, and faith the hand which receives it. Christ's righteousness is the robe, faith the hand that puts it on; so that it is Christ who is the treasure. By his blood he dischargeth our debt, and not by faith; whose office is only to receive Christ, whereby he becomes ours. It is Christ's righteousness that is the robe which covers our nakedness, and makes us beautiful in God's eye; only, faith hath the honour to put the robe on the soul, and it is no small honour that is therein put upon it above other graces. As God graced Moses exceedingly above the rest of his brethren the Israelites, when he was called up the mount to receive the law from








God's mouth, while they had their bounds set them—to stand waiting at the bottom of the hill till he brought it down to them; so doth God highly honour faith, to call this up as the grace by whose hand he will convey this glorious privilege of justification over to us.

*Question.* But why is faith rather than any other grace else employed in this act?

*Answer First.* Because there is no grace hath so proper a fitness for this office as faith. Why hath God appointed the eye to see and not the ear? why the hand to take our food rather than the foot? It is easily answered, because these members have a particular fitness for these functions and not the other. Thus faith hath a fitness for this work peculiar to itself. We are justified not by giving anything to God of what we do, but by receiving from God what Christ hath done for us. Now faith is the only receiving grace, and therefore only fit for this office.

*Answer Second.* There is no grace that God could trust his honour so safely with in this business of justification as with faith. The great design God hath in justifying a poor sinner is to magnify his free mercy in the eye of his creature. This is written in such fair characters in the word, that he who runs {to it} may read it. God was resolved that his free mercy should go away with all the honour, and the creature should be quite cut out from any pretensions to partnership with him therein. Now there is no way like to this of being justified by faith, for the securing and safe-guarding of the glory of God's free grace, Rom. 3:25, 26. When the apostle hath in some verses together discoursed of the free justification of a sinner before God, he goes on to show how this cuts the very comb, yea throat, of all self-exalting thoughts, ver. 27: 'Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.' Princes, of all wrongs, most disdain and abhor to see their royal bed defiled. So jealous they have been of this, that, for the prevention of all suspicion of such a foul fact, it hath been of old the custom of the greatest monarchs, that those who were their favourites, and admitted into nearest attendance upon their own persons and queens, should be eunuchs—such whose very disability of nature might remove all suspicion of any such attempt by them. Truly, God is more jealous of having the glory of his name ravished by the

pride and self-glorying of the creature, than ever any prince was of having his queen deflowered. And therefore to secure it from any such horrid abuse, he hath chosen faith—this eunuch grace, as I may so call it—to stand so nigh him, and be employed by him in this high act of grace, whose very nature, being a self-emptying grace, renders it incapable of entering into any such design against the glory of God's grace. Faith hath two hands; with one it pulls off its own righteousness and throws it away, as David did Saul's armour; with the other it puts on Christ's righteousness over the soul's shame, as that in which it dares alone see God or be seen of him. 'This makes it impossible,' saith learned and holy Master Ball, 'how to conceive that faith and works should be conjoined as concauses in justification; seeing the one—that is faith—attributes all to the free grace of God; the other—that is works—challenge to themselves. The one, that is faith, will aspire no higher but to be the instrumental cause of free remission; the other can sit no lower, but to be the matter of justification, if any cause at all. For, if works be accounted to us in the room or place of exact obedience in free justification, do they not supply the place? are they not advanced to the dignity of works complete and perfect in justification from justice?' *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, p. 70.

FOURTH PARTICULAR. *The mighty influence, yea universal, that faith hath upon all her sister-graces, speaks her the chief of them all.* What makes the sun so glorious a creature but because it is a common good, and serves all the lower world with light and influence? Faith is a grace whose ministry God useth as much for the good of the spiritual world in the saints—called in Scripture the       , 'the new creation,' Gal. 6:15—as he doth the sun for the corporeal. Nothing is hid from the heat of the sun, Ps. 19:6, and there is no grace that faith's influence reacheth not unto.

*[The influence of faith reacheth unto all other graces.]*

*First. Faith finds all the graces with work.* As the rich tradesman gives out his wool, some to this man, and some to that, who all spin and work of the stock he gives them out, so that, when he ceaseth to trade, they must also, because they have no stock but what he affords

them,—thus faith gives out to every grace what they act upon. If faith trades not, neither can they.

To instance in one or two graces for all the rest. *Repentance*, this is a sweet grace, but set on work by faith. Nineveh's repentance is attributed unto their faith: 'The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth,' Jonah 3:5. It is very like indeed that their repentance was no more than legal, but it was as good as their faith was. If their faith had been better, so would their repentance also. All is whist and quiet in an unbelieving soul; no news of repentance, nor noise of any complaint made against sin till faith begins to stir. When faith presents the threatening, and binds the truth and terror of it to the conscience, then the sinner hath something to work upon. As light accentuates colours and brings the eye acquainted with its object, whereupon it falls to work, so doth faith actuate sin in the conscience; now musing thoughts will soon arise, and, like clouds, thicken apace into a storm, till they bespread the soul with a universal blackness of horror and trembling for sin; but then also the creature is at a loss, and can go no further in the business of repentance, while faith sends in more work from the promise by presenting a pardon therein to the returning soul; which no sooner is heard and believed by the creature, but the work of repentance goes on apace. Now the cloud of horror and terror, which the fear of wrath, from consideration of the threatening, had gathered in the conscience, dissolves into a soft rain of evangelical sorrow, at the report which faith makes from the promise.

*Love* is another heavenly grace; but faith gathers the fuel that makes this fire. Speak, Christian, whose soul now flames with love to God, was it always thus? No! sure there was a time, I dare say for thee, when thy heart was cold—not a spark of this fire to be found on the altar of thy heart. How is this then, Christian, that now thy soul loves God, whom before thou didst scorn and hate? Surely thou hast heard some good news from heaven, that hath changed thy thoughts of God, and turned the stream of thy love, which ran another way, into this happy channel. And who can be the messenger besides faith that brings any good news from heaven to the soul? It is faith that proclaims the promise; opens Christ's

excellencies; pours out his name, for which the virgins love him. When faith hath drawn a character of Christ out of the word, and presented him in his love and loveliness to the soul, now the creature is sweetly inveigled in his affections to him; now the Christian hath a copious theme to enlarge upon in his thoughts, whereby to endear Christ more and more unto him —‘Unto him that believes, he is precious;’ and the more faith, the ‘more precious,’ 1 Peter 1:7. If we should sit in the same room by the dearest friend we had in all the world, and our eyes were held from seeing him, we would take no more notice of him, and give no more respect to him, than to a mere stranger. But if one should come and whisper {to} us in the ear, and tell us this is such a dear friend of yours, that once laid down his life to save yours, that hath made you heir to all the goodly estate that he hath, will you not show your respect to him? O how our hearts would work in our breasts, and make haste to come forth in some passionate expression of our dear affection to him! Yea, how heartily ashamed would we be for our uncivil and unbecoming behaviour towards him, though occasioned by our ignorance of him. Truly thus it is here. So long as faith’s eye hath a mist before it, or is unactive and as it were asleep in the dull habit, the Christian may sit very nigh Christ in an ordinance, in a providence, and be very little affected with him, and drawn out in loves to him. But when faith is awake to see him as he passeth by in his love and loveliness, and active to make report to the soul of the sweet excellencies it sees in Christ, as also of his dear bleeding love to his soul, the Christian’s love now cannot choose but spring and leap in his bosom at the voice of faith, as the babe did in Elizabeth’s womb at the salutation of her cousin Mary.

*Second.* As faith sets the other graces on work by actuating their objects, about which they are conversant, so it *helps them all to work, by fetching strength from Christ to act and reinforce them.* Faith is not only the instrument to receive the righteousness of Christ for our justification, but it is also the great instrument to receive grace from Christ for our sanctification. ‘Of his fulness...we receive grace for grace,’ John 1:16. But how do we receive it? Even by faith. Faith unites the soul to Christ; and as by a pipe laid close to the mouth of a fountain water is carried

to our houses for the supply of the whole family, so by faith is derived to the soul supply in abundance for the particular offices of all the several graces. He that believes, ‘out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,’ John 7:38. That is, he that hath faith, and is careful to live in the exercise of it, shall have a flow and an increase of all other graces, called here ‘living waters.’ Hence it is that the saints, when they would advance to a high pitch in other graces, pray for the increase of their faith. Our Saviour, Luke 17:3, 4, sets his apostles a very hard lesson when he would wind up their love to such a high pitch as to forgive their offending brother ‘seven times’ in a day. Now mark, ver. 5—‘The apostles,’ apprehending the difficulty of the duty, ‘said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.’ But why did they rather not say, ‘Increase our love,’ seeing that was the grace they were to exercise in forgiving their brother? Surely it was not because love hath its increase from faith. If they could get more faith on Christ, they might be sure they should have more love to their brother also. The more strongly they could believe on Christ for the pardon of their own sins, not ‘seven,’ but ‘seventy times’ in a day committed against God, the more easy it would be to forgive their brother offending themselves seven times a day. This interpretation, our Saviour’s reply to their prayer for faith favours, ver. 6 —‘And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.’ Where Christ shows the efficacy of justifying faith by the power of a faith of miracles. As if he had said, ‘You have hit on the right way to get a forgiving spirit; it is faith indeed that would enable you to conquer the unmercifulness of your hearts. Though it were as deeply rooted in you as this sycamore-tree is in the ground, yet by faith you should be able to pluck it up.’ When we would have the whole tree fruitful, we think we do enough to water the root, knowing what the root sucks from the earth it will soon disperse into the branches. Thus that sap and fatness, faith, which is the radical grace, draws from Christ, will be quickly diffused through the branches of the other graces, and tasted in the pleasantness of their fruit.

*Third.* Faith *defends the Christian in the exercise of all his graces.* ‘By faith we stand,’ Rom.

11:20. As a soldier under the protection of his shield stands his ground and does his duty, notwithstanding all the shot that are made against him to drive him back. When faith fails, then every grace is put to the run and rout. Abraham's simplicity and sincerity, how was it put to disorder when he dissembled with Abimelech concerning his wife? and why, but because his faith failed him. Job's patience received a wound when his hand grew weary, and his shield of faith, which should have covered him, hung down. Indeed, no grace is safe if from under the wing of faith. Therefore, to secure Peter from falling from all grace, Christ tells him, 'I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not,' Luke 22:32. This was the reserve that Christ took care should be kept to recover his other graces when foiled by the enemy, and to bring him off that encounter wherein he was so badly bruised and broken. It is said that Christ could not do many mighty things in his own country 'because of their unbelief,' Matt. 13:58. Neither can Satan do any great hurt to the Christian so long as faith is upon the place. It is true he aims to fight faith above all, as that which keeps him from coming at the rest, but he is not able long to stand before it. Let a saint be never so humble, patient, devout, alas! Satan will easily pick some hole or other in these graces, and break in upon him when he stands in the best array, if faith be not in the field to cover these. This is the grace that makes him face about and take him to his heels, 1 Peter 5:9.

*Fourth. Faith alone procures acceptance with God for all the other graces and their works.* 'By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice,' Heb. 11:4. When a Christian hath wrought hardest in a day, and hath spun the finest, evenest, thread of obedience at the wheel of duty, he is afraid to carry home his work at night with an expectation of any acceptance at God's hands for his work's sake. No, it is faith he makes use of to present it through Christ to God for acceptance. We are said, 1 Peter 2:5, 'To offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;' That is, by faith in Christ, for without faith Christ makes none of our sacrifices acceptable. God takes nothing kindly but what the hand of faith presents. And so prevalent is faith with God, that he will take light gold—broken services—at her hand; which, were they to come alone, would be rejected with in-

dignation. As a favourite that hath the ear of his prince, finds it easy to get his poor kindred entertained at court also (so Joseph brought his brethren into Pharaoh's presence with great demonstrations of favour shown them by him for his sake; and Esther wound Mordecai into a high preferment in Ahasuerus' court, who upon his own credit could get no farther than to sit at the gate), thus faith brings those works and duties into God's presence, which else were sure to be shut out, and, pleading the righteousness of Christ, procures them to be received into such high favour with God, that they become his delight, Prov. 15:8, and as a pleasant perfume in his nostrils, Mal. 3:4.

*Fifth. Faith brings in succours when other graces fail.* Two ways the Christian's graces may fail—in their activity, or in their evidence.

1. *In their activity*, it is low water sometimes with the Christian. He cannot act so freely and vigorously then as at another time when the tide runs high, through divine assistances that flow in amain upon him. Those temptations which he could at one time snap asunder as easily as Samson did his cords of flax, at another time he is sadly hampered with that he cannot shake them off. Those duties which he performs with delight and joy, when his grace is in a healthful plight; at another time he pants and blows at, as much as a sick man doth to go up a hill—so heavily doth he find them come off. Were not the Christian, think you, ill now on it, if he had no comings in but from his own shop of duty? Here now is the excellency of faith; it succours the Christian in this his bankrupt condition. As Joseph got over his brethren to him, and nourished them out of his granaries all the time of famine, so doth faith the Christian in his penury of grace and duty. And this it doth in two ways.

(1.) *By laying claim to the fulness of that grace which is in Christ as its own.* Why art thou dejected, O my soul, saith the Christian's faith, for thy weak grace? There is enough in Christ, all fulness dwells in him, it pleased the Father it should be so, and that to pleasure thee in thy wants and weaknesses. It is a ministerial fulness; as the clouds carry rain not for themselves but the earth, so doth Christ his fulness of grace for thee. 'He is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,' 1 Cor. 1:30. When

the rags of the Christian's own righteousness discourage and shame him, faith hath a robe to put on that covers all this uncomeliness. 'Christ is my righteousness,' saith faith, and 'in Him' we are 'complete,' Col. 2:10. Faith hath two hands, a working hand a receiving hand; and the receiving hand relieves the working hand, or else there would be a poor house kept in the Christian's bosom. We find Paul himself but in a starving condition, for all the comfort his own graces could with their earnings afford him. He is a wretched man in his own account, if these be all he hath to live upon, Rom. 7:24; yet even then, when he sees nothing in his own cupboard, his faith puts forth his receiving hand to Christ, and he is presently set at a rich feast, for which you find him giving thanks, ver. 25, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

(2.) Faith succours the Christian in the weakness and inactivity of his graces, *by applying the promises for the saints' perseverance in grace.* It brings great comfort to a sick man, though very weak at present, to hear his physician tell him, that though he is low and feeble, yet there is no fear he will die. The present weakness of grace is sad, but the fear of falling quite away is far sadder. Now faith, and only faith, can be the messenger to bring the good news to the soul, that it shall persevere. Sense and reason are quite posed and dunced here. It seems impossible to them, that such a bruised reed should bear up against all the counterblasts of hell, because they consider only what grace itself can do, and finding it so over-matched by the power and policy of Satan, think it but rational to give the victory to the stronger side. But faith, when it seeth symptoms of death in the saint's grace, finds life in the promise, and comforts the soul with this—that the faithful God will not suffer his grace to see corruption. He hath undertaken the physicking of his saints: 'Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit' John 15:2. When Hazael came to inquire of Elisha for his sick master, whether he should live or die; the prophet sent him with this answer back unto the king his master: 'Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die,' II Kings 8:10—that is, he might certainly recover for all his disease, but he should die by the traitorous bloody hand of Hazael his servant. Give me leave only to

allude to this. When the Christian consults with his faith, and inquires of it, whether his weak grace will fail or hold out, die or live, faith's answer is, 'Thy weak grace may certainly die and fall away, but the Lord hath showed me it shall live and persevere'—that is, in regard of its own weakness and the mutability of man's nature, the Christian's grace might certainly die and come to nothing; but God hath shown faith in the promise that it shall certainly live and recover out of its lowest weakness. What David said in regard of his house, that every Christian may say in regard of his grace. 'Though his grace be not so with God (so strong, so unchangeable in itself), yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire,' II Sam. 23:5. This salt of the covenant is it shall keep, saith faith, thy weak grace from corruption. 'Why art thou cast down,' saith the psalmist, 'O my soul? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God,' Ps. 42:11. The health of David's countenance was not in his countenance, but in his God, and this makes his faith silence his fears, and so peremptorily resolve upon it, that there is a time coming—how near soever he now lies to the grave's mouth—when he shall yet praise him. 'The health and life of thy grace lie both of them, not in thy grace,' saith faith, 'but in God, who is thy God, therefore I shall yet live and praise him.' I do not wonder that the weak Christian is melancholy and sad when he sees his sickly face in any other glass but this.

2. *In the evidence of them* the Christian's grace may fail. It may disappear, as stars do in a cloudy night. How oft do we hear the Christian say in an hour of desertion and temptation, 'I know not whet her I love God or no in sincerity; I dare not say I have any true godly sorrow for sin; indeed I have thought formerly these graces had a being in me, but now I am at a loss what to think, yea, sometimes I am ready to fear the worst.' Now in this dark benighted state, faith undergirds the soul's ship, and hath two anchors it casts forth, whereby the soul is stayed from being driven upon the devouring quicksands of despair and horror.

(1.) Faith *makes a discovery of the rich mercy in Christ to poor sinners, and calls the soul to look up to it, when it hath lost the sight of his own grace.*

It is no small comfort to a man, that hath lost his acquaintance for a debt paid, when he remembers that the man he deals with is a merciful good man, though his discharge be not presently to be found. That God whom thou hast to do with is very gracious; what thou hast lost he is ready to restore—the evidence of thy grace I mean. David begged this and obtained it, see Ps. 51. ‘Yea,’ saith faith, ‘if it were true what thou fearest, that thy grace was never true, there is mercy enough in God’s heart to pardon all thy former hypocrisy, if now thou comest in the sincerity of thy heart.’ And so, faith persuades the soul by an act of adventure to cast itself upon God in Christ. ‘Wilt thou not,’ saith faith, ‘expect to find as much mercy at God’s hands as thou canst look for at a man’s?’ It is not beyond the line of created mercy to forgive many unkindnesses, much falseness and unfaithfulness, upon a humble sincere acknowledgment of the same. The world is not so bad, but it abounds with parents that can do thus much for their children, and masters for their servants; and is that hard for God to do which is so easy in his creature? Thus faith vindicates God’s name. And so long as we have not lost the sight of God’s merciful heart, our head will be kept above water, though we want the evidence of our own grace.

(2.) Faith *makes a discovery of the rich mercy in Christ to poor sinners, and calls the soul to look up to it, when it hath lost the sight of his own grace.* And it is some comfort, though a man hath no bread in his cupboard, to hear there is some to be had in the market. ‘O,’ saith the complaining Christian, ‘there were some hope, if I could find but those relentings and meltings of soul which others have in their bosoms for sin; then I could run under the shadow of that promise and take comfort, ‘Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted,’ Matt. 5:4. But alas! my heart is as hard as the flint.’ ‘Well,’ saith faith, ‘for thy comfort know, there are not only promises to the mourning soul and broken heart, but there are promises that God will break the heart, and give a spirit of mourning.’ So for other graces; not only promises to those that fear God, but to ‘put the fear of God into our hearts;’ not only promises to those that walk in his statutes and keep his judgments, but also to ‘put his spirit within us, and cause us to walk in his statutes,’ Eze. 36:27. Why then, O my soul, dost thou sit

there bemoaning thyself fruitlessly for what thou sayest thou hast not, when thou knowest where thou mayest have it for going? As Jacob said to his sons, ‘Why do ye look one upon another? Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die,’ Gen. 42:1, 2. Thus faith rouseth the Christian out of his amazed thoughts upon which his troubled spirit dwells like one destitute of counsel, not knowing what to do; and turns his bootless complaints, wherein he must necessarily pine and starve, into fervent prayer for that grace he wants. ‘There is bread in the promise,’ saith faith. Sit not here languishing in a sluggish despondency, but get you down upon your knees, and humbly, but valiantly, besiege the throne of grace for grace in this time of need. And certainly, the Christian may sooner get a new evidence for his grace, by pleading the promise, and plying the throne of grace, than by yielding so far to his unbelieving thoughts as to sit down and melt away his strength and time in the bitterness of his spirit—which Satan dearly likes—without using the means, which he will never do to any purpose, till faith brings thus much encouragement from the promise, that what he wants is there to be had freely and fully.

*Sixth.* As faith succours the Christian when his other graces fail him most, so it *brings in his comfort when they most abound.* Faith is to the Christian as Nehemiah was to Artaxerxes, Neh. 2:1. Of all the graces this is the Christian’s cup-bearer. The Christian takes the wine of joy out of faith’s hand, rather than any other grace. ‘Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,’ Rom. 15:13. It is observable, I Peter 1, to see how the apostle therefore doth, as it were, cross his hands, as once Jacob did in blessing his son Joseph’s children, and gives the pre-eminence to faith, attributing the Christian’s joy to his faith, rather than to his love ver. 8: ‘Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.’ Mark, ‘believing, ye rejoice.’ Here is the door, the Christian’s chief joy, yea, all his fiduciary joy comes in at. It is Christ that we are in this respect allowed only to rejoice in, ‘For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,’ Php. 3:3,—where Christ is



made the sole subject of our rejoicing fiducially, in opposition to all else, even our graces themselves, which become flesh when thus rejoiced and glorified in. Christ's blood is the wine that only glads the heart of God by way of satisfaction to his justice, and therefore only that can bring true gladness into the heart of man. When Christ promiseth the Comforter, he tells his disciples from what vessel he should draw the wine of joy that he was to give them: 'He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you,' John 16:15. No grape of our own vine is pressed into this sweet cup. As if Christ had said, When he comes to comfort you with the pardon of your sins, 'he shall take of mine,' not anything of yours—my blood by which I purchased your peace with God, not your own tears of repentance by which you have mourned for your sins. All the blessed privileges which believers are instated into, they are the fruits of Christ's purchase, not of our earnings. Now, the Christian's joy flowing in from Christ, and not anything that he, poor creature, doth or hath; hence it comes to pass, that faith, above all the graces, brings in the Christian's joy and comfort, because this is the grace that improves Christ and what is Christ's for the soul's advantage. As of grace, so of comfort. Faith is the good spy, that makes discovery of the excellences in Christ, and then makes report of all to the soul it sees in him and knows of him. It is faith that broaches the promises, turns the cock and sets them a running into the soul. It doth not only show the soul how excellent Christ is, and what dainties are in the promises; but it applies Christ to the soul, and carves out the sweet viands that are dished forth in the promises. Yea, it puts them into the very mouth of the soul; it masticates and grinds the promise so, that the Christian is filled with its strength and sweetness. Till faith comes and brings the news of the soul's welcome, O how maidenly and uncomfortably do poor creatures sit at the table of the promise! Like Hannah, 'they weep and eat not.' No, alas! they dare not be so bold. But, when faith comes, then the soul falls to, and makes a satisfying meal indeed. No dish on the table but faith will taste of. Faith knows God sets them not on to go off untouched. It is though an humble yet a bold grace, because it knows it cannot be so bold with God in his own way as it is welcome.

## USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Unbelief hath the same pre-eminence among sins, as faith 'above all' graces.]*

*Use First. Is faith the chief of graces?* This may help us to conceive of the *horrible nature of unbelief*. This surely will deserve as high a place among sins as faith hath among the graces. Unbelief! It is the Beelzebub, the prince of sins. As faith is the radical grace, so is unbelief a radical sin, a sinning sin. As of all sinners, those are most infamous who are ringleaders and make others sin—which is the brand that God hath set upon Jeroboam's name, 'Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin,' 1 Kings 14:16—so among sins, they are most horrid that are most productive of other sins. Such a one is unbelief above any other. It is a ring-leading sin, a sin-making sin. The first poisonous breath which Eve sucked in from the tempter was sent in the words, 'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?' Gen. 3:1. As if he had said, 'Consider well on the matter. Do you believe God meant so? Can you think so ill of God as to believe he would keep the best fruit of the whole garden from you?' This was the traitor's gate, at which all other sins entered into her heart; and it continues of the same use to Satan to this day, for the hurrying souls into other sins—called therefore, 'an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God,' Heb. 3:12. The devil sets up this sin of unbelief as a blind betwixt the sinner and God, that the shot which come from the threatening, and are levelled at the sinner's breast, may not may not be dre aded and feared by him. And then the wretch can be as bold with his lust, as the pioneer is at his work, when once he hath got his basket of earth between him and the enemies' bullets. Nay, this unbelief doth not only choke the bullets of wrath which are sent out of the law's fiery mouth, but it damps the motions of grace which come from the gospel. All the offers of love which God makes to an unbelieving heart, they fall like seed into dead earth, or, like sparks into a river, they are out as soon as they fall into it.

'The word'—it is said—'did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it,'

Heb. 4:2. The strength of this whole body of sin lies in this lock of unbelief. There is no mastering of a sinner while unbelief is in power. This will carry all arguments away, whether they be from law or gospel, that are pressed upon him, as easily as Samson did the doors, posts, with bar and all, from the city of Gaza, Judges 16:2. It is a sin that doth keep the field—one of the last of all the others; that which the sinner is last convinced of, and the saint ordinarily last conqueror of. It is one of the chief strengths and fastnesses unto which the devil retreats when other sins are routed. O how oft do we hear a poor sinner confess and bewail other sins he hath lived in formerly, with brinish tears, but will not hearken yet to the offer of mercy in Christ. Bid him believe on Christ, and he shall be saved—which was the doctrine Paul and Silas preached to the trembling jailor, Acts 16:31—alas! he dares not, he will not; you can hardly persuade him it is his duty to do so. The devil hath now betaken himself to this city of gates and bars, where he stands upon his guard; and, the more strongly to fortify himself in it, he hath the most specious pretenses for it of any other sin. It is a sin that he makes the humbled soul commit out of fear of sinning, and so stabs the good name of God, for fear of dishonouring him by a saucy presumptuous faith. Indeed it is a sin by which Satan intends to put the greatest scorn upon God, and unfold all his cankered malice against him at once. It is by faith that the saints 'have obtained a good report.' Yea, it is by the saints' faith that God hath a good report in the world. And, by unbelief, the devil doth his worst to raise an evil report of God in the world; as if he were not what his own promise and his saints' faith witness him to be. In a word, it is a sin that hell gapes for of all the others.

There are two sins that claim a pre-eminence in hell—hypocrisy and unbelief; and therefore other sinners are threatened to 'have their portion with the hypocrites,' Matt. 24:51, and 'with unbelievers,' Luke 12:46; as if those infernal mansions were taken up principally for these, and all others were but inferior prisoners. But of the two unbelief is the greater, and that which may, with an emphasis, be called above this or any other, 'the damning sin.' 'He that believeth not is condemned already,' John 3:18. He hath his mittimus already to jail; yea, he is in it already in a sense—he hath the brand of a damned person

on him. The Jews are said, Rom. 11:32, to be shut up 'in unbelief.' A surer prison the devil cannot keep a sinner in. Faith shuts the soul up in the promise of life and happiness, as God shut Noah into the ark. It is said, 'the Lord shut him in,' Gen. 7:16. Thus faith shuts the soul up in Christ, and the ark of his covenant, from all fear of danger from heaven or hell; and [thus too,] on the contrary, unbelief shuts a soul up in guilt and wrath, that there is no more possibility for an unbeliever of escaping damnation, than for one to escape burning that is shut up in a fiery oven. No help can come to the sinner so long as this bolt of unbelief is on the door of his heart. As our salvation is attributed to faith, rather than to other graces—though none [be] wanting in a saved person—so sinners' damnation and ruin is attributed to their unbelief, though the other sins [are] found with it in the person damned. The Spirit of God passeth over the Jews' hypocrisy, murmuring, rebellion, and lays their destruction at the door of this one sin of unbelief. 'They could not enter in because of unbelief,' Heb. 3:19.

O sinners!—you who live under the gospel I mean—if you perish, know beforehand what is your undoing—it is your unbelief that does it. If a malefactor that is condemned to die be offered his life by the judge upon reading a psalm of mercy, and he reads not, we may say his not reading hangs him. The promise of the gospel is this psalm of mercy, which God offers in his son to law-condemned sinners. Believing is reading this psalm of mercy. If thou believest not and are damned, thou goest to hell rather for thy final unbelief than any of thy other sins, for which a discharge is offered thee upon thy receiving Christ and believing on him. Let this cause us all to rise up against this sin, as the Philistines did against Samson, whom they called the destroyer of their country,' Judges 16:24. This is the destroyer of your souls, and that is worse; yea, it destroys them with a bloodier hand than other sins do that are not aggravated with this. We find two general heads of indictments upon which the whole world of sinners shall be condemned at the great day, II Thes. 1:8. There Christ's coming to judgment is expressed; and those miserable undone creatures that shall fall under his condemning sentence, are comprised in these two [classes]—such as 'know not God,' and such as 'obey not the gospel of Jesus

Christ.' The heathens' negative unbelief of the gospel shall not be charged upon them, because they never had it preached to them. No; they shall be sent to hell for 'not knowing God,' and so shall escape with a lighter damnation by far, than Jews or Christian Gentiles to whom the gospel hath been preached —though to some of these with a stronger and longer continued beam of light than [has been the lot of] others. The dismal charge which shall be brought against these will be, that they have not obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus; that is, not believed on Christ—called therefore the 'obedience of faith,' Rom. 16.26. And certainly, we cannot but think that there shall be a torment proper to these gospel refusers, which those that never had the offer of grace shall not feel, in hell. And among those that obey not the gospel the greatest vengeance waits for them that have had the longest and most passionate treaty of mercy allowed them. These are they that put God to the greatest expense of mercy, and therefore they must necessarily expect the greatest proportion of wrath and vengeance to be measured to them; yea, their unbelief puts Christ, and the grace of God in him, to the greatest shame and scorn that is possible for creatures to do; and it is but righteous that God should therefore put their unbelief and themselves with it to the greatest shame before men and angels, of any other sinners.

*[Reasons why we should be serious  
in the TRIAL OF OUR FAITH.]*

*Use Second. Is faith the chief of graces? Let this make us the more curious and careful that we be not cheated in our faith.* There are some things of so inconsiderable worth, that they will not pay us for the pains and care we take about them; and there to be choice and scrupulous is folly; to be negligent and incurious is wisdom. But there are other things of such worth and weighty consequence, that none but he that means to call his wisdom in question can be willing to be mistaken and cozened in them. Who that is wise would pay as for a precious stone, and have a pebble, or at best a Bristol-stone, put upon him for his money? Who, when his life is at stake, and knows no way to save it but by getting some one rich drug which is very scarce, but to be had, would not be very careful to have

the right? O my dear friends, doth it not infinitely more concern you to be careful in your merchandise for this pearl of precious faith? Can you be willing to take the devil's false sophisticated ware off his hand? a mock faith which he would cheat you with, rather than obtain the 'faith unfeigned,' which God hath to give unto his children —called therefore the 'faith of God's elect?' Will the devil's drugs, that are sure to kill thee, serve thy turn, when thou art offered by God himself a rich drug that will cure thee? When thou goest to buy a garment, thou askest for the best piece of stuff of cloth in the shop. In the market thou wouldst have the best meat for thy belly; when with the lawyer the best counsel for thy estate; and of the physician the best directions for thy health. Art thou for the best in all but for thy soul? Wouldst thou not have a faith of the best kind also? If a man receives false money, who doth he wrong but himself? and if thou beest gulled with a false faith, the loss is thy own, and that no small one. Thyself will think so when thou comest to the bar, and God shall bid thee either pay the debt thou owest him, or go to rot and roar in hell's prison. Then how wilt thou be confounded! When thou producest thy faith and hopest to save thyself with this—that thou believest on the Lord Jesus—but shalt have thy confidence rejected, and God tell thee to thy teeth it is not faith but a lie in thy right hand that thou hast got, and therefore he will not accept the payment, though it be Christ himself that offerest to lay down; nay, that he will give thee up into the tormentor's hand, and that not only for believing, but also for counterfeiting the King of heaven's coin, and setting his name on thy false money; which thou dost by pretending to faith, when it is a false one thou hast in thy bosom. This were enough to awaken your care in the trial of your faith, but to give some further weight to the exhortation we shall cast in these three conditions.

1. *Reason.* Consider that *as thy faith is, so are all thy other graces.* As a man's marriage is so are all his children, legitimate, or illegitimate. Thus, as our marriage is to Christ, so all our graces are. Now, it is faith by which we are married to Christ. 'I have espoused you to one husband,' saith Paul to the Corinthians, II Cor. 11:2. How, but by their faith? It is faith whereby the soul gives its consent to take Christ for her

husband. Now, if our faith be false, then our marriage to Christ is feigned; and if that be feigned, then all our pretended graces are base-born. How goodly soever an outside they have—as a bastard may have a fair face—they are all illegitimate; our humility, patience, temperance—all bastards. And, you know, ‘a bastard was not to enter into the congregation,’ Deut. 23:2. No more shall any bastard grace enter into the congregation of the just in heaven. He that hath children of his own will not make another’s bastard his heir. God hath children of his own to inherit heaven’s glory, in whose hearts he hath by his own Spirit begotten those heavenly graces which do truly resemble his own holy nature; surely he will never settle it upon strangers, counterfeit believers, that are the devil’s brats and by-blows.

2. *Reason.* Consider *the excellency of true faith makes false faith so much the more odious.* Because a king’s son is an extraordinary personage, therefore it is so high a crime for an ignoble person to counterfeit himself to be such a one. It is by that we ‘become the sons of God,’ John 1:12. And what a high presumption is it then that, by a false faith, thou committest? Thou pretendedst to be a child of God, when no heaven-blood runs in thy veins, but hast more reason to look for thy kindred in hell and derive thy pedigree from Satan. This passeth for no less than blasphemy in the account of the Scripture. ‘I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan,’ Rev. 2:9. God loathes such with his heart. A false friend is worse than an open enemy in man’s judgment; and a hypocritical Judas more abhorred by God than a bloody Pilate. Either, therefore, get true faith, or pretend to none. The ape, because he hath the face of a man, but not the soul of a man, is therefore the most ridiculous of all creatures. And of all sinners, none will be put more to shame at the last day than such as have aped and imitated the believer in some exterior postures of profession, but never had the spirit of a believer so as to perform one vital act of faith. The psalmist tells us of some whose ‘image’ God will ‘despise,’ Ps. 73:20. It is spoken chiefly of the wicked man’s temporary prosperity—which, for its short continuance, is compared to the image or representation of a thing in the fancy of a sleeping man, that then is

busy and pleaseth us with many fine pleasing objects, but all are lost when our sleep leaves us—this God will despise at the great day; when he shall not give heaven and glory by the estates and honours that men had in the world, but tumble them down to hell if graceless, as well as the poorest beggar in the world. But, there is another sort of persons whose image God will at that day despise more than these, and that is the image of all temporary believers and unsound professors, who have a fantastical faith, which they set up like an image in their imaginations, and dance about it with as many self-pleasing thoughts as a man doth that is dreaming himself to be some great prince; but this great idol shall then be broken, and the worshippers of it hissed down to hell with the greatest shame of any other.

3. *Reason.* Consider that *none stand at greater disadvantage for the obtaining of a true faith than he who flatters himself with a false one.* ‘Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him,’ Prov. 26:12, that is, there is more hope of persuading him. Of all fools the conceited fool is the worst. Pride makes a man incapable of receiving counsel. Nebuchadnezzar’s mind is said to be ‘hardened in pride,’ Dan. 5:20. There is no reasoning with a proud man. He castles himself in his own opinion of himself, and there stands upon his defence against all arguments that are brought. Bid a conceited professor labour for faith, or he is undone; and the man will tell you that you mistake and knock at the wrong door. It is the ignorant person, or profane, you should go to on the errand. He thanks God he is not now to seek for a faith, and thus blesseth himself in his good condition, when God knows ‘he feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?’ Isa. 44:20. The ignorant profane person, like the psalmist’s ‘man of low degree,’ is plain ‘vanity.’ It is not hard to make themselves to acknowledge as much as that they have nothing, deserve nothing, can look for nothing as they are but hell and damnation. But, such as pretend to faith, and content themselves with a false one, they are like the ‘men of high degree’ ‘a lie,’ which is vanity as well as the other, but with a specious cover over it that hides it. Therefore the devil is forward enough to put poor silly souls on


believing, that he may forestall, if he can, the Spirit's market, and prevent the creature's obtaining of a true faith, by cheating of it with a counterfeit. It is like the wicked policy of Jeroboam, who, to keep the Israelites from going to Jerusalem, and hankering after the true worship of God there, set up something like a religious worship nearer hand, at home, in the 'golden calves;' and this pleased many well enough, that they missed not their walk to Jerusalem. O friends, take heed therefore of being cheated with a false faith. Every one, I know, would have the living child to be hers and not the dead one. We would all pass for such as have the true faith and not the false. But, be not your own judges; appeal to the Spirit of God, and let him, with the sword of his word, come and decide the controversy. Which faith is thine, the true or false?

## SECOND BRANCH.

*'THE SHIELD OF FAITH' itself, and how its truth may be judged of.*

By this time, possibly, you may be solicitous to know what your faith is, and how you may come to judge of the truth of it. Now for your help therein, take these TWO DIRECTIONS. One, taken from the manner of the Spirit's working faith; the other, from the properties of faith, when it is wrought.

*[The manner of the Spirit's working faith.]*

FIRST DIRECTION. We know what faith is, and how to judge of it, *from the manner of the Spirit's working it in the soul.* It is incomparably the greatest work that passeth upon the soul from the Spirit of Christ; it is called the —'The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe,' Eph. 1:19. Oh, observe with what a heap of expressions the Spirit of God loads our weak understandings, that labouring under the weight of them, and finding the difficulty of reaching the significancy of them, we might be the more widened to conceive of that power which can never be fully understood by us—being indeed infinite, and so too big to be inclosed within the

narrow walls of our understandings—power,' 'greatness of power,' 'exceeding greatness,' and lastly, 'exceeding greatness of his power,' that is, of God. What angel in heaven can tell us what all these amount to? God, with reverence be it spoken, sets his whole force to this work. It is compared to no less than 'the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power,' Eph. 1:20,21. To raise anyone from the dead is a mighty, an almighty work; but to raise Christ from the dead, carries more wonder with it than to raise any other. He had a heavier grave-stone to keep him down than any besides—the weight of a world's sin lay upon him—yet notwithstanding this he is raised with power by the Spirit, not only out of the grave, but into glory. Now the power God puts forth upon the soul in working faith, is according to this of raising Christ, for, indeed, the sinner's soul is as really dead in sin as Christ's body was in the grave for sin. Now, speak, poor creature, art thou any way acquainted with such a power of God to have been at work in thee? or dost thou think slightly of believing, and so show thyself a stranger to this mystery? Certainly, this one thing might resolve many—if they desired to know their own state—that they have no faith, because they make faith so trivial and light a matter, as if they were as easy to believe as to say they do; and it were of no more difficulty to receive Christ into their souls by faith, than to put a bit of bread into their mouths with their hand. Ask some, whether ever such a day or time of God's power came over their heads, to humble them for sin, drive them out of themselves, and draw them effectually unto Christ? And they may answer you as those did Peter, when he asked—'Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost,' Acts 19:2. So these might say, 'We know not whether there be any such power required to the working of faith or no.' But to descend into a more particular consideration of this powerful work of the Spirit upon the soul for the production of faith, it will be necessary to consider—O what posture the Spirit of Christ finds the soul in before he begins this great work! and then how he makes his addresses to the soul, and what acts he puts

forth upon the soul for the working faith.

*First. The posture of the soul when the Spirit begins his great work of grace in it.* The Spirit finds the creature in such a state as it neither can, nor will, contribute the least help to the work. As the 'prince of the world,' when he came to tempt Christ, 'found nothing in him' to befriend and further his tempting design; so, when the Spirit of Christ comes, he finds as little encouragement from the sinner. No party within the castle of the soul to side with him when he comes first to set down before it, and lay siege to it, but all the powers of the whole man in arms against him! Hence it is that so many scornful answers are sent out to the summons that are given sinners to yield. 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not,' John 1:11. Never was a garrison more resolved to stand out against both the treaties and batteries of an assailing enemy, than the carnal heart is all means that God useth to reduce it into his obedience. The noblest operations of the soul, they are 'earthly, sensual, devilish,' James 3:15, so that except heaven and earth can meet—sensual and spiritual please one palate, God and the devil agree—there is no hope that a sinner of himself should like the motion that Christ makes, or that with any argument he should be won over to like it, so long as the ground of dislike remains in his earthly, sensual, and devilish nature.

*Second. We proceed to show how the Spirit makes his addresses to the soul, and what acts he puts forth upon it for the working faith.* Now the Spirit's address is suited to the several facilities of the soul, the principal of which are these three, understanding, conscience, and will. These are like three forts, one within the other, which must all be reduced before the town be taken—the sinner, I mean, subdued to the obedience of faith—and to these the Spirit makes his particular addresses, putting forth an act of almighty power upon every one of them, and that in this order.

*[The Spirit's particular addresses to the soul, when working faith in it.]*

1. The Spirit makes his approach to *the understanding, and on it he puts forth an act of illumination.* The Spirit will not work in a dark shop; the first thing he doth in order to faith, is to

beat out a window in the soul, and let in some light from heaven into it. Hence, believers are said to be 'renewed in the spirit of their minds,' Eph. 4:23, which the same apostle calleth being 'renewed in knowledge,' Col. 3:10. By nature we know little of God, and nothing of Christ or the way of salvation by him. The eye of the creature therefore must be opened to see the way of life, before he can by faith get into it. God doth not use to waft souls to heaven, like passengers in a ship, who are shut under the hatches, and see nothing all the way they are sailing to their port. If [it had been] so, that prayer might have been spared which the psalmist, inspired of God, breathes forth in the behalf of the blind Gentiles 'That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations,' Ps. 67:2. As faith is not a naked assent without affianc<sup>clxxxviii</sup> and innitency<sup>clxxxix</sup> on Christ; so neither is it a blind assent without some knowledge. If, therefore, thou continuest still in thy brutish ignorance, and knowest not so much as who Christ is, and what he hath done for the salvation of poor sinners, and what thou must do to get interest in him, thou art far enough from believing. If the day be not broken in thy soul, much less is the Sun of righteousness arisen by faith in thy soul.

2. Again, when the Spirit of God hath sprung with a divine light into the understanding, *then he makes his address to the conscience, and the act which passeth upon that is an act of conviction;* 'he shall convince the world of sin,' &c, John 16:8. Now this conviction is nothing but a reflection of the light that is in the understanding upon the conscience whereby the creature feels the weight and force of those truths he knows, so as to be brought into a deep sense of them. Light in a direct beam heats not, nor doth knowledge swimming in the brain affect. Most under the gospel know that unbelief is a damning sin, and that there is 'no name' to be saved by but the name of Christ; yet how few of those know this convincingly, so as to apply it to their own consciences, and to be affected with their own deplored state, who are the unbelievers and Christless persons? As he is a convicted drunkard in law, who, in open court, or before a lawful authority, upon clear testimony and deposition of witnesses, is found and judged to be such; so he, scripturally, is a convinced sinner, who, upon the clear evidence of the word

brought against him by the Spirit, is found by his own conscience —God's officer in his bosom—to be so. Speak now, poor creature, did ever such an act of the Spirit of God pass upon thee as this is? which that thou mayest the better discern of, try thyself by these few characters of a convinced person.

(1.) A sinner truly convinced is not only convinced of this sin or that sin, but of *the evil of all sin*. It is an ill sign when a person seems in a passion to cry out of one sin, and to be senseless of another sin. A parboiled conscience is not right, soft in one part, and hard in another. The Spirit of God is uniform in its work.

(2.) The convinced sinner is not only convinced of acts of sin, but of *the state of sin also*. He is not only affected [by] what he hath done—this law broken, and that mercy abused by him—but with what his state and present condition is. Peter leads Simon Magus from that one horrid act he committed to the consideration of that which was worse—the dismal state that he discovered him to be in. 'I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity,' Acts 8:23. Many will confess they do not do as they should, who will not think by any means so ill of themselves that their state is naught—a state of sin and death; whereas the convinced soul freely puts himself under this sentence of death, owns his condition, and dissembles not his pedigree. 'I am a most vile wretch,' saith he, 'a limb of Satan, full of sin as the toad is of rank poison. My whole nature lies in wickedness, even as the dead rotten carcass doth its slime and putrefaction. I am a child of wrath, born to no other inheritance than hell-flames; and if God will now tread me down thither, I have not one righteous syllable to object against his proceedings, but there is that in my own conscience which will clear him from having done me any wrong in my doom.'

(3.) The convinced sinner doth not only condemn himself for what he hath done and is, but he *despairs of himself as to anything he can now do to save himself*. Many, though they go so far as to confess they are vile wretches, and have lived wickedly, and for this deserve to die; yet, when they have put the rope around their neck by a self-condemning act, they are so far from being convinced of their own impotency, that they hope to cut the rope with their repentance,

reformation, and I know not what bundle of good works, which they think shall redeem their credit with God and recover his favour, which their former sins have unhappily lost them. And this comes to pass, because the plough of conviction did not go deep enough to tear up those secret roots of self-confidence with which the heart of every sinner is woefully tainted. Whereas every soul, thoroughly convinced by the Spirit, is a self-despairing soul; he sees himself beyond his own help, like a poor condemned prisoner, laden with so many heavy irons, that he sees it is impossible for him to make an escape, with all his skill or strength, out of the hands of justice. O friends! look whether the work be gone thus far in your souls or no. Most that perish, it is not their disease that kills them, but their physician. They think to cure themselves, and this leaves them incurable. Speak, soul, did the Lord ever ferret thee out of this burrow where so many earth themselves? Art thou as much at a loss what to do, as sensible for what thou hast done? Dost thou see hell in thy sin and despair in thyself? Hath God got thee out of this Keilah, and convinced thee if thou wouldst stay in the self-confidence of thy repentance, reformation, and duties, they would all deliver thee up into the hands of God's justice and wrath, when they shall come against thee? Then, indeed, thou hast escaped one of the finest snares that the wit of hell can weave.

(4.) The convinced sinner is not only convinced of sin, so as to condemn himself, and despair of himself, but he is *convinced of a full provision laid up in Christ for self-condemned and self-despairing ones*. 'He shall convince the world of sin, and of righteousness,' John 16:9, 10. And this is as necessary an antecedent for faith as any of the former. Without this, the soul convinced of sin is more like to go to the gallows with Judas, or fall on the sword of the law—as the jailer attempted to do on his when he thought his condition desperate—than think of coming to Christ. Who will go to *his* door that hath not wherewithal to relieve him?

3. The third and last faculty to be dealt with is *the will*, and on this, for the production of faith, *the Spirit puts forth an act of renovation, whereby he doth sweetly, but powerfully, incline the will, which before was rebellious and refractory, to accept of Christ, and make a free deliberate choice of him for his Lord and Saviour*. I say a 'free' choice, not

only cudgelled into him with apprehensions of wrath, as one may run under an enemy's pent-house in a storm, whose door he would have passed by in fair weather, and never looked that way. Speak, soul, dost thou please thyself in choosing Christ? dost thou go to Christ, not only for safety, but delight? So the spouse: 'I sat under his shadow with great delight,' Song 2:3. I say a '*deliberate*' choice, wherein the soul well weighs the terms Christ is offered on, and when it hath considered all seriously, likes them, and closeth with him. Like [as it was with] Ruth, who when Naomi spake the worst she could to discourage her, yet liked her mother's company too well to lose it for those troubles that attended her. Speak, soul, hath the Spirit of God thus put his golden key into the lock of thy will, to open the everlasting door of thy heart to let Christ the King of glory in? Hath he not only opened the eye of thy understanding, as he awaked Peter asleep in prison, and caused the chains of senselessness and stupidity to fall off thy conscience, but also opened the iron gate of thy will, to let thee out of the prison of impenitency, where even now thou wert fast bolted in; yea, brought thee to knock at heaven-door for entertainment, as Peter did at the house of Mary, where the church was met. Be of good comfort, thou mayest know assuredly that God hath sent, not his angel, but his own Spirit, and hath delivered thee out of the hand of sin, Satan, and justice.

[THE PROPERTIES OF TRUE FAITH,  
*when it is wrought.*]

SECOND DIRECTION. We know what faith is, and how to judge of it, *from its properties when it is wrought in us buy the Spirit*. We shall content ourselves by noticing three. *First*. True faith is obediential. *Second*. It is prayerful. *Third*. It is uniform in its acting.

[*True faith is OBEDIENTIAL.*]

*First Property*. This choice excellent faith is an *obediential faith*; that is, *true faith on the promise works obedience to the command*. Abraham is famous for his obedience; no command, how difficult soever, came amiss to him. He is an obedient servant indeed, that, when he doth but hear his master knock with his foot, leaves all and runs presently to know his

master's will and pleasure. Such a servant had God of Abraham: 'Who raised up the righteous man from the east, called him to his foot,' Isa. 41:2. But what was the spring that set Abraham's obedience a going? See for this, Heb. 11:8 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheri'tance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.' As it is impossible to please God without faith, so it is impossible not to desire to please God with faith. It may well go for an idol faith, that hath hands but doth not work, feet, but doth not walk in the statutes of God. No sooner had Christ cured the woman in the gospel of her fever, but it is said, 'She arose, and ministered unto them,' Matt. 8:15. Thus the believing soul stands up and ministers unto Christ in gratitude and obedience. Faith is not lazy; it inclines not the soul to sleep, but work; it sends the creature not to bed, there to snort away his time in ease and sloth, but into the field. The night of ignorance and unbelief, *that* was the creature's sleeping time; but, when the Sun of righteousness ariseth, and it is day in the soul, then the creature riseth and goeth forth to his labour. The first words that break out faith's lips, are those of Saul in his hour of conversion: 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Acts 9:6. Faith turns the Jordan, and alters the whole course of a man. 'We were,' saith the apostle, 'foolish' and 'disobedient,' 'but after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,' Titus 3:3, 4, then the case was altered, as it follows. And, therefore, take your foul fingers off the promise, and pretend no more to faith, if ye be children of Belial—such whose necks do not freely stoop to this yoke of obedience. The devil himself may as soon pass for a believer as a disobedient soul. Other things he can show as much as you. Dost thou pretend to knowledge? thou wilt not deny the devil to be a greater scholar than thyself, I hope, and that in Scripture knowledge. Dost *thou* believe the Scripture to be true? and doth not he more strongly? Dost thou tremble? he much more. It is obedience he wants, and this makes him a devil, and it will make thee like him also.

[*Two characters distinguishing  
true faith's obedience.*]

*Question*. But, you may ask, *what stamp is*



*there to be found on faith's obedience* which will distinguish it from all counterfeits—for there are many fair semblances of obedience, which the devil will never grudge us the having?

*Answer.* Take these two characters of the obedience of faith.

1. *Character.* Faith's obedience *begins at the heart, and from thence it diffuseth and dilates itself to the outward man, till it overspreads the whole man in a sincere endeavour.* As in natural life, the first part that lives in the heart, so the first that faith subdues into obedience is the heart. It is called a 'faith which purifieth the heart,' Acts 15.9. And the believing Romans 'obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to them,' Rom. 6:17. Whereas a false faith, which apes this true faith—as art imitates nature—begins without, and there ends. All the seeming good works of a counterfeit believer, they are like the beautiful colour in a picture's face, which comes not from a principle of life within, but the painter's pencil without. Such were those, John 2:23, who are said to 'believe on Christ,' 'but Jesus did not commit himself unto them,' ver. 24. And why? 'for he knew what was in man,' ver. 25. He cared not for the painted porch and goodly outside: 'for he knew what was in man,' and by that knowledge he knew them to be rotten at core, naught at heart, before they were specked on the skin of their exterior conversation.

*Question* (1.) But how may I know my obedience is *the obedience of the heart*?

*Answer.* If it comes from love then it is the obedience of the heart. He commands the heart that is the master of its love. The castle must needs yield when he that keeps it, and hath the keys of it, submits. Love is the affection that governs this royal fort of man's heart. We give our hearts to them we give our love to. And indeed thus it is that faith brings the heart over into subjection and obedience to God, by putting it under a law of love; 'faith worketh by love,' Gal. 5:6. First, faith worketh love, and then it worketh by it. As first the workman sets an edge on his tools, and then carves and cuts with them; so faith sharpens the soul's love to God, and then acts by it. Or, as a statuary, to make some difficult piece, before he goes about it, finding his hands numb with cold, that he cannot handle his tools so nimbly as he should, goes first to the fire, and, with the help of its heat, chafes them till they of stiff and numb become agile and

active, then to work he falls; so faith brings the soul—awk and listless enough, God knows, to any duty—unto the meditation of the peerless, matchless love of God in Christ to it; and at this fire faith stays the Christian's thoughts till his affections begin to kindle and come to some sense of this love of God, and now the Christian bestirs himself for God with might and main.

*Question* (2.) But how may I know my obedience is *from love*?

*Answer.* I will send to St. John to be resolved of this question, 'For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous,' 1 John 5:3. Speak, soul, what account have you of the commandments? Do you look upon them as an iron chain about your legs, and think yourselves prisoners because you are tied to them? or do you value them as a chain of gold about your neck, and esteem yourselves favourites of the King of heaven, that he will honour you to honour him by serving of him? So did as great a prince as the world had: 'Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly,' 1 Chr. 29. Not, 'Who am I, that I should be a king over my people?' but 'that I should have a heart so gracious to offer willingly with my people.' Not, 'Who am I, that they should serve me?' but, 'that thou wilt honour me with a heart to serve thee with them?' The same holy man in another place speak of sin as his prison, and his obedience as his liberty: 'I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts,' Ps. 119:45. When God gives him a large heart for duty, he is as thankful as a man that was bound in prison is when he is set at liberty, that he may visit his friends and follow his calling. The only grievous thing to a loving soul is to be hindered in his obedience. This is that which makes such a one out of love with the world, and with being in it — because it cumpers him in his work, and many times keeps him from it. As a conscionable faithful servant, that is lame or sickly, and can do his master little service, O how it grieves him! Thus the loving soul bemoans itself, that it should put God to so much cost, and be so unprofitable under it. Speak, is this thy temper? Blessed art thou of the Lord! There is a jewel of two diamonds, which this will prove thou art owner of, that the crown-jewels of all the princes of the world are not so worthy to be valued with, as a heap of dust or dung is to be compared

with them. The jewel I mean, is made of this pair of graces —faith and love. They are thine, and, with them, God and all that he hath and is. But, if the commandments if the commandments of God be ‘grievous,’ as they are to every carnal heart, and thou countest thyself at ease when thou canst make an escape from a duty to commit a sin, as the beast doth when his collar is off and he in his fat pasture again; now thou art where thou wouldst be, and can show some spirits that thou hast. But when conscience puts on the trace again, thou art dull and heavy again. O, it speaks thee to have no love to God, and therefore no faith on God, that is true. That is a jade indeed who hath no mettle but in the pasture.

2. *Character.* The obedience of faith is *full of self-denial*. Faith keeps the creature low; as in what he hath, so he doth. ‘I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,’ Gal. 2:20. As if he had said, ‘I pray, mistake me not; when I say, ‘I live,’ I mean, not that I live by myself, but Christ in me. I live, and that deliciously, but it is Christ that keeps the house, not I. I mortify my corruptions, and vanquish temptations, but I am debtor to Christ for the strength.’ None can write here, as one did under Pope Adrian’s statue —where the place of his birth was named, and those princes that had preferred him from step to step till he mounted the pope’s chair, but God left out of all the story—‘*nihil hic Deus fecit*’—God did nothing for this man. No, blessed Paul, and in him every believer, acknowledgeth God for sole founder, and benefactor too, of all the good he hath and doth. They are not ashamed to acknowledge who they are beholden to for all. ‘These are the children which God hath graciously given me,’ said Jacob. And these the services which God hath graciously assisted me in, saith Paul; ‘I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,’ 1 Cor. 15:10. All is *ex dono Dei*—from the gift of God. O how chary are saints of writing themselves the authors of their own good works, parts, or abilities! ‘Art thou able,’ said the king to Daniel, ‘to make known unto me the dream which I have seen?’ Dan. 2:26. Now mark, he doth not say, as the proud astrologers, ‘We will show the interpretation,’ Dan. 2:4. That fitted their mouths well enough who had no acquaintance with God, but not Daniel’s—the servant of the living God. Though at the very time he had the secret

revealed to him and could tell the king his dream, yet he was careful to stand clear from any filching of God’s glory from him; and therefore he answers the king by telling him what his God could do rather than himself. ‘There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets,’ &c. And what makes Daniel so self-denying? Truly it was because he had obtained this secret of God by faith at the throne of grace; as you may perceive by chapter 2:15-17 compared. That faith which taught him to beg the mercy of God, enabled him to deny himself, and give the entire glory of it from himself to God. As rivers empty their streams again into the bosom of the sea, whence they at first received them; so men give the praise of what they do unto that by which they do it. If they attempt any enterprise with their own wit or industry, you shall have them bring their sacrifice to their wit or net. No wonder to hear Nebuchadnezzar—who looked no higher than himself in building his great Babylon—ascribe the honour of it to himself, ‘Is not this great Babylon, that I have built...by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?’ Dan. 4:30. But faith teacheth the creature to blot out his own name, and write the name of God in its room, upon all he hath and doth. When the servants came to give up their accounts to their Lord, every one for his pound; those that were faithful to improve it how humbly and self-denyingly do they speak! ‘Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds,’ saith the first, Luke 19:16. ‘Thy pound hath gained five,’ saith another, ver. 18. Mark, not ‘I have gained,’ but, ‘thy pound hath gained ten and five.’ They do not applaud themselves, but ascribe both principal and increase to God; thy talent hath gained, that is, thy gifts and grace, through thy assistance and blessing, have gained thus much more. Only he that did least comes in with a brag, and tells his Lord what he had done. ‘Behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.’ Least doers are greatest boasters.

[*True faith is PRAYERFUL.*]

*Second Property.* True faith is *prayerful*. Prayer, it is the child of faith; and as the child bears his father’s name upon him, so doth prayer the name of faith. What is it known by but by ‘the prayer of faith?’ James 5:15. Prayer, it

is the very natural breath of faith. Supplication and thanksgiving—the two parts of prayer—by these, as the body by the double motion of the lungs, doth the Christian suck in mercy from God, and breathe back again that mercy in praise to God. But, without faith he could do neither; he could not by supplication draw mercy from God; ‘for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,’ Heb. 11:6. Neither could he return praises to God without faith. David’s heart must be fixed before he can sing and give thanks, Ps. 56. Thanksgiving is an act of self-denial, and it is faith alone that will show us the way out of our own doors; and as the creature cannot pray—I mean acceptably—without faith, so with faith he cannot but pray. The new creature, like our infants in their natural birth, comes crying into the world; and therefore Christ tells it for great news to Ananias of Saul, a new-born believer, ‘Behold he prayeth.’ But is that so strange, that one brought up at the foot of Gamaliel, and so precise a Pharisee as he was, should be found upon his knees at prayer? Truly no, it was *that* his sect gloried in—their fasting and praying—and therefore, he, being strict in his way, was no doubt acquainted with this work as to the exterior part of it, but he never had the spirit of prayer, till he now had the Spirit of grace, whereby he believed on Jesus Christ. And therefore, if you will try your faith, it must not be by bare praying, but by some peculiar characters which faith imprints prayer withal. Now there are three acts by which faith discovers itself in reference to this duty of prayer. 1. Faith puts forth an exciting act, whereby it stirs up the Christian to pray. 2. Faith hath an assisting act in prayer. 3. Faith hath a supporting act after prayer.

*[Three acts by which faith discovers itself in reference to prayer.]*

1. *Act.* Faith puts forth an exciting act, whereby it provokes the Christian and strongly presses him to pray. And this it doth,

(1.) By discovering to the creature his own beggary and want, as also the fulness that is to be had from God in Christ for his supply—both which faith useth as powerful motives to quicken the soul up to pray. As the lepers said to one another, ‘Why sit we here until we die? If we

say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: come, and let us fall into the host of the Syrians,’ II Kings 7:3, 4. Thus faith rouseth up the soul to prayer. If thou stayest at thy own door, O my soul, thou art sure to starve and die. What seest thou in thyself but hunger and famine? No bread there; no money to buy any in thy own purse. Up therefore, haste thee to thy God, and thy soul shall live. O sirs, are you pressed with this inward feeling of your own wants? Press to the throne of grace as the only way left for your supply. You may hope it is faith that sends you. Faith is the principle of our new life. ‘I live,’ said Paul, ‘by the faith of the Son of God,’ Gal. 2:20. This life being weak, is craving and crying for nourishment, and that naturally, as the new-born babe doth for the milk. If therefore you find this inward sense prompting and provoking of you to cry to God, it shows this principle of life—faith I mean—is in thee.

*Objection.* But, may not an unbeliever pray in the sense of his wants, and be inwardly pinched with them, which may make him pray very feelingly?

*Answer.* We must distinguish of wants. They are either spiritual or carnal. It cannot be denied, but an unbeliever may be very sensible of outward carnal wants, and knock loud at heaven-gate for supply. We find them ‘howling on their beds, and assembling themselves for corn and wine,’ Hosea 7:14. There is the cry of the creature, and the cry of the new creature. Every creature hath a natural cry for that which suits their nature. Hence, ‘The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God,’ Ps. 104:21. But, give the lion flesh, and he will not roar for want of grass; give the ox grass, and you shall not hear him lowing for flesh; so give the faithless, graceless person his fill of his carnal food—sensual enjoyments—and you shall have little complaint of spiritual wants from him. They are therefore spiritual wants you must try your faith by. If thou canst heartily pray for love to Christ, faith on him, or any other grace—feeling the want of them, as a hungry man doth of his food—thou mayest conclude safely there is this principle of new life, which, like the veins at the bottom of the stomach, by its sucking, puts thee to pain till it be heard and satisfied; for these graces being proper to the new creature, can be truly desired of none but

one that is a new creature.

(2.) Faith excites to prayer *from an inward delight it hath in communion with God*. 'It is good for me,' saith the psalmist, 'to draw near to God.' Now mark the next words, 'I have put my trust in the Lord,' Ps. 73:28. We take delight to be often looking where we have laid up our treasures. This holy man had laid up his soul, and all he had, in God, by faith, to be kept safely for him; and now he delights oft to be with God. He hath that which invites him into his presence with sweet content. By faith the soul is contracted to Christ. Now, being espoused to Christ, there is no wonder at all that it should desire communion with him. And prayer, being the place of meeting where Christ and the soul can come the nearest on this side of heaven, therefore the believer is seen so oft walking that way. Canst thou say, poor soul, that this is thy errand when praying—to see the face of God? Can nothing less, and needest thou nothing more to satisfy, and recreate thy soul in prayer, than communion with God? Certainly God hath thy faith, or else thou couldst not so freely bestow thy love on him and take delight in him.

2. *Act*. Faith puts forth *an assisting act in prayer*. To instance only in two particulars.

(1.) It assists the soul *with importunity*. Faith is the wrestling grace. It comes up close to God; takes hold of God, and will not easily take a denial. It inflames all the affections, and sets them on work. This is the soul's eye, by which it sees the filth, the hell, that is in every sin. And seeing affects the heart, and puts it into a passion of sorrow when the soul spreads its abominations before the Lord. The creature now needs no onion to make it weep. Tears come alone freely, as water from a flowing spring. It makes a discovery of Christ to the soul in the excellencies of his person, love, and graces, from the glass of the promise, at the sight of which it is even sick with longing after them, and such pangs of love come upon it, as make it send forth strong cries and supplications for that it so impatiently desires. Yea, further, faith doth not barely set the creature's teeth on edge by displaying the excellency of Christ and his grace; but it supplies him with arguments, and helps the soul to wield and use them both valiantly and victoriously upon the Almighty. Never could he tell what to do with a promise in prayer, till now that faith teacheth him to press God with it,

humbly, yet boldly. 'What wilt thou do unto thy great name?' Joshua 7:9. As if he had said, 'Thou art so fast bound to thy people by promise and oath, that thou canst not leave them to perish, but thy name will suffer with them.' Faith melts promises into arguments, as the soldier doth lead into bullets, and then helps the Christian to send them with a force to heaven in a fervent prayer; whereas a promise in an unbeliever's mouth is like a shot in a gun's mouth without any fire to put to it. O how cold and dead doth a promise drop from him in prayer! He speaks promises, but cannot pray promises or press promises. And therefore, try thyself not by naked praying, but by importunity in prayer; and that, not by the agitation of thy bodily spirits, but the inward working of thy soul and spirit, whether carried out to plead the promise and urge it upon God with an humble importunity, or not.

(2.) Faith enables the soul *to persevere in the work*. False faith may show some mettle at hand, but it will jade at length. Will the hypocrite pray always? Job 27:10. No; as the wheel wears with turning, till it breaks at last; so doth the hypocrite. He prays himself weary of praying. Something or other will in time make him quarrel with that duty which he never inwardly liked; whereas the sincere believer hath that in him which makes it impossible he should quite give over praying, except he should also cease believing. Prayer, it is the very breath of faith. Stop a man's breath, and where is he then? It is true the believer through his own negligence may find some more difficulty of fetching his prayer-breath at one time than at another—as a man in a cold doth for his natural breath. Alas! who is so careful of his soul's health that needs not to bewail this? But for faith to live, and this breath of prayer to be quite cut off, is impossible. We see David did but hold his breath a little longer than ordinary, and what a distemper it put him into, till he gave himself ease again by venting his soul in prayer. 'I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end,' Ps. 39:2. Dost thou, O man, find thyself under a necessity of praying? As the little babe who cannot choose but cry when it ails or wants anything—because it hath no other way to help itself than by crying

to hasten its mother or nurse to its help—[so] the Christian's wants, sins, and temptations continuing to return upon him, he cannot but continue also to pray against them. 'From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee,' saith David, Ps. 61:2. Wherever I am I will find thee out. Prison me, banish me, or do with me what thou wilt, thou shalt never be rid of me, 'I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever,' ver. 4. But how could David do that when banished from it? Surely he means by prayer. The praying Christian carries a 'tabernacle' with him. As long as David can come at the tabernacle he will not neglect it; and when he cannot through sickness, banishment, &c., then he will look towards it, and as devoutly worship God in the open fields as if he were in it. 'Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice,' Ps. 141:2. He speaks of such a time when he could not come to offer sacrifice at the tabernacle.

3. *Act.* Faith hath a *supporting act after prayer.*

(1.) It supports the soul *to expect a gracious answer.* 'I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up,' Ps. 5:3. Or, 'I will look' for what, but for a return? An unbelieving heart shoots at random, and never minds where his arrow lights, or what comes of his praying; but faith fill the soul with expectation. As a merchant, when he casts up his estate, counts what he hath sent beyond sea, as well as what he hath in hand; so doth faith reckon upon what he hath sent to heaven in prayer and not received, as well as those mercies which he hath received, and are in hand at present. Now this expectation which faith raiseth in the soul after prayer, appears in the power that it hath to quiet and compose the soul in the interim between the sending forth, as I may say, the ship of prayer, and its return home with its rich lading it goes for. And it is more or less, according as faith's strength is. Sometimes faith comes from prayer in triumph, and cries *victoria*—victory. It gives such a being and existence to the mercy prayed for in the Christian's soul, before any likelihood of it appears to sense and reason, that the Christian can silence all his troubled thoughts with the expectation of its coming. So Hannah prayed, and 'was no more sad,' 1 Sam. 1:18. Yea, it will make the Christian disburse his praises for the mercy long before it is received. Thus high faith wrought in David,

'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee;' and in the next words, 'In God I will praise his word,' Ps. 56:3, 4; that is, he would praise God for his promise, before there were any performance of it to him, when it had no existence but in God's faithfulness and David's faith. This holy man had such a piercing eye of faith, as he could see the promise, when he was at lowest ebb of misery, so certain and unquestionable in the power and truth of God, that he could then praise God, as if the promised mercy had actually been fulfilled to him. But I would not have thee, Christian, try the truth of thy faith by this heroic high strain it mounts to in some eminent believers. Thou mayest be a faithful soldier to Christ, though thou attainest not to the degree of a few worthies in his army, more honourable in this respect than the rest of their brethren.

(2.) There is a lower act of faith, which, if thou canst find, may certify thee of its truth: that, I mean, which, though it doth not presently, upon praying, disburden the soul of all its anxious disquieting thoughts, *yet keeps the soul's head above their waves and gives a check to them, that they abate, though by little and little, as the stream in a channel doth at a falling tide.* When God took the deluge from the earth, he did not do it in a moment. It is said, 'The waters returned from off the earth continually,' Gen. 8:3; that is, it was falling water from day to day, till all was gone. Canst thou not find, Christian, that some of thy tumultuous disquieting thoughts are let out at the sluice of prayer, and that it is some ease to thy encumbered spirit, that thou hast the bosom of a gracious God to empty thy sorrowful heart into? and, though praying doth not drain away all thy fears, yet it keeps thee, doth it not, from being overflowed with them, which thou couldst not avoid without faith? A soul wholly void of faith, prays, and leaves none of its burden with God, but carries all back with it that it brought, and more too. Calling on God gives no more relief to him, than throwing out an anchor that hath no hooks to take hold on the firm earth, doth the sinking ship. If, therefore, poor soul, thou findest, upon throwing thy anchor of faith in prayer, that it takes such hold on Christ in the promise as to stay thee from being driven by the fury of Satan's affrighting temptations, or thy own despairing thoughts, bless God for it. The ship that rides at anchor is safe —though it may be a

little tossed to and fro—so long as the anchor keeps its hold. And so art thou, poor soul. That faith will save from hell, that will not wholly free the soul here from fears<sup>cxc</sup>.

[*True faith is UNIFORM.*]

*Third Property.* True faith is *uniform*. As sincere obedience doth not pick and choose—take this commandment, and leave that—but hath respect to all the precepts of God; so, faith unfeigned hath respect to all the truths of God. It believes one promise as well as another. As the true Christian must not have ‘the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ James 2:1, so, not with respect to truths. To pretend to believe one promise, and to give no credit to another, this is to be partial in the promises, as the priests are charged to be in the duties of the law, Mal. 2:9. The honour of God is as deeply engaged to perform one promise as another. Indeed, as the breach of but one commandment would put us under the guilt of the whole; so God’s failing in one promise—which is blasphemy to think—would be the breaking of his whole covenant. Promises are copulative as well as commands; and therefore, neither can God keep one, except he perform all; nor we believe one, except we believe all. God hath spoken all these words of promises, as he did those of precepts; his seal is to all, and he looks that we should compass all within the embraces of our faith. David bears witness to the whole truth of God, ‘Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever,’ Ps. 119:160. Try now thy faith here. Possibly, thou pretendest to believe the promise for pardon, and art oft pleasing thyself with the thoughts of it; but, what faith hast thou on the promise, for sanctifying thy nature and subduing thy corruptions? May be thou mindest not these, improvest not these. This fruit may hang long enough on the branches of the promises before thou gatherest it. The other is for thy tooth, not these; whereas true faith would like one as well as the other. See how David heartily prays for the performance of this promise, ‘Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me,’ Ps. 119:132, 133. David would not lose any privilege that God hath by promise settled on his children.

‘Do with me,’ saith he, ‘as thou usest to do.’ this is no more than family fare—what thou promisest to do for all that love thee; and let me not go worse clad than the rest of my brethren. May be thou fanciest thou hast a faith for the eternal salvation of thy soul. But, hast thou faith to rely on God for the things of this life? A strange believer, is he not, that lives by faith for heaven, and by his wits and sinful policy for the world? Christ proves that they, John 5:44, did not believe on him, because they durst not trust him with their names and credits. If we cannot trust him with the less, how can we in the greater?

I deny not, but he that hath a true faith, yea, a strong faith for heaven, may be put to a plunge and his faith foiled about a temporal promise; but we must not from an hour of temptation, wherein God leaves his most eminent saints to humble them, judge of the constant ordinary frame of the believer’s heart. Though Abraham dissembled once to save his life, which he thought in some danger for his wife’s beauty; yet he did, at other times, give eminent testimony that he trusted God for his temporal life, as well as for his eternal salvation. I do not therefore bid thee question the truth of thy faith for every fainting fit that comes over it, as to the good things of the promise of this life. A man may, in a time of war, have some of his estate lie under the enemy’s power for a time, and he, so long, have no profits from it; but still he reckons it as his estate, is troubled for his present great loss, and endeavours, as soon as he can, to recover it again out of his enemy’s hand. So, in the hurry of a temptation, when Satan—the soul’s great enemy—is abroad, and God withdraws his assistance, the believer may have little support from some particular promise; but he ever counts that as his portion as well as any other, mourns he can act his faith no more upon it, and labours to reinforce his faith with new strength from heaven when he can, that he may be able to live upon it, and improve it more to his comfort. So that still it holds true, if we believe not God for this life, neither do we for the other. In a word, may be thou pretendest for a faith for thy temporals, and seemest to trust God for things of this life; but art a mere stranger to those prime acts of faith, whereby the believing soul closeth with Christ, and receiveth him as his Lord and Saviour, and so seals to the covenant that in the gospel is tendered to poor sinners. Canst thou

so far fight against thy own reason, as to think that any temporal promise belongs to thee without these? What gives the woman the right to her jointure<sup>cxci</sup> but her marriage covenant? And what gives the creature a true claim to these promises, or any other in the covenant of grace, but its union to Christ, and accepting of him as he is offered? The first act of God's love to the creature is that whereby he chooseth such a one to be his, and sets him apart, in his unchangeable purpose, to be an object of his special love in Christ, and therefore called 'the foundation,' as that on which God lays the superstructure of all other mercies: 'The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his,' II Tim. 2:19. First, God chooseth a person to be his, and on this foundation he builds, and bestows all his further cost of mercy upon the creature, as one that is his. So on the creature's part, first, faith closeth with Christ, severs him in his thoughts from all others, and chooseth him to be his Saviour, in whom alone he will trust, and whom alone he will serve; which done, then it trades with this promise and that, as the portion which falls to him by marriage with Christ. And therefore see how preposterous thy course is, who snatchest these promises to thyself, before there hath passed any good-will from thee to Christ.

### BRANCH THIRD.

[EXHORTATION TO UNBELIEVERS,  
to obtain 'the shield of faith.']

Is faith so precious a grace? *Let it provoke you, who want it, to get it.* Can you hear of this pearl and not wish it were yours? Wherefore hath the Spirit spoken such great and glorious things of faith in the Word but to make it the more desirable in your eye? Is there any way to get Christ, but by getting faith? or dost not thou think that thou needest Christ as much as any other? There is a generation of men in the world would almost make one think this was their judgment, who, because their corruptions have not, by breaking out into plague-sores of profaneness, left such a brand of ignominy upon their name as some others lie under, but their

conversations have been strewed with some flowers of morality, whereby their names have kept sweet among their neighbours; and, therefore, they do not at all listen to the offers of Christ, neither do their consciences check them for this neglect. And why so? Surely it is not because they are more willing to go to hell than others; but because the way they think they are in will bring them in good time to heaven, without any more ado. Poor deluded creatures! Is Christ then sent to help only some more debauched sinners to heaven, such as drunkards, swearers, and of that rank? And are civil, moral men, left to walk thither on their own legs? I am sure, if the word may be believed, we have the case resolved clear enough. That tells of but one way to heaven for all that mean to come there. As there is but 'one God,' so but 'one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,' I Tim. 2:5. And if there is but one bridge over the gulf, judge what is like to become of the civil, righteous man, for all his sweet-scented life, if he miss this one bridge, and goes on in the road he hath set out in for heaven? O remember, proud man, who thou art, and cease thy vain attempt. Art thou not of Adam's seed? Hast thou not traitor's blood in thy veins? If 'every mouth be stopped,' Rom. 3:19, 20, how darest thou open thine? If 'all the world become guilty before God,' that 'by the deeds of the law no flesh can be justified in his sight,' where then shalt thou stand to plead thy innocency before him who sees thy black skin under thy white feathers, thy foul heart through thy fair carriage? It is faith on Christ that alone can purify thy heart. Without it thy washed face and hands—external righteousness I mean—will never commend thee to God. And therefore thou art under a horrible delusion if thou dost not think that thou needest Christ and a faith to interest thee in him, as much as the bloodiest murderer or filthiest Sodomite in the world. If a company of men and children in a journey were to wade through some brook, not beyond a man's depth, the men would have the advantage of the children. But if to cross the seas, the men would need a ship to waft them over, as well as the children. And they might well pass for madmen, if they should think to wade through, without the help of a ship, that is offered them as well as the other, because they are a little taller than the rest are. Such a foolish, desperate adventure

wouldst thou give for thy soul, if thou shouldst think to make thy way through the justice of God to heaven, without shipping thyself by faith in Christ, because thou art not so bad in thy external conversation as others. Let me therefore again and again beseech all that are yet destitute of faith, to endeavour for it, and that speedily. There is nothing deserves the precedency in your thoughts before this. David resolved not to 'give sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eyelids, till he find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob,' Ps. 132:4, 5. The habitation which pleaseth God most is thy heart; but it must be a believing heart, 'That Christ may dwell in your heart by faith,' Eph. 3:17. O how dare yo sleep a night in that house where God doth not dwell? and he dwells not in thee, if thou carriest an unbelieving heart in thy bosom. There is never a gospel sermon thou hearest, but he stands at thy door to be let in. Take heed of multiplying unkindnesses in denying him entertainment. How knowest thou but God may, finding thy heart shut so oft by unbelief against his knocks, suddenly seal thee up under final unbelief?

[DIRECTIONS TO UNBELIEVERS  
for attaining faith.]

But possibly thou wilt ask now, how thou mayest get this precious grace of faith? The answer to this question, take in these following directions. FIRST. Labour to get thy heart convinced of, and affected with, thy unbelief. SECOND. Take heed of resisting or opposing his help to the Spirit of God, when he offers his help to the work. THIRD. Lift up thy cry aloud in prayer to God for faith. FOURTH. Converse much with the promises, and be frequently pondering them in thy musing thoughts. FIFTH. Press and urge thy soul home with that strong obligation that lies on thee, a poor humbled sinner, to believe.

[The unbeliever must get his heart  
convinced of its unbelief.]

FIRST DIRECTION. *Labour to get thy heart convinced of, and affected with, thy unbelief.* Till this be done, thou wilt be but sluggish and slighty in thy endeavours for faith. A man may be convinced of other sins and never think of coming to Christ. Convince a drunkard of his drunkenness, and

upon leaving his drunken trade his mind is pacified; yea, he blesseth himself in his reformation, because all the quarrel his conscience had with him was for that particular sin. But, when the Spirit of God convinceth the creature of his unbelief, he gets between him and those burrows in which he did use to earth and hide himself. He hath no ease in his spirit from those plasters now, which formerly had relieved him, and so kept him from coming over to Christ. Before, it served the turn to bring his conscience to sleep when it accused him for such a sin, that he had left the practice of it; and, for the neglect of a duty, that now he had taken it up without an inquiry into his state, whether good or bad, pardoned or unpardoned. Thus many make a shift to daub and patch up the peace of their consciences, even as some do to keep up an old rotten house, by stopping in, here a tile and there a stone, till a loud wind comes and blows the whole house down. But, when once the creature hath the load of its unbelief laid upon his spirit, then it is little ease to him to think he is no drunkard as he was, no atheist in his family—without the worship of God—as he was. 'Thy present state,' saith the Spirit of God, 'is as damning, in that thou art an unbeliever, as if thou wert these still.' Yea, what thou wert, thou art; and wilt be found at the great day, to be the drunkard and atheist, for all thy seeming reformation, except by an intervening faith thou gainest a new name. What though thou beest drunk no more? yet the guilt remains upon thee till faith strikes it off with the blood of Christ. God will be paid his debt; by thee, or Christ for thee; and Christ pays no reckoning for unbelievers.

Again, as the guilt remains, so the power of those lusts remains, so long as thou art an unbeliever—however they may disappear in the outward act. Thy heart is not emptied of one sin, but the vent stopped by restraining grace. A bottle full of wine, close stopped, shows no more what it hath in it than one that is empty. And that is thy case. How is it possible thou shouldst truly mortify any one lust, that hast no faith, which is the only victory of the world? In a word, if under the conviction of thy unbelief thou wilt find—how little a sin soever now it is thought by thee—that there is more malignity in it than in all thy other sins. Hast thou been a liar? That is a grievous sin indeed. Hell gapes for every one



that loveth and telleth a lie, Rev. 22:15. But know, poor wretch, the loudest lie which ever thou toldest is that which by thy unbelief thou tellest. Here thou bearest false witness against God himself, and tellest a lie, not to the Holy Ghost, as Ananias did, but a lie of the Holy Ghost; as if not a word were true he saith in the promises of the gospel. If 'he that believeth setteth to his seal that God is true,' judge you whether the unbeliever makes him not a liar? Hast thou been a murderer, yea, had thy hand in the blood of saints—the best of men? This is a dreadful sin, I confess. But by thy unbelief, thou art a more bloody murderer by how much the blood of God is more precious than the blood of mere men. Thou killest Christ over again by thy unbelief, and treadest his blood under thy feet, yea, throwest it under Satan's feet to be trampled on by him.

*Question.* But how can unbelief be so great a sin, when it is not in the sinner's power to believe?

*Answer.* By this reason the unregenerate person might wipe off any other sin and shake off the guilt of it with but saying, 'It is not my fault that I do not keep this commandment or that, for I have no power of myself to do them.' This is true; he cannot perform one holy action holily and acceptably. 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God,' Rom. 8:8. But, it is a false inference, that therefore he doth not sin because he can do no other.

1. *Because his inability is not created by God, but contracted by the creature himself.* 'God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions,' Ecc. 7:29. Man had not his lame hand from God. No, he was made a creature fit and able for any service his Maker would please to employ him in. But man crippled himself. And man's fault cannot prejudice God's right. Though he hath lost his ability to obey, yet God hath not lost his power to command. Who, among ourselves, thinks his debtor discharged, by wasting that estate whereby he was able to have paid us? It is confessed, had man stood, he should not, indeed could not, have believed on Christ for salvation, as now he is held forth in the gospel; but this was not from any disability in man, but from the unmeetness of such an object to Adam's holy state. If it had been a duty meet for God to command, there was ability in man to have obeyed.

2. Man's present impotency to yield obedience to the commands of God, and in particular to this of believing—where it is promulgated—doth afford him no excuse; *because it is not a single inability, but complicated with an inward enmity against the command.* It is true man *can* not believe. But it is as true man *will* not believe. 'Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life,' John 5:40. It is possible, yea, ordinary, that a man may, through some feebleness and deficiency of strength, be disabled to do that which he is very willing to do; and this draws out our pity. Such a one was the poor cripple, who lay so long at 'the pool,' John 5:5. He was willing enough to have stepped down if he could have but crept thither; or that any other should have helped him in, if they would have been so kind. But, what would you think of such a cripple that can neither go himself into the pool for healing, nor is willing any should help him in; but flees in the face of him that would do him this friendly office? Every unbeliever is this cripple. He is not only impotent himself, but a resister of the Holy Ghost that comes to woo and draw him unto Christ. Indeed, every one that believes believes willingly. But he is beholden, not to nature, but to grace, for this willingness. None are willing till 'the day of power' comes, Ps. 110:3, in which the Spirit of God overshadows the soul, and by his incubation, as once upon the waters, new-forms and moulds the will into a sweet compliance with the call of God in the gospel.

*[The Spirit of God MUST NOT BE RESISTED when proffering his help to the work of faith.]*

SECOND DIRECTION. *Take heed of resisting or opposing the Spirit of God when he offers his help to the work.* If ever thou believest, he must enable thee; take heed of opposing him. Master workmen love not to be controlled. Now, two ways the Spirit of God may be opposed. *First.* When the creature waits not on the Spirit, where he ordinarily works faith. *Second.* When the creature, though he attends on him in the way and means, yet controls him in his work.

*First.* Take heed thou *opposest not the Spirit by not attending on him in the way and means by which he ordinarily works faith.* Thou knowest where Jesus used to pass, and his Spirit breathe, and that is in the great gospel

ordinance—the ministry of the word. Christ's sheep ordinarily conceive when they are drinking the water of life here. The hearing of the gospel it is called, Gal. 3:2, 'The hearing of faith;' because by hearing the doctrine of faith, the Spirit works the grace of faith in them. This is the still voice he speaks to the souls of sinners in. 'Thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it,' Isa. 30:20. Here are God and man teaching together. Thou canst not neglect man's teaching, but thou resist the Spirit's also. It was for something that the apostle placed them so near, 1 Thes. 5:19, 20. He bids us 'quench not the Spirit;' and in the next words, 'Despise not prophesyings.' Surely he would have us know that the Spirit is dangerously quenched when prophesying, or preaching of the gospel, is despised. Now the most notorious way of despising prophesying or preaching, is to turn our back off the ordinance and not attend on it. When God sets up the ministry of the word in a place, his Spirit then opens his school, and expects that all who would be taught for heaven should come thither. O take heed of playing the truant, and absenting thyself from the ordinance upon any unnecessary occasion, much less of casting off the ordinance. If he tempts God that would be kept from sin, and yet will not keep out of the circle of the occasion that leads to the sin; then he tempts God as much that would have faith, and pretends his desire is that the Spirit should work it, but will not come within the ordinary walk of the Spirit where he doth the work. Whether it is more fitting that the scholar should wait on his master at school to be taught, or that the master should run after the his truant scholar at play in the field to teach him there, judge you?

*Second.* Take heed that *in thy attendance on the word thou dost not control the Spirit in those several steps he takes in thy soul in order to the production of faith.* Though there are no preparatory works of our own to grace, yet the Holy Spirit hath his preparatory works whereby he disposeth souls to grace. Observe therefore carefully the gradual approaches he makes by the word to thy soul, for want of complying with him in which he may withdraw in a distaste and leave the work at a sad stand for a time, if not quite give it over, never more to return to it. We read, Acts 7:23, how 'it came into the heart of

Moses to visit his brethren the children of Israel'—stirred up no doubt by God himself to the journey. There he begins to show his good-will to them, and zeal for them, in slaying an Egyptian that had wronged an Israelite; which, though no great matter towards their full deliverance out of Egypt, yet 'he supposed' (it is said, ver. 25) 'his brethren would have understood,' by that hint, 'how that God by his hand would deliver them.' But they did not comply with him, nay, rather opposed him; and therefore he withdrew, and they hear no more of Moses or their deliverance for 'forty years' space, ver. 30. Thus, may be, the Spirit of God gives thee a visit in an ordinance—directs a word that speaks to thy particular condition. He would have thee understand by this, sinner, how ready he is to help thee out of thy house of bondage—thy state of sin and wrath—if now thou wilt hearken to his counsel and kindly entertain his motions. [But], carry thyself rebelliously now against him, and God knows when thou mayest hear of him again knocking at thy door upon such an errand.

God makes short work with some in his judiciary proceedings. If he finds a repulse once, sometimes he departs, and leaves a dismal curse behind him as the punishment of it. 'I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper,' Luke 14:24. They were but once invited, and, for their first denial, this curse [is] clapped upon their heads. It is not said they shall never come where the supper stands on the board, but they shall never 'taste.' Many sit under the ordinances, where Christ in gospel-dishes is set forth admirably, but, through the efficacy of this curse upon them, never taste of these dainties all their life. They hear precious truths, but their hearts are sealed up in unbelief, and their minds made reprobate and injudicious, that they are not moved at all by them. There is a kind of frenzy and madness I have heard of, in which a man will discourse soberly and rationally, till you come to speak of some one particular subject that was the occasion of his distemper, and first broke his brain; here he is quite out, and presently loses his reason, not able to speak with any understanding of it. O how many men and women are there among us—frequent attenders on the word—who, in any matter of the world are able to discourse very understandingly

and rationally; but, when you come to speak of the things of God, Christ, and heaven, it is strange to see how soon their reason is lost and all understanding gone from them! they are not able to speak of these matters with any judgement. Truly I am afraid, in many—who have sat long under the means, and the Spirit hath been making some attempts on them—th is injudiciousness of mind in the things of God is but the consequence of that spiritual curse which God hath passed upon them for resisting these essays of his Spirit.

I beseech you, therefore, beware of opposing the Spirit. Doth he beam any light from his word into thy understanding, whereby thou, who wert before an ignorant sot, comest to something of the evil of sin, the excellency of Christ, and canst discourse rationally of the truths of the Scripture? Look now to it, what thou canst with this candle of the Lord is lighted in thy mind; take heed thou beest not found sinning with it, or priding thyself in it, lest it goes out in a snuff, and thou, for 'rebelling against the light,' comest at last to 'die without knowledge,' as is threatened, Job 36:12. If the Spirit of God goes yet further, and [so] fortifies the light in thy understanding that it sets thy conscience on fire with the sense of thy sins, and apprehensions of the wrath due to them; now, take heed of resisting him when in mercy to thy soul he is kindling this fire in thy bosom, to keep thee out of a worse in hell, if thou wilt be ruled by him. Thou must expect that Satan, now his house is on fire over his head, will bestir him what he can to quench it; thy danger is lest thou shouldst listen to him for thy present ease. Take heed therefore where thou drawest thy water with which thou quenchest this fire; that it be out of no well, but out of the word of God. In thinking to quiet thy conscience, thou mayest quench the Spirit of God in thy conscience; which is the mischief the devil bngs thou shouldst pull upon thy own head. There is more hope of a sick man when his disease comes out, than when it lies at the heart and nothing is seen outwardly. You know how Hazael helped his master to his sad end, who might have lived for all his disease. 'He took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died;' and it follows, 'and Hazael reigned in his stead,' II Kings 8:15. Thus the wretch came to the crown. He saw the king like to recover, and he squatted his

disease, in all probability, to his heart by the wet cloth, and so by his death made a way for himself to the throne. And truly Satan will not much fear to recover the throne of thy heart—which this present combustion in thy conscience puts him in great fear of losing—can he but persuade thee to apply some carnal coolings to it, thereby to quench the Spirit in his convincing work. These convictions are sent thee mercifully in order to thy spiritual delivery, and they should be as welcome to thee as the kindly bearing pains of a woman in travail are to her. Without them she could not be delivered of her child, nor without these, more or less, can the new creature be brought forth in thy soul.

Again, may be the Spirit of God goes yet further, and doth not only dart light into thy mind, hell-fire into thy conscience, but heaven-fire also into thy affections. My meaning is, he from the word displays Christ so in his own excellencies, and the fitness of him in all his offices to thy wants, that thy affections begin to work after him. The frequent discourses of him, and the mercy of God through him to poor sinners, are so luscious, that thou beginnest to taste some sweetness in hearing of them, which stirs up some passionate desires, whereby thou art in hearing the word often sallying forth in such-like breathings as these, 'O that Christ were mine! Shall I ever be the happy soul whom God will pardon and save?' Yea, possibly in the heat of thy affections thou art cursing thy lusts and Satan, who have held thee so long from Christ; and sudden purposes are taken up by thee that thou wilt bid adieu to thy former ways, and break through all the entreaties of thy dearest lusts, to come to Christ. O soul! now the kingdom of God is nigh indeed unto thee. Thou art, as I may so say, even upon thy quickening, and therefore, above all, this is the chief season of thy care, lest thou shouldst miscarry. If these sudden desires did but ripen into a deliberate choice of Christ; and these purposes settle into a permanent resolution to renounce sin and self, and so thou cast thyself on Christ; I durst be the messenger to joy thee with the birth of this babe of grace—faith I mean—in thy soul.

I confess, affections are up and down; yea, like the wind, how strongly soever they seem to blow the soul one way at present, [they] are often found in the quite contrary point very soon after. A man may be drunk with passion and

affection, as really as with wine or beer. And as it is ordinary for a man to make a bargain, when he is in beer or wine, which he repents of as soon as he is sober again; so it is as ordinary for poor creatures, who make choice of Christ and his ways in a sermon—while their affections have been elevated above their ordinary pitch by some moving discourse—to repent of all they have done a while after, when the impression of the word, which heated their affection in hearing, is worn off. Then they come to themselves again and are what they were—as far from any such desires after Christ as ever. Content not therefore thyself with some sudden pangs of affection in an ordinance, but labour to preserve those impressions which then the Spirit makes on thy soul, that they be not defaced and rubbed off—like colours newly laid on before they are dry—by the next temptation that comes. This is the caveat of the apostle, Heb. 2:1, ‘Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip’—or run out as leaking vessels. May be, at present, thy heart is melting, and in a flow with sorrow for thy sins, and thou thinkest, Surely now I shall never give my lust a kind look more—indeed one might wonder, to see the solemn mournful countenances under a sermon, which of these could be the man or woman that would afterwards be seen walking hand in hand with those sins they now weep to hear mentioned—but, as thou lovest thy life, watch thy soul, lest this prove but ‘as the early dew,’ none of which is to be seen at noon. Do thou therefore as those do who have stood some while in a hot bath, out of which when they come they do not presently go into the open air (*that* were enough to kill them), but betake themselves to their warm bed, that they may nourish this kindly heat; and now while their pores are open, by a gentle sweat breathe out more effectually the remaining dregs of their distemper. Thus betake thyself to thy closet, and there labour to take the advantage of thy present relenting frame for the more free pouring out of thy soul to God, now the ordinance hath thawed the tap; and, with all thy soul, beg of God he would not leave thee short of faith, and suffer thee to miscarry now he hath thee upon the wheel, but make thee a ‘vessel unto honour;’ which follows as the third direction.

[*The unbeliever must*  
CRY IN PRAYER FOR FAITH.]

THIRD DIRECTION. *Lift up thy cry aloud in prayer to God for faith.*

*Question.* But may an unbeliever pray? Some think he ought not.

*Answer.* This is ill news, if it were true, even for some who do believe, but dare not say they are believers. It were enough to scare them from prayer too; and so it would be as Satan would have it—that God would have few or none to vouch him in this solemn part of his worship; for they are but the fewest of believers that can walk to the throne of grace in view of their own faith. Prayer, it is *medium cultus*, and also *medium gratiæ*—means, whereby we give worship to God, and also wait to receive grace from God; so that to say a wicked man ought not to pray, is to say he ought not to worship God and acknowledge him to be his Maker; and also, that he ought not to wait on the means whereby he may obtain grace and receive faith. ‘Prayer is the soul’s motion God-ward,’ saith Rev. Mr. Baxter; and to say an unbeliever should not pray, is to say he should not turn to God, who yet saith to the wicked, ‘Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.’ ‘Desire is the soul of prayer,’ saith the same learned author, ‘and who dares say to the wicked, Desire not faith, desire not Christ or God?’ (Right Method for Peace of Conscience, p. 63)

It cannot indeed be denied, but that an unbeliever sins when he prays. But it is not his praying is his sin, but his praying unbelievably. And therefore, he sins less in praying than in neglecting to pray; because, when he prays, his sin lies in the circumstance and manner, but when he doth not pray, then he stands in a total defiance to the duty God hath commanded him to perform, and means God hath appointed him to use, for obtaining grace. I must therefore, poor soul, bid thee go on, for all these bugbears, and neglect not this grand duty which lies upon all the sons and daughters of men. Only go in the sense of thy own vileness, and take heed of carrying purposes of going on in sin with thee to the throne of grace. This were a horrible wickedness indeed. As if a traitor should put on the livery which the prince’s servants wear, for no other end but to gain more easy access to his

person, that he might stab him with a dagger he hath under that cloak. Is it not enough to sin, but wouldst thou make God accessory to his own dishonour also? By this bold enterprise thou dost what lies in thee to do it. Should this be thy temper—which, God forbid—if I send thee to pray, it must be with Peter's counsel to Simon Magus, 'Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee,' Acts 8:22. But I suppose thee, to whom now I am directing my advice, to be of a far different complexion—one brought to some sense of thy deplored state, and so softened by the word that thou couldst be content to have Christ upon any terms; only thou art at a loss in thy own thoughts, how such an impotent creature, yea impudent sinner, as thou hast been, should ever come to believe on him. So that it is not the love of any present sin in thy heart, but the fear of thy past sins in thy conscience, that keeps thee from believing. Now for thee it is that I would gather the best encouragements I can out of the word, and with them strew thy way to the throne of grace.

Go, poor soul, to prayer for faith. I do not fear a chiding for sending such customers to God's door. He that sends us to call sinners home unto him, cannot be angry to hear thee call upon him. He is not so thronged with such suitors as that he can find in his heart to send them away with a denial that come with this request in their mouths. Christ complains that sinners 'will not come unto him that they may have eternal life;' and dost thou think he will let any complain of him, that they desire to come, and he is unwilling they should? Cheer up thy heart, poor creature, and knock boldly; thou hast a friend in God's own bosom that will procure thy welcome. He that could, without any prayer made to him, give Christ for thee, will not be unwilling, now thou so earnestly prayest, to give faith unto thee. When thou prayest God to give, he commands thee to do. 'And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ,' 1 John 3:23. So that, in praying for faith, thou prayest that his will may be done by thee; yea, *that* part of his will which above all he desires should be done—called therefore with an emphasis 'the work of God.' 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent,' John 6:29. As if Christ had said, 'If ye do not this, ye do nothing

for God;' and surely Christ knew his Father's mind best. O how welcome must that prayer be to God which falls in with his chiefest design.

Joab found his request, in the mouth of the woman of Tekoah, to take as he would have it. How could it do otherwise, when he asks nothing but what the king liked better than himself did or could? And doth it not please God more, thinkest thou—how strong soever thy desires for faith are—that a poor humbled sinner should believe, than it can do to the creature himself? Methinks, by this time, thou shouldst begin to promise thyself, poor soul, a happy return of this thy adventure, which thou hast now sent to heaven. But for thy further encouragement know that this grace, which thou so wantest and makest thy moan to God for, is a principal part of Christ's purchase. That blood, which is the price of pardon, is the price of faith also, by which poor sinners may come to have the benefit of that pardon. As he has bought off that wrath which man's sin had justly kindled in God's heart against him, so hath also that enmity which the heart of the creature is filled with against God, and paid for a new stock of grace, wherewith his bankrupt creature may again set up; so that, poor soul, when thou goest to pray for faith, look up unto Christ, as having a bank of grace lying by him, to give out to poor sinners who see they have nothing of their own to begin with, and in the sense of this their beggary repair to him. 'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them,' Ps. 68:18. This is beyond all doubt meant of Christ, and to him applied, Eph. 4:8. Now observe,

*First.* There is a bank and treasure of gifts in the hand of Christ—'Thou hast.'

*Second.* *Who trusts him with them;* and that is his Father—'Thou hast received gifts;' that is, Christ of his Father.

*Third.* When, or *upon what consideration*, doth the Father deposit this treasure into Christ's hands? 'Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received,' &c. That is, when Christ had vanquished sin and Satan by his death and rode in the triumphant chariot of his ascension into heaven's glorious city, *then* did Christ receive these gifts. They were the purchase of his blood, and the pay-

ment of an old debt which God, before the foundation of the world—when the covenant was transacted and struck—promised his Son, upon the condition of his discharging sinful man's debt with the effusion of his own precious blood unto death.

*Fourth.* The *persons* for whose use Christ received these gifts—'for men,' not angels—for 'rebellious' men, not men without sin; so that, poor soul, thy sinful nature and life do not make thee an excepted person, and shut thee out from receiving any of this dole.

*Fifth.* Observe the *nature of these gifts*, and the *end* they are given Christ for; 'that God may dwell in them or with them.' Now, nothing but faith can make a soul that hath been rebellious a place meet for the holy God to dwell in. This is the gift indeed he received all other gifts for, in a manner. Wherefore the gifts of the Spirit and ministry, 'apostles, teachers, pastors,' &c., but that by these he might work faith in the hearts of poor sinners? Let this give thee boldness, poor soul, humbly to press God for that which Christ hath paid for. Say, 'Lord, I have been a rebellious wretch indeed; but did Christ receive nothing for such? I have an unbelieving heart; but I hear there is faith paid for in thy covenant. Christ shed his blood that thou mightest shed forth thy Spirit on poor sinners.' Dost thou think, that while thou art thus pleading with God, and using Christ's name in prayer to move him, that Christ himself can sit within hearing of all this, and not befriend thy motion to his Father? Surely he is willing that what God is indebted to him should be paid; and therefore, when thou beggest faith upon the account of his death, thou shalt find him ready to join issue with thee in the same prayer to his Father. Indeed, he went to heaven on purpose that poor returning souls might not want a friend at court, when they come with their humble petitions thither.

*[The unbeliever should, for faith,  
CONVERSE MUCH WITH THE PROMISES.]*

FOURTH DIRECTION. *Converse much with the promises, and be frequently pondering them in thy musing thoughts.* It is indeed the Spirit's work, and only his, to bottom thy soul upon the promise, and give his word a being by faith in thy heart. This thou canst not do. Yet, as fire came down from heaven upon Elijah's sacrifice,

when he had laid the wood in order and gone as far as he could; so thou mayest comfortably hope that then the Spirit of God will come with spiritual light and life to quicken the promise upon thy heart, when thou hast been conscientiously diligent in meditating on the promise; if withal thou ownest God in the thing as he did. For when he had laid all in order, he lift up his heart to God in prayer, expecting all from him, 1 Kings 18:36. I know no more speedy way to invite the Spirit of God into our assistance than this. As he tempts the devil to tempt him that lets his eyes gaze, or thoughts gad, upon a lustful object, so he bespeaks the Holy Spirit's company that lets out his thoughts upon holy heavenly objects. We need not doubt but the Spirit of God is as willing to cherish any good motion, as the infernal spirit is to nourish that which is evil. We find the spouse sitting under the shadow of her beloved, as one under an apple-tree, Song 2:3, and presently she tells us 'his fruit was sweet to her taste.' What doth this her sitting under his shadow better signify, than a soul sitting under the thoughts of Christ and the precious promises, that grow out of him as branches out of a tree? Do but, O Christian, place thyself here awhile, and it were strange if the Spirit should not shake some fruit from one branch or another into thy lap. Thou knowest not but, as Isaac met his bride when he went into the fields to meditate, so thou mayest meet thy beloved while walking by thy meditations in this garden of the promises.

*[The unbeliever should press his soul with the  
STRONG OBLIGATION WE ARE UNDER TO BELIEVE.]*

FIFTH DIRECTION. *Press and urge thy soul home with that strong obligation that lies upon thee, a poor humbled sinner, to believe.* Possibly, God hath [so] shamed thee in the sight of thy own conscience for other sins, that thou loatest the very thought of them, and durst as well run thy head into the fire as allow thyself in them. If thou shouldst wrong thy neighbour in his person, name, or estate, it would kindle a fire in thy conscience and make thee afraid to look within doors—converse, I mean, with thy own thoughts—till thou hadst repented of it. And is faith the only indifferent thing—a business left to thy own choice, whether thou wilt be so good to thyself as to believe or no? Truly, the

tenderness of conscience which many humbled sinners express in trembling at, and smiting them for, other sins, compared with the little sense they express for this of unbelief, speaks as if they thought that they offended God in them, and only wronged themselves by this their unbelief. O how greatly thou art deceived and abused in thy own thoughts if these be thy apprehensions!—yea, if thou dost not think thou dishonourest God and offendest him in a more transcendent manner by thy unbelief than by all thy other sins!

What Bernard saith of a hard heart I may say of an unbelieving heart, *illud cor verè durum, quod non trepidat, ad nomen cordis duri*—that is a hard heart indeed, saith he, that trembles not at the name of a hard heart. And that is an unbelieving heart indeed, that trembles not at the name of an unbelieving heart. Call thyself, O man, to the bar, and hear what thy soul hath to say for its not closing with Christ, and thou shalt then see what an unreasonable reason it will give. It must be either because thou likest not the terms, or else because thou fearest they are too good ever to be performed. Is the first of these thy reason, because thou likest not the terms on which Christ is offered? Possibly, might thou but have had Christ and thy lusts with him, thou wouldst have been better pleased. But to part with thy lusts to gain a Christ, this thou thinkest is 'a hard saying.' It is strange this should offend thee, which God could not have left out and truly loved us. Thou art a sot, a devil, if thou dost not think thy sins the worst piece of thy misery. O what is Christ worth in thy thoughts if thou darest not trust him to recompense the loss of a base lust? That man values Gold little who thinks he shall pay too dear for it by throwing the dirt or dung out of his hands, with which they are full, to receive it. Well sinner, the terms for having Christ, it seems, content thee not. Ask then thy soul how the terms on which thou holdest thy lusts like thee? Canst thou, doth thou think, better spare the blissful presence of God and Christ in hell, where thy lusts, if thou holdest of this mind, are sure enough to leave thee at last, than the company of thy lusts in heaven, whither faith in Christ would as certainly bring thee? Then take thy choice, and leave it for thy work in hell to repent of thy folly. But I should think, if thou wouldst be so faithful to thyself as to state the

case right, and then seriously acquaint thy soul with it, giving it time and leisure to dwell upon it daily, that thou wouldst soon come to have better thoughts of Christ, and worse of thy sins.

But may be this is not the reason that keeps thee from believing. The terms thou likest highly, but it cannot enter into thy heart to think that ever such great things as are promised should be performed to such a one as thou art. Well, of the two, it is better the rub in thy way to Christ should lie in the difficulty that thy understanding finds to conceive, than in the obstinacy of thy will not to receive, what God in Christ offers. But this must be removed also. And therefore fall to work with thy soul, and labour to bring it to reason in this particular, for, indeed, nothing can be more irrational than to object against the reality and certainty of God's promises. Two things well wrought on thy soul, would satisfy thy doubts and scatter thy fears as to this.

*First.* Labour to get a right notion of God in thy understanding, and it will not appear strange at all that a great God should do so great things for poor sinners. If a beggar should promise you a thousand pounds a year, you might indeed slight it, and ask where should he have it? But if a prince should promise more, you would listen after it, because he hath an estate that bears proportion to his promise. God is not engaged for more by promise than infinite mercy, power, and faithfulness can see discharged. 'Be still, and know that I am God,' Ps. 46:10. Of this psalm Luther would say, in times of great confusion in the church, 'Let us sing the six and fortieth psalm, in spite of the devil and all his instruments.' And this clause of it, poor humbled soul, thou mayest sing with comfort, in spite of Satan and sin also, 'Be still, O my soul, and know that he who offers thee mercy is God.' 'They that know his name will trust in him.'

*Second.* Peruse well the securities which this great God gives for the performance of his promise to the believer, and thou shalt find them so many and great—though his bare word deserves to be taken for more than our souls are worth—that if we had the most slippery cheating companion in the world under such bonds for the paying of a sum of money, we should think it were sure enough; and wilt thou not rest satisfied when the true and faithful God puts himself under these for thy security, whose truth is so immutable that

it is more possible for light to send forth darkness, than it is that a lie should come out of his blessed lips?

#### BRANCH FOURTH.

[EXHORTATION TO BELIEVERS *to preserve the 'shield of faith.'*]

I now turn myself to you that are believers in a double exhortation. FIRST. Seeing faith is such a choice grace, be stirred up to a more than ordinary care to preserve it. SECOND. If faith be such a choice grace, and thou hast it, dent not what God hath done for thee.

*[Faith is to be PRESERVED WITH EXCEEDING CARE because of its pre-eminence among graces.]*

EXHORTATION FIRST. Seeing faith is such a choice grace, *be stirred up to a more than ordinary care to preserve it.* Keep that, and it will keep thee and all thy other graces. Thou standest by faith; if that fails thou fallest. Where shall we find thee then but under thy enemies' feet? Be sensible of any danger thy faith is in; like that Grecian captain who, being knocked down in fight, asked as soon as he came to himself where his shield was. This he was solicitous for above anything else. O be asking, in this temptation, and that duty, where is thy faith, and how it fares? This is the grace which God would have us chiefly judge and value ourselves by, because there is the least danger of priding in this self-emptying grace above any other. 'I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith,' Rom. 12:3. There were many gifts which the Corinthians received from God, but he would have them think of themselves rather by their faith, and the reason is, that they may 'think soberly.'

Indeed all other graces are to be tried by our faith; if they be not fruits of faith they are of no true worth. This is the difference between a Christian and an honest heathen. He values himself by his patience, temperance, liberality, and other moral virtues which he hath to show above others. These he expects will commend

him to God and procure him a happiness after death; and in these he glories and makes his boast while he lives. But the Christian, he is kept sober in the sight of these—though they commence graces in him that were but virtues in the heathen—because he hath a discovery of Christ, whose righteousness and holiness by faith become his; and he values himself by these more than what is inherent in him. I cannot better illustrate this than by two men—the one a courtier, the other a countryman and a stranger to the court, both having fair estates, but the courtier the greatest by far. Ask the country gentleman, that hath no relation to court or place in the prince's favour, what he is worth; and he will tell you as much as his lands and monies amount to. These he values himself by. But, ask the courtier what he is worth; and he—though he hath more land and money by far than the other—will tell you he values himself by the favour of his prince more than by all his other estate. I can speak a big word, saith he: 'What my prince hath is mine, except his crown and royalty; his purse mine to maintain me, his love to embrace me, his power to defend me.' The poor heathens, being strangers to God and his favour in Christ, they blessed themselves in the improvement of their natural stock, and that treasure of moral virtues which they had gathered together with their industry, and the restraint that was laid upon their corruptions by a secret hand they were not aware of. But the believer, having access by faith into this grace wherein he stands so high in court favour with God by Jesus Christ, he doth and ought to value himself chiefly by his faith rather than any other grace. Though none can show these graces in their true heavenly beauty besides himself, yet, they are not these, but Christ, who is his by faith, that he blesseth himself in. The believer, he can say through mercy, that he hath a heart beautified with those heavenly graces, to which the heathen's mock-virtue's and the proud self-justiciary's mock-graces also, are no more to be compared, than the image in the glass is to the face, or the shadow to the man himself. He can say he that hath holiness in truth, which they have but in show and semblance. And this grace of God in him he values infinitely above all the world's treasure or pleasure—he had rather be the ragged saint than the robed sinner—yea, above his natural life, which he can be willing to



lose, and count himself no loser, may he thereby but secure this his spiritual life. But this is not the biggest word a believer can say. He is not only partaker of the divine nature by that principle of holiness infused to him; but he is heir to all the holiness, yea, to all the glorious perfections, that are in God himself. All that God is, hath, or doth, he hath leave to call his own. God is pleased to be called his people's God—'The God of Israel,' II Sam. 23:3. As a man's house and land bears the owner's name upon it, so God is graciously pleased to carry his people's name upon him, that all the world may know who are they he belongs to. Naboth's field is called 'the portion of Naboth,' II Kings 11:21; so God is called 'the portion of Jacob,' Jer. 10:16. Nothing hath God kept from his people, saving his crown and glory. That, indeed, he 'will not give to another,' Isa. 42:8. If the Christian wants strength, God would have him make use of his; and that he may do boldly and confidently, the Lord calls himself his people's strength, 'the strength of Israel will not lie,' I Sam. 15:29. Is it righteousness and holiness he is scanted in? Behold, where it is brought unto his hand—Christ 'is made unto us righteousness,' I Cor. 1:30, called therefore 'the Lord our righteousness,' Jer. 33:16. Is it love and mercy they would have? All the mercy in God is at their service. 'Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee!' Ps. 31:19. Mark the phrase, 'laid up for them.' His mercy and goodness—it is intended for them. As a father that lays up such a sum of money, and writes on the bag, 'This is a portion for such a child.' But how comes the Christian to have this right to God, and all that vast and untold treasure of happiness which is in him? This indeed is greatly to be heeded. It is faith that gives him a good title unto all this. That which makes him a child makes him an heir. Now faith makes him a child of God, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,' John 1:12. As therefore, if you would not call your birthright into question, and bring your interest in Christ, and those glorious privileges that come along with him, under a sad dispute in your souls, look to your faith.

*Question.* But what counsel, may the Christian say, can you give for the preserving of my faith?

*Answer.* To this I answer in these following

particulars. *First.* That which was instrumental to beget thy faith will be helpful to preserve it, viz. the word of God. *Second.* Wouldst thou preserve thy faith, look to thy conscience. *Third.* Exercise it. *Fourth.* Take special notice of that unbelief which yet remains in thee. *Fifth.* If thou wouldst preserve thy faith, labour to increase it.

[DIRECTIONS to believers for the preserving of faith.]

*First Direction.* That which was instrumental to beget thy faith will be helpful to preserve it—I mean the word of God. As it was seed for the former purpose in thy conversion, so now it is milk for the present sustentation of thy faith. Lie sucking at this breast, and that often. Children cannot suck long, nor digest much at a time, and therefore need the more frequent returns of their meals. Such children are all believers in this world. 'Precept' must be 'upon precept, line upon line, here a little, and there a little.' The breast [must be] often drawn out for the nourishing of them up in their spiritual life, or else they cannot subsist. It was not ordinary that Moses should look so well as he did after he had fasted so long, Ex. 34:28, 29. And truly it is a miraculous faith they must have who will undertake to keep their faith alive without taking any spiritual repast from the word. I have heard of some children that have been taken from their mother's breast as soon almost as born, and brought up by hand, who yet have done well for their natural life. But I shall not believe a creature can thrive in his spiritual life, who cast off ordinances, and weans himself from the word, till I hear of some other way of provision that God hath made for the ordinary maintenance of it besides this; and I despair of living so long as to see this proved. I know some, that we may hope well of, have been for a time persuaded to turn their backs on the word and ordinances; but they have turned well hunger-bit to their old fare again, yea, with Naomi's bitter complaint in their mouths, 'I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty,' Ruth 1:21. And happy are them that they are come to their stomachs in this life, before this food be taken off the table, never more to be set on. He that taught Christians to pray for their daily bread, did suppose they had need of it; and surely he did not mean only or chiefly corporal bread, who, in the same chapter

bids them, 'But seek ye first the kingdom of God,' Matt. 6:33. Well, Christian, prize thou the word, fed savourily on the word, whether it be dished forth in a sermon at the public, or in a conference with some Christian friend in private, or in a more secret duty of reading and meditation by thy solitary self. Let none of these be disused, or carnally used, by thee, and with God's blessing thou shalt reap the benefit of it in thy faith. When thy stomach fails to the word, thy faith must needs begin to fail on the word. O that Christians, who are so much in complaints of their weak faith, would but turn their complaints into inquiries why it is so weak and declining! Is it not because faith hath missed its wonted meals from the word? Thou, haply, formerly broken through many straits to keep thy acquaintance with God in his word, and wert well paid for that time which thou didst borrow of thy other occasions for this end, by that sweet temper that thou foundest thy heart in to trust God and rely upon him in all conditions; but now, since thou hast discontinued thy acquaintance with God in those ordinances, thou perceivest a sad change. Where thou couldst have trusted God, now thou art suspicious of him. Those promises that were able in a mutiny and hubbub of thy unruly passions, to have hushed and quieted all in thy soul at their appearing in thy thoughts, have now, alas! but little authority over thy murmuring unbelieving heart, to keep it in any tolerable order. If it be thus with thee, poor soul, thy case is sad; and I cannot give thee better counsel for thy soul, than that which physicians give men in a consumption for their bodies. They ask them where they were born and bred up, and to that their native air they send them, as the best means to recover them. Thus, soul, let me ask thee, if thou ever hadst faith, where it was born and bred up? was it not in the sweet air of ordinances, hearing, meditating, conferring of the word, and praying over the word? Go, poor creature, and get thee as fast as thou canst into thy native air, where thou didst draw thy first Christian breath, and where thy faith did so thrive and grow for a time. No means more hopeful to set thy feeble faith on its legs again than this.

*Second Direction.* Wouldst thou preserve thy faith, *look to thy conscience.* A good conscience is the bottom faith sails in. If the conscience be wrecked, how can it be thought that faith should

be safe? If faith be the jewel, a good conscience is the cabinet in which it is kept; and if the cabinet be broken, the jewel must needs be in danger of losing. Now you know what sins waste the conscience—sins either deliberately committed, or impudently continued in.

O take heed of deliberate sins! Like a stone thrown into a clear stream, they will so roil thy soul and muddy it, that thou, who even now couldst see thy interest in the promise, wilt be at a loss and not know what to think of thyself. They are like the fire on the top of the house; it will be no easy matter to quench it. But, if thou hast been so unhappy as to fall into such a slough, take heed of lying in it by impenitency. The sheep may fall into a ditch, but it is the swine that wallows in it; and therefore, how hard wilt thou find it, thinkest thou, to act thy faith on the promise, when thou art, by thy filthy garments and besmeared countenance, so unlike one of God's holy one's? It is dangerous to drink poison, but far more to let it lie in the body long. Thou canst not act thy faith, though a believer, on the promise, so as to apply the pardon it presents to thy soul, till thou hast renewed thy repentance.

*Third Direction.* *Exercise thy faith,* if thou meanest to preserve it. We live by faith, and faith lives by exercise. As we say of some stirring men, they are never well but at work—confine them in their bed or chair and you kill them; so here, hinder faith from working, and you are enemies to the very life and being of it. Why do we act faith so little in prayer, but because we are no more frequent in it? Let the child seldom see its father or mother, and when he comes into their presence he will not make much after them. Why are we no more able to live on a promise when at a plunge? Surely because we live no more with the promise. The more we converse with the promise, the more confidence we shall put in it. We do not strangers as we do our neighbours, in whose company we are almost every day. It were a rare way to secure our faith, yea, to advance it and all our other graces, would we, in our daily course labour to do all our actions, as in obedience to the command, so in faith on the promise. But alas! how many enterprises are undertaken where faith is not called in, nor the promise consulted with, from one end of the business to the other? And therefore, when we

would make use of faith in some particular strait, wherein we think ourselves to be more than ordinary at a loss, our faith itself is at a loss, and to seek, like a servant who, because his master very seldom employs him, makes bold to be gadding abroad, and so when his master doth call him upon some extraordinary occasion, he is out of the way and not to be found. O Christian! take heed of letting your faith be long out of work. If you do not use it when you ought, it might fail you when you desire most to act it.

*Fourth Direction.* Take special notice of that unbelief which yet remain in thee and, as it is putting forth daily its head in thy Christian course, be sure thou loadest thy soul with the sense of it, and deeply humblest thyself before God for it. What thy faith loseth by every act of unbelief, it recovers again by renewing thy repentance. David's faith was on a mending hand when he could shame himself heartily for his unbelief, Ps. 73:22. He confesseth how 'foolish and ignorant' he was; yea, saith he, 'I was as a beast before thee'—so irrational and brutish his unbelieving thoughts now appeared to him—and, by this ingenuous, humble confession, the malignity of his distemper breathes out [so] that he is presently in his old temper again, and his faith is able to act as high as ever. 'Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory,' ver. 23, 24. But so long as thy unbelief is sure to grow upon thee as thou beest unhumbled for it. We have the reason why the people of Laish were so bad. 'There was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in anything,' Judges 18:7. Christian, thou hast a magistrate in thy bosom commissioned by God himself to check, reprove, and shame thee, when thou sinnest. Indeed, all things go to wreck in that soul where this [one] doth his office. Hear therefore what this hath to charge thee with, that thou mayest be ashamed. There is no sin dishonours God more than unbelief; and this sword cuts his name deepest when in the hand of a saint. O to be wounded in the house of his friends, this goes near the tender heart of God. And there is reason enough why God should take this sin so unkindly at a saint's hand, if we consider the near relation such a one stands in to God. It would grieve an indulgent father to see his own child come into court, and there bear witness against him and charge him of

some untruth in his words, more than if a stranger should do it; because the testimony of a child, though, when it is for the vindication of a parent it may lose some credit in the opinion of those that hear it, upon the suspicion of partiality, yet, when against a parent, it seems to carry some more probability of truth than what is another that is a stranger says against him; because the band of natural affection with which the child is bound to his parent is so sacred that it will not be easily suspected. He can offer violence to it, but upon the more inviolable necessity of bearing witness to the truth.

O think of this, Christian, again and again—by thy unbelief thou bearest false witness against God! And if thou, a child of God, speakest no better of thy heavenly Father, and presentest him in no fairer character to the world, it will be no wonder if it be confirmed in its hard thoughts of God, even to final impenitency and unbelief, when it shall see how little credit he finds with thee, for all thy great profession of him and near relation to him. When we would sink the reputation of a man the lowest possible, we cannot think of an expression that will do it more effectually than to say, 'He is such a one as those that are nearest to him, even his own children, dare not trust, or will not give him a good word.' O Christian, ask thyself whether thou couldst be willing to be the unhappy instrument to defame God, and take away his good name in the world. Certainly thy heart trembles at the thought of it if a saint; and if it doth, then surely thy unbelief, by which thou hast done this so oft, will wound thee to the very heart; and, bleeding for what thou hast done, thou wilt beware of taking that sword into thy hand again, with which thou hast given so many a wound to the name of God and thy own peace.

*Fifth Direction.* If thou wouldst preserve thy faith, labour to increase it. None [are] in more danger of losing what they have than those poor-spirited men who are content with what they have. A spark is sooner smothered than a flame; a drop more easily drunk up and dried than a river. The stronger thy faith is, the safer thy faith is from the enemies' assaults. The intelligence which an enemy hath of a castle's being weakly provided for a siege, is enough to bring him against it, which else should not have been troubled with his company. The devil is a coward, and he loves to fight on the greatest

advantage; and greater he cannot have than the weakness of the Christian's faith. Didst thou but know, Christian, the many privileges of a strong faith above a weak, thou wouldst never rest till thou hadst it. Strong faith comes conqueror out of those temptations where weak faith is foiled and taken prisoner. Those Philistines could not stand before Samson in his strength, who durst dance about him scornfully in his weakness. When David's faith was up how undauntedly did he look death in the face! 1 Sam. 30:6. But, when that was out of heart, O how poor-spirited is he!—ready to run his head into every hole, though never so dishonourably, to save himself, 1 Sam. 21:13.

Strong faith frees the Christian from those heart-rending thoughts which weak faith must needs be oppressed with. 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee,' Isa. 26:3. So much faith, so much inward peace and quietness. If little faith, then little peace and serenity, through the storms that our unbelieving fears will necessarily gather. If strong faith, then strong peace; for so the ingemination in the Hebrew, 'peace, peace,' imports. It is confessed that weak faith hath as much peace with God through Christ as the other hath by his strong faith, but not so much bosom peace. Weak faith will as surely land the Christian in heaven as strong faith; for it is impossible the least dram of true grace should perish, being all incorruptible seed. But the weak doubting Christian is not like to have so pleasant a voyage thither as another with strong faith. Though all in the ship come safe to shore, yet he that is all the way sea-sick hath not so comfortable a voyage as he that is strong and healthful. There are many delightful prospects occur in a journey which he that is sick and weak loseth the pleasure of. But the strong man views all with abundance of delight; and though he wisheth with all his heart he was at home, yet the entertainment he hath from these do much shorten and sweeten his way to him. Thus, Christian, there are many previous delights which saints travelling to heaven meet on their way thither—besides what God hath for them at their journey's end—but it is the Christian whose faith is strong and active on the promise that finds them. This is he who sees the spiritual glories in the promise that ravish his soul with unspeakable delight; while the doubting Christian's eye of faith is so gummed

up with unbelieving fears that he can see little to affect him in it. This is he that goes singing all the way with the promise in his eye; while the weak Christian, kept in continual pain with his own doubts and jealousies, goes sighing and mourning with a heavy heart, because his interest in the promise is yet under a dispute in his own thoughts. As you would not therefore live uncomfortably, and have a dull melancholy walk of it to heaven, labour to strengthen your faith.

*Question.* But may be you will ask, How may I know whether my faith be strong or weak? I answer by these following characters.

[CHARACTERS *by which we may know whether faith be strong or weak.*]

1. *Character.* The more *entirely the Christian can rely on God, upon his naked word in the promise, the stronger his faith is.* He, surely, putteth greater confidence in a man that will take his own word or single bond for a sum of money, than he who dares not, except some others will be bound for him. When we trust God for his bare promise, we trust him on his own credit, and this is faith indeed. He that walks without staff or crutch is stronger than he that needs these to lean on. Sense and reason, these are the crutches which weak faith leans on too much in its acting. Now, soul, inquire,

(1.) Canst thou bear up thyself on the promise, *though the crutch of sense and present feeling be not at hand?* May be thou hast had some discoveries of God's love and beamings forth of his favour upon thee; and so long as the sun shined thus in at thy window thy heart was lightsome, and thou thoughtest thou shouldst never distrust God more, or listen to thy unbelieving thoughts more; but how findest thou thy heart now, since those sensible demonstrations are withdrawn, and may be some frowning providence sent in the room of them? Dost thou presently dispute the promise in thy thoughts, as not knowing whether thou mayest venture to cast anchor on it or no? Because thou hast lost the sense of his love, does thy eye of faith fail thee also, that thou hast lost the sight of his mercy and truth in the promise? Surely thy eye of faith is weak, or else it would read the promise without these spectacles. The little child, indeed, thinks the

mother is quite lost if she goes but out of the room where he is; but as it grows older so it will be wiser. And truly so will the believer also. Christian, bless God for the experiences and sensible tastes thou hast at any time of his love; but know, that we cannot judge of our faith, whether weak or strong, by them. Experiences, saith Parisiensis, are like crutches, which do indeed help a lame man to go, but they do not make the lame man sound or strong; food and physic must do that. And therefore, Christian, labour to lean more on the promise, and less on sensible expressions of God's love, whether it be in the present feeling or past experiences of it. I would not take you off from improving these, but [from] leaning on these, and limiting the actings of our faith to these. A strong man, though he doth not lean on his staff all the way he goes—as the lame man doth on his crutch, which bears his whole weight—yet he may make good use of it now and then to defend himself when set upon by a thief or dog in his way. Thus the strong Christian may make good use of his experiences in some temptations, though he doth not lay the weight of his faith upon them, but [upon] the promise.

(2.) Canst thou bear thyself upon the promise, *when the other crutch of reason breaks under thee?* or does thy faith ever fall to the ground with it? That is a strong faith indeed that can trample upon the improbabilities and impossibilities which reason would be objecting against the performance of the promise, and give credit to the truth of it with a *non obstante* — notwithstanding. Thus Noah fell hard to work about the ark, upon the credit he gave both the threatening and promissory part of God's word, and never troubled his head to clear the matter to his reason how these strange things could come to pass. And it is imputed to the strength of Abraham's faith, that he could not suffer his own narrow reason to have the hearing of the business, when God promised him a Michaelmas<sup>cxcii</sup> spring—as I may say—a son in his old age. 'And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead,' Rom. 4:19. Skilful swimmers are not afraid to go above their depth, whereas young learners feel for the ground, and are loath to go far from the bank-side. Strong faith fears not when God carries the creature beyond the depth of his reason: 'We know not what to do,' said good

Jehoshaphat, 'but our eyes are upon thee,' II Chr. 20. As if he had said, 'We are in a sea of troubles; beyond our own help, or any thought how we can wind out of these straits; but our eyes are upon thee. We dare not give our case for desperate so long as there is strength in thine arm, tenderness in thy bowels, and truth in thy promise.' Whereas weak faith, that is groping for some footing for reason to stand on, it is taken up how to reconcile the promise and the creature's understanding. Hence those many questions which drop from its mouth. When Christ said, 'Give ye them to eat,' Mark 6, his disciples ask him, 'Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread?' As if Christ's bare word could not spare that cost and trouble! 'Whereby shall I know this?' saith Zacharias to the angel, 'for I am an old man,' Luke 1:18. Alas! his faith was not strong enough to digest, at present, this strange news.

2. *Character.* The more *composed and contented the heart is under the changes which providence brings upon the Christian's state and condition in the world, the stronger his faith is.* Weak bodies cannot bear the change of weather so well as healthful and strong ones do. Hot and cold, fair or foul, cause no great alteration in the strong man's temper; but alas! the other is laid up by them, or at best goes complaining of them. Thus strong faith can live in any climate, travel in all weather, and fadge with any condition. 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content,' Php. 4:11. Alas! all Christ's scholars are not of Paul's form; weak faith hath not yet got the mastery of this hard lesson. When God turns thy health into sickness, thy abundance into penury, thy honour into scorn and contempt, into what language dost thou now make thy condition known to him? Is thy spirit embittered into discontent, which thou ventest in murmuring complaints? or art thou well satisfied with God's dealings, so as to acquiesce cheerfully in thy present portion, not from an unsensibleness of the affliction, but approbation of divine appointment? If the latter, thy faith is strong.

(1.) It shows *God hath a throne in thy heart.* Thou reverencest his authority and ownest his sovereignty, or else thou wouldst not acquiesce in his orders. 'I was dumb, because thou didst it,' Ps. 39:9. If the blow had come from any other hand he could not have taken it so silently.

When the servant strike the child, he runs to his father and makes his complaint; but, though the father doth more to him, he complains not of his father, nor seeks redress from any other, because it is his father whose authority he reveres. Thus thou comportest thyself toward God; and what but a strong faith can enable thee? 'Be still, and know that I am God,' Ps. 46:10. We must know God believingly to be what he is, before our hearts will be 'still.'

(2.) This acquiescency of spirit under the disposition of providence shows *that thou dost not only stand in awe of his sovereignty, but hast amiable comfortable thoughts of his mercy and goodness in Christ.* Thou believest he can soon, and will certainly make thee amends, or else thou couldst not so easily part with these enjoyments. The child goes willingly to bed when others, may be, are going to supper at a great feast in the family; but the mother promiseth the child to save something for him against the morning; this the child believes and is content. Surely thou hast something in the eye of thy faith which will recompense all thy present loss; and this makes thee fast so willingly when others feast, be sick when others are well. Paul tells us why he and his brethren in affliction did not faint, II Cor. 4:16, 17. They saw heaven coming to them while earth was going from them. 'For which cause we faint not, ...for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'

3. *Character.* The more *able to wait long for answers to our desires and prayers, the stronger faith is.* It shows the tradesman to be poor and needy when he must have ready money for what he sells. They that are forehanded are willing to give time, and able to forbear long. Weak faith is all for the present; if it hath not presently its desires answered, then it grows jealous and lays down sad conclusions against itself—his prayer was not heard, or he is not one God loves, and the like. Much ado to be kept out of a fainting fit—'I said in my haste that all men were liars.' But strong faith that can trade with God for time, yea, waits God's leisure—'He that believeth shall not make haste,' Isa. 28:16. He knows his money is in a good hand, and he is not over-quick to call for it home, knowing well that the longest voyages have the richest returns. As rich lusty ground can forbear rain longer than lean or sandy [ground], which must have a

shower ever and anon, or the corn on it fades; or as a strong healthful man can fast longer without faintness, than the sickly and weak,—so the Christian of strong faith can stay longer for spiritual refreshing from the presence of the Lord, in the returns of his mercy and discoveries of his love to him, than one of weak faith.


4. *Character.* The more *the Christian can lose or suffer upon the credit of the promise, the stronger his faith is.* If you should see a man part with a fair inheritance, and leave his kindred and country where he might pass his days in the embracements of his dear friends and the delicious fare which a plentiful estate would afford him every day, to follow a friend to the other end of the world, with hunger and hardship, through sea and land, and a thousand perils that meet him on every hand, you would say that this man had a strong confidence of his friend, and a dear love to him, would you not? Nay, if he should do all this for a friend whom he never saw, upon the bare credit of a letter which he sends to invite him to come over to him, with a promise of great things he will do for him; *now*, to throw all his present possessions and enjoyments at his heels, and willingly put himself into the condition of a poor pilgrim and traveller, with the loss of all he hath, that he may come to his dear friend, this adds to the wonder of his confidence. Such gallant spirits we read of—'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice,' I Peter 1:6-8. Observe the place, and you shall find them in sorrowful plight —'in heaviness through manifold temptations'—yet, because their way lies through the sloughs to the enjoyment of God and Christ, whom they never saw or knew, but by the report the word makes of them, they can turn their back off the world's friendship and enjoyments—with which it courted them as well as others—and go with a merry heart through the deepest of them all. Here is glorious faith indeed. It is not praising of heaven, and wishing we were there, but a cheerful abandoning the dearest pleasures, and embracing the greatest sufferings of the world when called to the same, that will evidence our faith to be both true and strong.

5. *Character.* The more easily that *the Christian can repel motions, and resist temptations to sin, the stronger is his faith.* The snare or net which holds the little fish fast, the greater and

stronger fish easily breaks through. The Christian's faith is strong or weak as he finds it easy or hard to break from temptations to sin. When an ordinary temptation holds thee by the heel, and thou art entangled in like the fly in the spider's web—much ado to get off, and persuade thy heart from yielding—truly it speaks faith very feeble. To have no strength to oppose the assaults of sin and lust, speaks the heart void of faith. Where faith hath not a hand to prostrate an enemy, it yet hath a hand to lift up against it, and a voice to cry out for help to heaven. Some way or other faith will show its dislike and enter its protest against sin.

And to have little strength to resist, evidenceth a weak faith. Peter's faith was weak when a maid's voice dashed him out of countenance; but it was well amended when he could withstand, and, with a noble constancy, disdain the threats of a whole counsel, Acts 4. Christian, compare thyself with thyself, and give righteous judgment on thyself. Do now thy lusts as powerfully inveigle thy heart, and carry it away from God, as they did some months or years ago; or canst thou in truth say thy heart is got above them. Since thou hast known more of Christ, and had a view of his spiritual glories, canst thou now pass by their door and not look in; yea, when they knock at thy door in a temptation, thou canst shut it upon them, and disdain the motion? Surely thou mayest know thy faith is grown stronger. When we see that the clothes which a year or two ago were even fit for the person, will not now come on him, they are so little, we may easily be persuaded to believe the person is much grown since that time. If thy faith were no more grown, those temptations which fitted thee would like thee as well now. Find but the power of sin die, and thou mayest know that faith is more lively and vigorous. The harder the blow, the stronger the arm that gives it. A child cannot strike such a blow as a man. Weak faith cannot give such a home-blow to sin as a strong faith can.

6. *Character.* The more *ingenuity and love is in thy obediential walking, the stronger thy faith is.* Faith works by love, and therefore its strength or weakness may be discovered by the strength or weakness of that love it puts forth in the Christian's actings. The strength of a man's arm that draws a bow, is seen by the force the arrow which he shoots flies with. And certainly the

strength of our faith may be known by the force our love mounts to God with. It is impossible that weak faith—which is unable to draw the promise as a strong faith can—should leave such a forcible impression on the heart to love God to abandon sin, perform duty, and exert acts of obedience to his command, know thy place, and take it with humble thankfulness, thou art a graduate in the art of believing. The Christian's love advanceth by equal paces with his faith, as the heat of the day increaseth with the climbing sun; the higher that mounts towards its meridian, the hotter the day grows. So the higher faith lifts Christ up in the Christian, the more intense his love to Christ grows, which now sets him on work after another sort than he was wont. Before, when he was to mourn for his sins, he was acted by a slavish fear, and made an ugly face at the work, as one doth that drinks some unpleasing potion; but now acts of repentance are not distasteful and formidable, since faith hath discovered mercy to sit on the brow of justice, and undeceived the creature of those false and cruel thoughts of God which ignorantly he had taken up concerning him. He doth not now 'hate the word repentance'—as Luther said he once did before he understood that place, Rom. 1:17—but goes about the work with amiable sweet apprehensions of a good God, that stands ready with the sponge of his mercy dipped in Christ's mercy, to blot out his sins as fast as he scores them up by his humble sorrowful confession of them. And the same might be said concerning all other offices of Christian piety. Strong faith makes the soul ingenuous. It doth not pay the performance of any duty, as an oppressed subject doth a heavy tax—with a deep sigh, to think how much he parts with—but as freely as a child would present his father with an apple of that orchard which he holds by gift from him. Indeed, the child when young is much servile and selfish, forbearing what his father forbids for fear of the rod, and doing what he commands for some fine thing or other that his father bribes him with, more than for pure love to his person or obedience to his will and pleasure. But, as he grows up and comes to understand himself better, and the relation he stands in, with the many obligations of it to filial obedience, then his servility and selfishness wear off, and his —natural affection—will prevail

more with him to please his father than any other argument whatever. And so will it with the Christian where faith is of any growth and ripeness.

7. *Character.* To name no more, *the more able faith is to sweeten the thoughts of death, and make it desirable to the Christian, the stronger his faith.* Things that are very sharp or sour will take much sugar to make them sweet. Death is one of those things which hath the most ungrateful taste to the creature's palate that can be. O it requires a strong faith to make the serious thoughts of it sweet and desirable! I know some in a pet and a passion have professed great desires of dying, but it hath been as a sick man desires to change his place, merely out of a weariness of, and discontent with, his present condition, without any due consideration of what they desire. But a soul that knows the consequences of death, and the unchangeableness of that state, whether of bliss or misery, that it certainly marries us to, will never cheerfully call for death in his cordial desires, till he be in some measure resolved from the promise what entertainment he may expect from God when he comes into that other world—and that weak faith will not do without abundance of fears and doubts. I confess, that sometimes a Christian of very weak faith may meet death with as little fear upon his spirit, yea, more joy, than one of a far stronger faith, when he is held up by the chin by some extraordinary comfort poured into his soul from God immediately. Should God withdraw this, however, his fears would return upon him, and he feel again his faintings; as a sick man, that hath been strangely cheered with a strong cordial, does his feebleness when the efficacy of it is spent. But we speak of the ordinary way how Christians come to have their hearts raised above the fear, yea, into a strong desire, of death, and that is by attaining to a strong faith. God can indeed make a feast of a few loaves, and multiply the weak Christian's little faith on a sudden, as he lives on a sick-bed, into a spread table of all varieties of consolations. But I fear that God will not do this miracle for that man or woman who, upon the expectation of this, contents himself with the little provision of faith he hath, and labours not to increase his store against that spending time.

[*Faith or the graces of God in a believer MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED.*]

EXHORTATION SECOND. We come to the *second word of exhortation* we have to speak to the saints:—*If faith be such a choice grace, and thou hast it, deny not what God hath done for thee.* Which is worst, thinkest thou?—the sinner to hide his sin and deny it, or the Christian to hide and deny his faith? I confess the first does worst, if we look to the intention of the persons; for the sinner hides his sin out of a wicked end. The doubting soul [however] means well—he is afraid to play the hypocrite and be found a liar in saying he hath what he fears he hath not. But, if we consider the consequence of the Christian's disowning the grace of God in him, and what use the devil makes of it for the leading him into many other sins, it will not be so easy to resolve whose sin is the greatest. Good Joseph meant piously when he had thought of putting away secretly his espoused Mary—thinking no other but that she had played the whore—and yet, it would have been a sad act if he had persisted in his thoughts, especially after the angel had told him that which was conceived in her to be of the Holy Ghost. Thus thou, poor mourning soul, may be, art oft thinking to put away thy faith as some by-blow of Satan, and base-born counterfeit grace begot on thy hypocritical heart by the father of lies. Well, take heed what thou dost. Hast thou had no vision—not extraordinary of an angel or immediate revelation, but ordinary of the Spirit of God—I mean in his word and ordinances, encouraging thee from those characters which are in the Scripture given of faith, and the conformity thy faith hath to them, to take and own thy faith as that which is conceived in thee by the Holy Ghost, and not a brat formed by the delusion of Satan in the womb of thy own groundless imagination? If so, be afraid of bearing false-witness against the grace of God in thee. As there is that makes himself rich in faith that hath nothing of this grace, so there is that maketh himself poor that hath great store of this riches. Let us therefore hear what are the grounds of this thy suspicion, that we may see whether thy fears or thy faith be imaginary and false. *First.* Saith the poor soul, I am afraid I have no true faith because I have not those joys and consolations which others have who believe.



*Second.* O but can there be any true faith where there is so much doubting as I find in myself?  
*Third.* O but I fear mine is a presumptuous faith, and if so, to be sure it cannot be right.

[GROUNDS OF SUSPICION *which lead to a believer's denying his faith.*]

*First Ground of Suspicion.* I am afraid, saith the poor soul, I have no true faith, *because I have not those joys and consolations which others have who believe.*

*Answer First.* Thou mayest have *inward peace though not joy.* The day may be still and calm though not glorious and sunshine. Though the Comforter be not come with his ravishing consolations, yet he may have hushed the storm of thy troubled spirit; and true peace, as well as joy, is the consequent of 'faith unfeigned.'

*Answer Second.* Suppose thou hast not yet attained so much as to this inward peace, yet know, *thou hast no reason to question the truth of thy faith for want of this.* We have peace with God as soon as we believe, but not always with ourselves. The pardon may be past the prince's hand and seal, and yet not put into the prisoner's hand. Thou thinkest them too rash, dost thou not, who judged Paul a murderer by the viper that fastened on his hand? And what art thou who condemnest thyself for an unbeliever, because of those troubles and inward agonies which may fasten for a time on the spirit of the most gracious child God hath on earth?

*Second Ground of Suspicion.* O but can there be any true faith *where there is so much doubting as I find in myself?*

*Answer.* There is a doubting which the Scripture opposeth to the least degree of faith. Our blessed Saviour tells them what wonder they shall do if they believe and 'doubt not,' Matt. 21:21; and, Luke 17:6, he tells his disciples if they have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, they shall do as much. That which is a faith without doubting in Matthew is faith as a grain of mustard-seed in Luke. But again, there is a doubting which the Scripture opposeth not to the truth of faith, but to the strength of faith, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' Matt. 14:31. They are the words of Christ to sinking Peter, in which he so chides his doubting as yet to acknowledge the truth of his faith, though

weak. All doubting is evil in its nature, yet some doubting, though evil in itself, doth evidence some grace that is good to be in the person so doubting; as smoke proves some fire. And peevishness and pettishness in a sick person that before lay senseless, is a good sign of some mending, though itself a thing bad enough. But the thing here desirable, I conceive, would be to give some help to the doubting soul, that he may what his doubting is symptomatical of; whether of true faith, though weak, or of no faith. Now for this I shall lay down FOUR CHARACTERS of those *doubtings* which accompany true faith.

1. *Character.* The *doubtings* of a true believer *are attended with much shame and sorrow of spirit, even for those doubtings.* I appeal to thy conscience, poor doubting soul, whether the consideration of this one sin doth not cost thee many a salt tear and heavy sigh which others know not of? Now, I pray, from whence come these? Will unbelief mourn for unbelief? or sin put itself to shame? No, sure, it shows there is a principle of faith in the soul that takes God's part, and cannot see his promises and name wronged by unbelief without protesting against it, and mourning under it, though the hands of this grace be too weak at present to drive the enemy out of the soul. The law cleared the damsel that 'cried' out 'in the field,' and so will the gospel thee who sincerely mournest for thy unbelief, Deut. 22:27. That holy man, whoever he was, was far gone in his doubting disease, Ps. 77. How many times do we find his unbelief putting the mercy and faithfulness of God—which should be beyond all dispute in our hearts—to the question and dubious vote in his distempered soul? He might with as much reason have asked his soul whether there was a God? as whether his mercy was clean gone and his promise failed? yet so far did his fears in this hurry carry him aside. But at last you have him acknowledging his folly, ver. 10, 'And I said this in my infirmity.' This I may thank thee for, O my unbelief! thou enemy of God and my soul, thou wilt be puzzling me with needless fears, and make me think and speak so unworthily of my God. This proved there was faith at the bottom of his unbelief.

2. *Character.* The *doubtings* of a sincere believer *are accompanied with ardent desires those things which it most calls in question and doubts of.* The weak believer, he questions whether God

loves him or no, but he desires it more than life. And this is the language of a gracious soul, 'Thy lovingkindness is better than life,' Ps. 63:3. He doubts whether Christ be his; yet, if you should ask him what value he sets upon Christ, and what he would give for Christ, he can tell you, and that truly, that no price should be too great if *he* were to be bought. No condition that God offers Christ upon appears to him hard, but all easy and cheap. And this is the judgment which only the believing soul can have of Christ. 'Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious,' 1 Peter 2:7. In a word, he doubts whether he be truly holy or only counterfeit; but his soul pants and thirsts after those graces most which he can see least. He to him should be the more welcome messenger that brings him the news of a broken heart, than another that tells him of a whole crown and kingdom fallen to him. He disputes every duty and action he doth, whether it be according to the rule of the word; and yet he passionately desires that he could walk without one wry step from it; and doth not quarrel with the word because it is so strict, but with his heart because it is so loose. And how great a testimony these give of a gracious frame of heart! See Ps. 119:20, 140, where David brings these as the evidence of his grace. Canst thou therefore, poor soul, let out thy heart strongly after Christ and his graces, while thou dost not see thy interest in either? Be of good cheer, thou art not so great a stranger with these as thou thinkest thyself. These strong desires are the consequent of some taste thou hast had of them already; and these doubts may proceed, not from an absolute want, as if thou wert wholly destitute of them, but [from] the violence of thy desires, which are not satisfied with what thou hast. It is very ordinary for excessive love to beget excessive fear, and that groundless. The wife, because she loves her husband dearly, fears when he is abroad she shall never see him more. One while she thinks he is sick; another while killed; and thus her love torments her without any just cause, when her husband is all the while well and on his way home. A jewel of great price, or ring that we highly value, if but laid out of sight, our extreme estimate we set on them makes us presently think them lost. It is the nature of passions in this our imperfect state, when strong and violent, to disturb our reason, and hide things from our eye which else were

easy to be seen. Thus many poor doubting souls are looking and hunting to find that faith which they have already in their bosoms—[it] being hid from them merely by the vehemency of their desire of it, and [by the] fear they should be cheated with a false one for a true. As the damsel 'opened not the gate for gladness' to Peter Acts 12:14—her joy at [the time then] present made her forget what she did—so the high value the poor doubting Christian sets on faith, together with an excess of longing after it, suffer him not to entertain so high an opinion of himself as to think he at present hath that jewel in his bosom which he so infinitely prizeth.

3. *Character.* The doubtings of a truly believing soul *make him more inquisitive how he may get what he sometimes he fears he hath not.* Many sad thoughts pass to and fro in his soul whether Christ be his or no, whether he may lay claim to the promise or no; and these cause such a commotion in his spirit, that he cannot rest till he come to some resolution in his own thoughts from the word concerning this great case. Therefore, as Ahasuerus, when he could not sleep, called for the records and chronicles of his kingdom, so the doubting the doubting soul betakes himself to the records of heaven—the word of God in the Scripture—and one while he is reading there, another while looking into his own heart, if he can find anything that answers the characters of Scripture—faith, as the face in the glass doth the face of man. David, Ps. 77, when he was at a loss what to think of himself, and many doubts did clog his faith —insomuch that the thinking of God increased his trouble—did not sit down and let the ship drive, as we say, not regarding whether God loved him or no. No; he 'communes with his own heart, and his spirit makes diligent search.' Thus it is with every sincere soul under doubtings. He dares no more sit down contented in that unresolved condition, than one who thinks he smells fire in his house dares settle himself to sleep till he hath looked into every room and corner, and satisfied himself that all is safe, lest he should be waked with the fire about his ears in the night. The poor doubting soul [is indeed] much more afraid, lest it should awake with hell-fire about it; whereas a soul in a state and under the power of unbelief, is secure and careless. The old world did not believe the threatening of the flood, and they

spend no thoughts about the matter. It is at their doors and windows before they had used any means how to escape it.

4. *Character.* In the midst of the true believer's doubtings *there is an innitency of his heart on Christ, and a secret purpose still to cleave to him.* At the same time that Peter's feet were sinking into the waters, he was lifting up a prayer to Christ; and this proved the truth of his faith, as the other its weakness. So Jonah, he had many fears, and sometimes so predominant, that as bad humours settle into a sore, so they gathered into a hasty unbelieving conclusion, yet then his faith had some little secret hold on God. 'Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple,' Jonah 2:4. And, 'When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord,' ver. 7. Holy David also, though he could not rid his soul of all those fears which got into it through his weak faith, as water into a leaking ship, yet he hath his hand at the pump, and takes up a firm resolution against them. 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee,' Ps. 56:3. The doubting Christian sinks, but, as a traveller in a slough where the bottom is firm, and so recovers himself. But the unbeliever, he sinks in his fears, as a man in a quick-sand, lower and lower till he be swallowed up into despair. The weak Christian's doubting is like the wavering of a ship at anchor—he is moved, yet not removed from his hold on Christ; but the unbeliever's, like the wavering of a wave, which, having nothing to stay it, is wholly at the mercy of the wind. 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed,' James 1:6.

*Third Ground of Suspicion.* O but, saith another, *I fear mine is a presumptuous faith, and if so, to be sure it cannot be right.*

*Answer.* For the fuller assoiling [*i.e.* clearing] this objection, I shall lay down *three characters of a presumptuous faith.*

1. *Character.* A presumptuous faith *is an easy faith.* It hath no enemy of Satan or our own corrupt hearts to oppose it, and so, like a stinking weed, shoots up and grows rank on a sudden. The devil never hath the sinner surer than when dreaming in this fool's paradise, and walking in his sleep, amidst his vain fantastical hopes of Christ and salvation. And therefore he is so far from waking him, that he draws the

curtains close about him, that no light nor noise in his conscience may break his rest. Did you ever know the thief call up him in the night whom he meant to rob and kill? No, sleep is his advantage. But true faith he is a sworn enemy against. He persecutes it in the very cradle, as Herod did Christ in the cratch;<sup>cxciii</sup> he pours a flood of wrath after it as soon as it betrays its own birth by crying and lamenting after the Lord. If thy faith be legitimate Naphtali may be its name; and thou mayest say, 'With great wrestlings have I wrestled with Satan and my own base heart, and at last have prevailed.' You know the answer that Rebecca had when she inquired of God about the scuffle and striving of the children in her womb, 'Two nations,' God told her, 'were in her womb.' If thou canst find the like strife in thy soul, thou mayest comfort thyself that it is from two contrary principles, faith and unbelief, which are lusting one against another; and thy unbelief, which is the elder—however now it strives for the mastery—shall serve the younger.

2. *Character.* Presumptuous faith *is lame of one hand;* it hath a hand to receive pardon and heaven from God, but no hand to give up itself to God. True faith hath the use of both her hands. 'My beloved is mine'—there the soul takes Christ; 'and I am his'—there she surrenders herself to the use and service of Christ. Now, didst thou ever pass over thyself freely to Christ? I know none but will profess they do this. But the presumptuous soul, like Ananias, lies to the Holy Ghost, by keeping back part, yea, the chief part, of that he promised to lay at Christ's feet. This lust he sends out of the way, when he should deliver it up to justice; and that creature enjoyment he twines about, and cannot persuade his heart to trust God with the disposal of it, but cries out when the Lord calls for it, 'Benjamin shall not go.' Life is bound up in it, and if God will have it from him he must take it by force, for there is no hope of gaining his consent. Is this the true picture of thy faith, and [of the] temper of thy soul? then verily thou blessest thyself in an idol, and mistake a bold face for a believing heart. But, if thou beest as willing to be faithful to Christ, as to pitch thy faith on Christ; if thou countest it as great a privilege that Christ should have a throne in thy heart and love, as that thou shouldst have a place and room in his mercy; in a word, if thou beest plain-

hearted and wouldst not hide a sin, nor lock up a creature enjoyment, from him, but desirest freely to give up thy dearest lust to the gibbet, and thy sweetest enjoyments to stay with, or go from thee, as thy God thinks fit to allow thee—though all this be with much regret and discontent from a malignant party of the flesh within thee—thou provest thyself a sound believer; and the devil may as well say that himself believeth as that thou presumest. If this be to presume, be thou yet more presumptuous. Let the devil nickname thee and thy faith as he pleaseth; the rose-water is not the less sweet because one writes ‘worm-wood water’ on the glass. The Lord knows who are his, and will own them for his true children, and their graces for the sweet fruits of his Spirit, though a false title be set on them by Satan and the world, yea, sometimes by believers on themselves. The father will not deny his child because he is a violent fit of a fever talks idle and denies him to be his father.

3. *Character.* The presumptuous faith *is a sapless and unsavoury faith.* When an unsound heart pretends to greatest faith on Christ, even then it finds little savour, tastes little sweetness in Christ. No, he hath his old tooth in his head, which makes him relish still the gross food of sensual enjoyments above Christ and his spiritual dainties. Would he but freely speak what he thinks, he must confess that if he were put to his choice whether he would sit with Christ and his children, to be entertained with the pleasures that they enjoy from spiritual communion with him in his promises, ordinances, and holy ways; or had rather sit with the servants, and have the scraps which God allows the men of the world in their full bags and bellies of carnal treasure; that he would prefer the latter before the former. He brags of his interest in God, but he care not how little he is in the presence of God in any duty or ordinance. Certainly, if he were such a favourite as he speaks, he would be more at court than he is. He hopes to be saved, he saith, but he draws not his wine of joy at this tap. It is not the thoughts of heaven that comfort him; but what he hath in the world and of the world, these maintain his joy. When the world's vessel is out, and the creature joy spent, alas, the poor wretch can find little relief from, or relish in, his pretended hopes of heaven and interest in Christ, but he is still whining after the other.

Whereas true faith alters the very creature's palate. No feast so sweet to the believer as Christ is. Let God take all other dishes off the board and leave but Christ, he counts his feast is not gone—he hath what he likes; but let all else stand, health, estate, friends, and what else the world sets a high value on, if Christ be withdrawn he soon misseth his dish, and makes his moan, and saith, ‘Alas! who hath taken away my Lord?’ It is Christ that seasons these and all his enjoyments, and makes them savoury meat to his palate; but without him they have no more taste than the white of an egg without salt.

## DIRECTION VIII.—SECOND GENERAL PART.


### [ARGUMENT PRESSING THE EXHORTATION.]

*‘Whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked’* (Eph. 6:16)

We have done with the *exhortation*, and now come to the second general part of the verse, viz. a *powerful argument* pressing this exhortation, contained in these words—‘Whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.’ ‘Ye shall be able.’ Not an uncertain ‘may be ye shall;’ but he is peremptory and absolute—‘ye shall be able.’ But what to do? ‘able to quench’—not only to resist and repel, but ‘to quench.’ But what shall they ‘quench?’ Not ordinary temptations only, but the worst arrows the devil hath in his quiver—‘fiery darts;’ and not some few of them, but ‘all the fiery darts of the wicked.’ In this second general there are two particulars. FIRST. The saint’s enemy described—‘*The wicked.*’ SECOND. The power and puissance of faith over the enemy—‘*Ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.*’

### DIVISION FIRST.—THE SAINT’S ENEMY DESCRIBED.

*‘The Wicked.’*

Here we have the saint’s enemy described in three particulars. FIRST. In their nature—‘wicked.’ SECOND. In their unity—‘wicked,’ or ‘wicked one,’ , in the singular number. THIRD. In their warlike furniture and provision, with which they take the field against the saints—‘darts,’ and they are ‘fiery.’

*[The saints enemy described* BY THEIR NATURE.]

FIRST. The saint’s enemy is here described *by their nature*—‘wicked.’ Something I have said of this, ver. 12 where Satan is called ‘spiritual wickednesses.’<sup>exciv</sup> I shall at present therefore pass it over with the lighter hand. Certainly there is some special lesson that God would have his people learn even from this attribute of the devil and his limbs—for the whole pack of devils and devilish men are here intended—that they are represented to the saint’s consideration by this name so oft as ‘wicked.’ I shall content myself with TWO ENDS, that I conceive God aims at by this name.

*First End.* They are called ‘wicked,’ as an odious name whereby God would raise his children’s stomachs into a loathing of sin above all things in

the world, and provoke their pure souls as to hatred and detestation of all sin, so [to] a vigorous resistance of the devil and his instruments, as such, who are wicked; which is a name that makes him detestable above any other. God would have us know, that when he himself would speak the worst he can of the devil, he can think of no name for the purpose like this—to say he is ‘the wicked one.’ The name which exalts God highest, and is the very excellency of all his other excellencies, is, that he is ‘the holy One,’ and ‘none holy as the Lord.’ This therefore gives the devil the blackest brand of infamy, that he is ‘the wicked one,’ and none wicked to that height besides himself. Could holiness be separated from any other of God’s attributes—which is the height of blasphemy to think—the glory of them would be departed. And could the devil’s wickedness be removed from his torments and misery, the case would be exceedingly altered. We ought then to pity him whom now we must no less than hate and abominate with a perfect hatred.

1. Consider this, *all ye who live in sin, and blush not to be seen in the practice of it.* O that you would behold your faces in this glass, and you

would see whom you look like! Truly, no other than the devil himself and in that which makes him most odious, which is his wickedness. Never more spit at the name of the devil, nor seem to be scared at any ill-shapen picture of him; for thou carriest a far more ugly one—and the truest of him that is possible—in thy own wicked bosom. The more wicked the more like the devil; who can draw the devil's picture like himself? If thou beest a wicked wretch thou art of the devil himself. 'Cain,' it is said, 'was of that wicked one,' 1 John 3:12. Every sin thou committest is a new line that the devil draws on thy soul. And if the image of God in a saint—which the Spirit of God is drawing for many years together in him—will be so curious a piece when the last line shall be drawn in heaven, O think, then, how frightful and horrid a creature thou wilt appear to be, when after all the devil's pains here on earth to imprint his image upon thee, thou shalt see thyself in hell as wicked to the full as a wicked devil can make thee.

2. Consider this, *O ye saints, and bestow your first pity on those poor forlorn souls that are under the power of a wicked devil.* It is a lamentable judgment to live under a wicked government, though it be but of men. For a servant in a family to be under a wicked master is a heavy plague. David reckons it among other great curses. 'Set thou a wicked man over him,' Ps. 109:6. O what is it then to have a wicked spirit over him! He would show himself very kind to his friend that should wish him to be the worst slave in Turkey, rather than the best servant of sin or Satan. And yet see the folly of men. Solomon tells us, 'When the wicked bear rule, the people mourn,' Prov. 29:2. But when a wicked devil rules, poor besotted sinners laugh and are merry. Well, you who are not out of your wits so far, but know sin's service to be the creature's utmost misery, mourn for them that go themselves laughing to sin, and by sin to hell.

And again, *let it fill thy heart, Christian, with zeal and indignation against Satan in all his temptations.* Remember he is wicked, and he can come for no good. Thou knowest the happiness of serving a holy God. Surely, then, thou hast an answer ready by thee against this wicked one comes to draw thee to sin. Canst thou think of fouling thy hands about his base nasty drudgery, after they have been used to so pure and fine work as the service of thy God is? Listen not to

Satan's motions except thou hast a mind to be 'wicked.'

*Second End.* They are called 'wicked,' as a name of contempt, for the encouragement of all believers in their combat with them. As if God had said, 'Fear them not; they are a wicked company you go against'—cause, and they who defend it, both 'wicked.' And truly, if the saints must have enemies, the worse they are the better it is. It would put mettle into a coward to fight with such a crew. Wickedness must needs be weak. The devils' guilt in their own bosoms tells them their cause is lost before the battle is fought. They fear thee, Christian, because thou art holy, and therefore thou needest not be dismayed at them who are wicked. Thou lookest on them as subtle, mighty, and many, and then thy heart fails thee. But look on all these subtle mighty spirits as wicked ungodly wretches, that hate God more than thee, yea thee for thy kindred to him, and thou canst not but take heart. Whose side is God on that thou art afraid? Will he that rebuked kings for touching his anointed ones and doing them harm in their bodies and estates, stand still, thinkest thou, and suffer these wicked spirits to attempt the life of God himself in thee, thy grace, thy holiness, without coming in to thy help? It is impossible.

[The saint's enemy described BY THEIR UNITY.]

SECOND. The saint's enemy is set out by their unity—'fiery darts of the wicked'—*J@B@ZD@* 'of the wicked one.' It is as if all were shot out of the same bow, and by the same hand; as if the Christian's fight were a single duel with one single enemy. All the legions of devils, and multitudes of wicked men and women, make but one great enemy. They are all one mystical body of wickedness; as Christ and his saints [are] one mystical holy body. One Spirit acts Christ and his saints; so one spirit acts devils, and ungodly men his limbs. The soul is in the little toe; and the spirit of the devil in the least of sinners. But I have spoken something of this subject elsewhere.<sup>CXCV</sup>

[The saint's enemy described  
BY THEIR WARLIKE PROVISION.]

THIRD. The saint's enemy is here described by their warlike furniture and provision with which they take the field against the saints—

‘darts,’ and those of the worst kind, ‘fiery darts.’

*First. Darts.* The *devil’s temptations* are the darts he useth against the souls of men and women. They may fitly be so called in a threefold respect.

1. *Darts or arrows are swift.* Thence is our usual expression, ‘As swift as an arrow out of a bow.’ Lightning is called God’s arrow, because it flies swiftly. ‘He sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them,’ Ps. 18:14, that is, lightning like arrows. Satan’s temptations flee like a flash of lightning—not long of coming. He needs no more time than the cast of an eye for the despatch of a temptation. David’s eye did but unawares fall upon Bathsheba, and the devil’s arrow was in his heart before he could shut his casement. Or the hearing of a word or two [will suffice]. Thus, when David’s servants had told what Nabal the churl said, David’s choler was presently up—an arrow of revenge wounded him to the heart. What quicker than a thought? Yet how oft is that a temptation to us? one silly thought riseth in a duty, and our hearts, before intent upon the work, are on a sudden carried away, like a spaniel after a bird that springs up before him as he goes after his master. Yea, if one temptation speeds not, how soon can he send another after it!—as quick as the nimblest archer. No sooner than one arrow is delivered, but he hath another on the string.

2. *Darts or arrows fly secretly.* And so do temptations.

(1.) The arrow oft *comes afar off*. A man may be wounded with a dart and not see who shot it. The wicked are said, to shoot their arrows ‘in secret at the perfect,’ and then, ‘they say, Who shall see them?’ Ps 64:4, 5. Thus Satan lets fly a temptation. Sometimes he useth a wife’s tongue to do his errand; another while he gets behind the back of a husband, friend, servant, &c., and is not seen all the while he is doing his work. Who would have thought to have found a devil in Peter tempting his master, or suspected that Abraham should be his instrument to betray his beloved wife into the hands of a sin? Yet it was so. Nay, sometimes he is so secret that he borrows God’s bow to shoot his arrows from, and the poor Christian is abused, thinking it is God chides and is angry, when it is the devil that tempts him to think so, and only counterfeits God’s voice. Job cries out

of ‘the arrows of the Almighty,’ how ‘the poison of them drank up his spirit,’ and of ‘the terrors of God that did set themselves in array against him,’ Job 6:4, when it was Satan all the while that was practicing his malice and playing his pranks upon him. God was friends with this good man, only Satan begged leave—and God gave it for a time—thus to affright him. And poor Job cries out, as if God had cast him off and were become his enemy.

(2.) Darts or arrows, they *make little or no noise as they go*. They cut their passage through the air, without telling us by any crack or report, as the cannon doth, that they are coming. Thus insensibly doth temptation make its approach;—the thief is in before we think of any need to shut the doors. The wind is a creature secret in its motion, of which our Saviour saith, ‘We know not whence it cometh and whither it goeth,’ John 3:8, yet, ‘we hear the sound thereof,’ as our Saviour saith in the same place. But temptations many times come and give us no warning by any sound they make. The devil lays his plot so close, that the soul sees not his drift, observes not the hook till he finds it in his belly. As the woman of Tekoah told her tale so handsomely, that the king passeth judgement against himself in the person of another before he smelt out the business.

3. *Darts have a wounding killing nature*, especially when well headed and shot out of a strong bow by one that is able to draw it. Such are Satan’s temptations—headed with desperate malice, and drawn by a strength no less than angelical; and this against so poor a weak creature as man, that it were impossible, had not God provided good armour for our soul, to outstand Satan’s power and get safe to heaven. Christ would have us sensible of their force and danger, by that petition in his prayer which the best of saints on this side heaven have need to use—‘Lead us not into temptation.’ Christ was then but newly out of the list, where he had tasted Satan’s tempting skill and strength; which, though beneath his wisdom and power to defeat, yet well he knew it was able to worst the strongest of saints. There was never any besides Christ that Satan did not foil more or less. It was Christ’s prerogative to be tempted, but not lead into temptation. Job, one of the chief worthies in God’s army of saints, who, from God’s mouth, is a nonesuch, yet was galled by

these arrows shot from Satan's bow, and put to great disorder. God was fain to pluck him out of the devil's grip, or else he would have been quite worried by that lion.

*Second.* Satan's warlike provision is not only darts, but 'fiery darts.' Some restrain these fiery darts to some particular kind of temptation, as despair, blasphemy, and those which fill the heart with terror and horror. But this, I conceive, is too strait; but faith is a shield for all kind of temptations—and indeed there is none but may prove a 'fiery' temptation; so that I should rather incline to think all sorts of temptations to be comprehended here, yet so as to respect some in an especial manner more than others. These shall be afterwards instanced in.

*Question.* Why are Satan's darts called fiery ones?

*Answer 1.* They may be said to be 'fiery,' *in regard of that fiery wrath with which Satan shoots them.* They are the fire this dragon spits, full of indignation against God and his saints. Saul, it is said, 'breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,' Acts 9:1. As one that is inwardly inflamed, his breath is hot—

a fiery stream of persecuting wrath came as out of a burning furnace from him. Temptations are the breathings of the devil's wrath.

*Answer 2.* They may be said to be 'fiery,' *in regard of the end they lead to*, if not quenched; and that is hell-fire. There is a spark of hell in every temptation; and all sparks fly to their element. So all temptations tend to hell and damnation, according to Satan's intent and purpose.

*Answer 3.* And chiefly they may be said to be 'fiery,' *in regard of that malignant quality they have on the spirits of men*—and that is to enkindle a fire in the heart and consciences of poor creatures. The apostle alludes to the custom of cruel enemies, who used to dip the heads of their arrows in some poison, whereby they became more deadly, and did not only wound the part where they lighted, but inflamed the whole body, which made the cure more difficult. Job speaks of 'the poison of them which drank up his spirits,' Job 6:4. They have an envenoming and inflaming quality.

## DIVISION SECOND.—THE POWER AND PUISSANCE OF FAITH OVER THIS ENEMY.

*'The shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.'*

The fiery darts of Satan which the believing soul is able by faith to quench may be described as of two sorts. **FIRST.** Either those that do pleasingly entice and bewitch with some seeming promises of satisfaction to the creature. Or, **SECOND.** Such as affright and carry horror with them. Both are fiery, and quenched by faith, and only faith.

### FAITH'S FIRST QUENCHING POWER.

*[Satan's 'fiery darts' of PLEASING TEMPTATIONS, and faith's power to quench them.]*

We shall begin with the first sort of Satan's fiery darts, viz. *those temptations that do pleasingly entice and bewitch the soul with some seeming promises of satisfaction to the creature.* The note is this:— **DOCTRINE.** That faith will enable a soul

to quench the fire of Satan's most pleasing temptations. **FIRST.** We will show you that these enticing temptations have a fiery quality to them. **SECOND.** That faith is able to quench them.

*[Satan's pleasing temptations HAVE A 'FIERY' QUALITY.]*

**FIRST.** We shall show you *that Satan's enticing temptations have a fiery quality in them.* They have an inflaming quality. There is a secret disposition in the heart of all to all sin. Temptation doth not fall on us as a ball of fire on ice or snow, but as a spark on tinder, or [as] lightning on a thatched roof, which presently is on a flame. Hence in Scripture, though tempted by Satan, yet the sin is charged on us. 'Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed,' James 1:14. Mark! it is



Satan tempts, but our own lust *draws us*. The fowler lays the shrap,<sup>cxcvi</sup> but the bird's own desire betrays it into the net. The heart of a man is marvellous prone to take fire from these darts. 'Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out,' Prov. 26:20. Thus the 'fiery darts' on Christ. There was no combustible matter of corruption in him for Satan to work upon. But our hearts being once heated in Adam could never cool since. A sinner's heart is compared to 'an oven.' 'They are all adulterers, as an oven heated by the baker,' Hosea 7:4. The heart of man is the oven, the devil the baker, and temptation the fire with which he heats it; and then no sin comes amiss. 'I lie,' saith David, 'among them that are set on fire,' Ps. 57:4. And, I pray, who sets them on fire? The apostle will resolve us, 'set on fire of hell,' James 3:6. O friends! when once the heart is inflamed by temptation, what strange effects doth it produce! how hard to quench such a fire, though in a gracious person! David himself, under the power of a temptation so apparent that a carnal eye could see it—Joab I mean, who reprov'd him—yet was hurried to the loss of seventy thousand men's lives; for so much that one sin cost. And if the fire be so raging in a David, what work will it make where no water is nigh, no grace in the heart to quench it? Hence the wicked are said to be 'mad' upon their idols, Jer. 1:38—spurring on without fear or wit, like a man inflamed with a fever that takes his head; there is no holding of him then in his bed. Thus the soul possessed with the fury of temptation runs into the mouth of death and hell, and will not be stopped.

*[Use or Application.]*

*Use First.* O how should this make us *afraid of running into a temptation when there is such a witchery in it*. Some men are too confident. They have too good an opinion of themselves—as if they could not be taken with such a disease, and therefore will breathe in any air. It is just with God to let such be shot with one of Satan's darts, to make them know their own hearts better. Who will pity him whose house is blown up, that kept his powder in the chimney corner? 'Is thy servant a dog,' saith Hazeal, II Kings 8:13. Do you make me a beast, sunk so far below the nature of man as to imbrue my hands in these horrid murders? Yet, how soon did this

wretch fall into the temptation, and, by that one bloody act upon his liege lord, which he perpetrated as soon as he got home, show that the other evils, which the prophet foretold of him, were not so improbable as at first he thought. Oh, stand off the devil's mark, unless you mean to have one of the devil's arrows in your side! Keep as far from the whirl of temptation as may be. For if once he got you within his circle, thy head may soon be dizzy. One sin helps to kindle another; the less the greater, as the brush the logs. When the courtiers had got their king to carouse and play the drunkard, he soon learned to play the scorner: 'The princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorn,' Hosea 7:5.

*Use Second.* Hath Satan's darts such an enkindling nature? *take heed of being Satan's instrument in putting fire to the corruption of another*. Some on purpose do it. Idolaters set out their temples and altars with superstitious pictures, embellished with all the cost that gold and silver can afford them, to bewitch the spectator's eye. Hence they are said to be 'inflamed with their idols,' Isa. 57:5—as much as any lover with his minion. And the drunkard, he enkindles his neighbour's lust, 'putting the bottle to him,' Hab. 2:15. O what a base work are these men employed about! By the law it is death for any wilfully to set fire on his neighbour's house. What then deserve they that set fire on the souls of men, and that no less than hell-fire? But, is it possible thou mayest do it unawares by a less matter than thou dreamest on. A silly child playing with a lighted straw may set a house on fire which many wise cannot quench. And truly Satan may use thy folly and carelessness to kindle lust in another's heart. Perhaps an idle light speech drops from thy mouth, and thou meanest no great hurt; but a gust of temptation may carry this spark into thy friend's bosom, and kindle a sad fire there. A wanton attire, which we will suppose thou wearest with a chaste heart, and only because it is the fashion, yet may ensnare another's eye. And if he that kept a pit open but to the hurt of a beast, sinned, how much more thou, who givest occasion to a soul's sin, which is a worse hurt? Paul 'would not eat flesh while the world stood, if it made his brother offend,' I Cor. 8:13. And canst thou dote on a foolish dress and immodest fashion, whereby many may offend, still to wear it? 'The body,' Christ saith,

'is better than raiment.' The soul, then, of thy brother is more to be valued surely than an idle fashion of thy raiment. We come to the second branch of the point.

[FAITH'S POWER TO QUENCH  
*Satan's pleasing temptations.*]

SECOND. We shall show you *that faith will enable a soul to quench the pleasing temptations of the wicked one.* This is called our 'victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,' 1 John 5:4. Faith sets its triumphant banner on the world's head. The same St. John will tell you what is meant by the world: 'Love not the world;... for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world,' 1 John 2:15, 16. All that is in the world is said to be '*lust*,' because it is food and fuel for lust. Now faith enables the soul to quench those darts which Satan dips and envenoms with these worldly lusts —called by some the worldlings Trinity.

*First Dart of pleasing temptations. 'The lust of the flesh.'* Under this are comprehended those temptations that promise pleasure and delight to the flesh. These indeed carry fire in the mouth of them; and when they light on a carnal heart, do soon inflame it with unruly passions and beastly affections. The adulterer is said to burn in his lust, Rom. 1:27. The drunkard to be 'inflamed with his wine,' Isa. 5:11. No sort of temptation works more strongly than those which present sensual pleasure and promise delight to the flesh. Sinners are said to 'work all uncleanness with greediness'—with a kind of covetousness; for the word imports they never have enough.<sup>cxvii</sup> When the voluptuous person hath wasted his estate, jaded his body in luxury, still the fire burns in his wretched heart. No drink will quench a poisoned man's thirst. Nothing but faith can be helpful to a soul in these flames. We find Dives in hell burning, and not 'a drop of water to cool the tip of his tongue' found there. The unbelieving sinner is in a hell above ground. He burns in his lust, and not a drop of water, for want of faith, to quench the fire. By faith it is said those glorious martyrs 'quenched the violence of the fire,' Heb. 11. And truly the fire of lust is as hot as the fire of martyrdom. By faith alone this is quenched also: 'We...were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived,

serving divers lusts and pleasures,...But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,...he saved us,' Titus 3:3, 4. Never could they shake off these lusts, the old companions, till by faith they got a new acquaintance with the grace of God revealed in the gospel.

[*How faith quenches the 'lust of the flesh.'*]

*Question.* How does faith quench this fiery dart of sensual delights?

*Answer 1.* As it undeceives and takes off the mist from the Christian's eyes, whereby he is now enabled to see sin in its naked being and callow<sup>cxviii</sup> principles before Satan hath plumed [it]. It gives him the native taste and relish of sin before the devil hath sophisticated it with his sugared sauce. And truly, now sin proves a homely piece, a bitter morsel. Faith hath a piercing eye; it is 'the evidence of things not seen.' It looks behind the curtain of sense, and sees sin, before its fiery was on and it be dressed for the stage, to be a brat that comes from hell, and brings hell with it. Now, let Satan come if he please, and present a lust never so enticing, the Christian's answer is ready. 'Be not cheated, O my soul,' saith faith, 'with a lying spirit.' He shows thee a fair Rachel, but he intends thee a blear-eyed Leah; he promises joy, but he will pay thee sorrow. The clothes that make this lust so comely are not its own. The sweetness thou tastest is not native, but borrowed to deceive thee withal. 'Thou art Saul,' saith the woman of Endor, 'why hast thou deceived me?' Thus, faith can call sin and Satan by their own names when they come in a disguise. 'Thou art Satan,' saith faith, 'why wouldst thou deceive me? God hath said sin is bitter as gall and wormwood, and wouldst thou make me believe I can gather the sweet fruits of true delight from this root of bitterness? grapes from these thorns?'

*Answer 2.* Faith doth not only enable the soul to see the nature of sin void of all true pleasure, but also how transient its false pleasures are. I will not lose, saith faith, sure mercies for transient uncertain pleasures. This made Moses leap out of the pleasures of the Egyptian court into the fire of 'affliction,' Heb. 11:25, because he saw them 'pleasures for a season.' Should you see a man in a ship throw

himself overboard into the sea, you might at first think him out of his wits; but if, a little while after, you should see him stand safe on the shore, and the ship swallowed up of the waves, you should then think he took the wisest course. Faith sees the world and all the pleasures of sin sinking: there is a leak in them which the wit of man cannot stop. Now is it not better to swim by faith through a sea of trouble and get safe to heaven at last, than to sin in the lap of sinful pleasures till we drown in hell's gulf? It is impossible that the pleasure of sin should last long.

(1.) *Because it is not natural.* Whatever is not natural soon decays. The nature of sugar is to be sweet, and therefore it holds its sweetness; but sweeten beer or wine never so much with sugar, in a few days they will lose their sweetness. The pleasure of sin is extrinsic to its nature, and therefore will corrupt. None of that sweetness which now bewitches sinners will be tasted in hell. The sinner shall have his cup spiced there by his hand that will have it a bitter draught.

(2.) The pleasures of sin must needs be short, *because life cannot be long, and they both end together.* Indeed, many times the pleasure of sin dies before the man dies. Sinners live to bury their joy in this world. The worm breeds in their conscience before it breeds in their flesh by death. But be sure that the pleasure of sin never survives this world. The word is gone out of God's mouth, every sinner shall 'lie down in sorrow and wake in sorrow.' Hell is too hot a climate for wanton delights to live in. Now faith is a provident, wise grace, and makes the soul bethink itself how it may live in another world. Whereas the carnal heart is all for the present; his snout is in the trough, and, while his draught lasts he thinks it will never end. But faith hath a large stride; at one pace it can reach over a whole life of years and see them done while they are but beginning. 'I have seen an end of all perfections,' saith David. He saw the wicked, when growing on their bed of pleasure, cut down, and burning in God's oven, as if it were done already, Ps. 37:2. And faith will do the like for every Christian according to its strength and activity. And who would envy the condemned man his feast which he hath in his way to the gallows.

*Answer 3.* Faith outvies Satan's proffers by showing the soul where choicer enjoyments are

to be had at a cheaper rate. Indeed, 'best is best cheap.' Who will not go to that shop where he may be best served? This law holds in force among sinners themselves. The drunkard goes where he may have the best wine; the glutton where he may have the best cheer. Now faith presents such enjoyments to the soul that are beyond all compare best. It leads to the promise, and entertains it there, at Christ's cost, with all the rich dainties of the gospel. Not a dish that the saints feed on in heaven but faith can set before the soul, and give it, though not a full meal, yet such a taste as shall melt it in 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.' This sure must needs quench the temptation. When Satan sends to invite the Christian to his gross fare, will not the soul say, 'Should I forsake those pleasures that cheered, yea ravished, my heart, to go and debase myself with sin's polluted bread, where I shall be but a fellow-commoner with the beast, who shares in sensual pleasures with man—yea, become worse than the beast—a devil, like Judas, who arose from his Master's table to sit at the devil's?'

*Second Dart of pleasing temptations.* 'The lust of the eyes.' This is quenched by faith. By 'the lust of the eyes,' the apostle means those temptations which are drawn from the world's pelf and treasure. [It is] called so, in the first place, *because it is the eye that commits adultery with these things.* As the unclean eye looks upon another man's wife, so the covetous eye looks upon another's wealth to lust after it. In the second place it is called so, *because all the good that in a manner is received from them is but to please the eye.* 'What good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?' Ecc. 5:11. That is, if a man hath but to buy food and raiment enough to pay his daily shot of necessary expenses, the surplusage serves only for the eye to play the wanton with. Yet we see how pleasing a morsel they are to a carnal heart. It is rare to find a man that will not stoop, by base and sordid practices, to take up this golden apple. When I consider what sad effects this temptation had on Ahab, who, to gain a spot of ground of a few acres, that could not add much to a king's revenues, durst swim to it in the owner's blood, I wonder not to see men whose condition is necessitous nibbling at the hook of temptation, where the bait is a far greater worldly advantage. This is the door the devil

entered into Judas by. This was the break-neck of Demas' faith, he embraced 'this present world.' Now faith will quench a temptation edged with these.

*[How faith quenches the 'lust of the eyes.']*

1. Faith *persuades the soul of God's fatherly care and providence over it.* And where this breast-work is raised the soul is safe so long as it keeps within its line. 'Oh!' saith Satan, 'if thou wouldst but venture on a lie—make bold a little with God in such a command—this wedge of gold is thine, and that advantage will accrue to thy estate.' Now faith will teach the soul to reply, 'I am well provided for already, Satan; I need not thy pension; why should I play the thief for that which, if good, God hath promised to give?' *'Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,'* Heb. 13:5. How canst thou want, O my soul, that by the promise hast command of God's purse? Let him that is 'without God in the world' shift and shirk by his wits; do thou live by thy faith.

2. Faith *teaches the soul that the creature's comfort and content comes not from abundance but God's blessing.* And to gain the world by a sin is not the road that leads to God's blessing. 'A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent,' Prov. 28:20. 'Shouldst thou,' saith faith, 'heap up the world's goods in an evil way, thou art never the nearer to the content thou expectest.' It is hard to steal one's meat and then crave a blessing on it at God's hands. What thou gettest by sin Satan cannot give thee quiet possession of, nor discharge those suits which God will surely commence against thee.


3. Faith *advanceth the soul to higher projects than to seek the things of this life.* It discover a world beyond the moon—and there lies faith's merchandise—leaving the colliers of this world to load themselves with clay and coals, while it trades for grace and glory. Faith fetcheth its riches from on far. Saul did not more willingly leave seeking his father's asses when he heard of a kingdom, than the believing soul leaves proling for the earth now it hears of Christ and heaven, Ps. 39:6, 7. We find, ver. 6, holy David branding the men of the world for folly, that they

troubled themselves so much for naught: 'Surely,' saith he, 'they are disquieted in vain; he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.' And, ver. 7, we have him with a holy disdain turning his back upon the world as not worth his pains: 'And now, Lord, what wait I for?' As if he had said, Is this the portion I could be content to sit down with?—to sit upon a greater heap of riches than my neighbour hath? 'My hope is in thee; deliver me from all my transgressions,' ver. 8. Every one as they like. Let them that love the world take the world; but, Lord, pay not my portion in gold or silver, but in pardon of sin. This I wait for. Abraham, he by faith had so low an esteem of this world's treasure that he left his own country to live here a stranger, in hope of 'a better,' Heb. 11:16.

*Third Dart of pleasing temptations. 'The pride of life.'* There is an itch of pride in man's heart after the gaudy honours of the world; and this itch of man's proud flesh the devil labours to scratch and irritate by suitable proffers. And when the temptation without and lust within meet, then it works to purpose. Balaam loved the way that led to court; and therefore spurs on his conscience—that boggled more than the ass he rode on—till the blood came. The Jews when convinced of Christ's person and doctrine, yet were such slaves to their honour and credit, that they part with Christ rather than hazard that. 'For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God,' John 12:43. Now faith quenches this temptation, and, with a holy scorn, disdains that all the preferment the world hath to heap on him should be a bribe for the least sin. 'By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,' Heb. 11:24, though by this adoption he might have been heir, for aught we know, of the crown; yet this he threw at his heels. It is not said, 'he did not seek to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter,' though that would have sounded a high commendation, having so fair an opportunity. Some would not have scrupled a little court flattery, thereby to have cologued<sup>excix</sup> From Webster's. — SDB themselves into further favour—having so fair a stock in the king's heart to set up with. But, it is said that he 'refused to be called' by this name. Honour came troulng in upon him, as water at a flowing tide. Now, to stand against this flood of preferment, and no breach made in his heart to entertain it—this

was admirable indeed. Nay, he did not refuse this preferment for any principality that he hoped for elsewhere. He forsook not one court to go to another, but to join with a beggarly reproached people. Yea, by rejecting their favour he incurred the wrath of the king. Yet faith carried him through all those heights and depths of favour and disgrace, honour and dishonour; and truly, wherever this grace is—allowing for its strength and weakness—it will do the like. We find, Heb. 11:33, how Samuel and the prophets ‘through faith subdued kingdoms.’ This, sure, is not only meant of the conquest of the sword — though some of them performed honourable achievements that way—but also by despising the honour and preferments of them. This indeed many of the prophets are famous for; and in particular Samuel, who, at God’s command, gave away a kingdom from his own house and family by anointing Saul, though himself at present had possession of the chief’s magistrate’s chair. And others, ver. 37, we read, ‘were tempted;’ that is, when ready to suffer, were offered great preferments if they would bend to the times by receding a little from the bold profession of their faith; but they chose rather the flames of martyrdom than the favour of princes on those terms. But, more particularly to show you how faith quenches this temptation.

*[How faith quenches ‘the pride of life.’]*

1. Faith *takes away the fuel that feeds this temptation.* Withdraw the oil and the lamp goes out. Now that which is fuel to this temptation is pride. Where this lust is in any strength, no wonder the creature’s eyes are dazzled with the sight of that which suits the desires of his heart so well. The devil now by a temptation does but broach, and so give vent to, what the heart itself is full with. Simon Magus had a haughty spirit; he would be Simon —some great man, and therefore, when he did but think an opportunity as offered to mount him up the stage, he is all on fire with a desire of having a gift to work miracles, that he dares to offer to play the huckster with the apostle. Whereas a humble spirit loves a low seat; is not ambitious to stand high in the thoughts of others; and so, while he stoops in his own opinion of himself, the bullet flees over his head which hits the proud man on the breast. Now it is faith lays the

heart low. Pride and faith are opposed; like two buckets, if one goes up the other goes down in the soul. ‘Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith,’ Hab. 2:4.

2. Faith *is Christ’s favourite, and so makes the Christian expect all his honour from him.* Indeed it is one of the prime acts of faith to cast the soul on God in Christ as all-sufficient to make it completely happy; and therefore, when a temptation comes —‘soul, thou mayest raise thyself in the world to this place or that esteem, if thou wilt but dissemble thy profession, or allow thyself in such a sin’—now faith chokes the bullet. Remember whose thou art, O my soul. Hast thou not taken God for thy liege-lord, and wilt thou accept preferment from another’s hand? Princes will not suffer their courtiers to become pensioners to a foreign prince—least of all to a prince in hostility to them. Now, saith faith, the honour or applause thou gettest by sin makes thee pensioner to the devil himself, who is the greatest enemy God hath.

3. Faith *shows the danger of such a bargain,* should a Christian gain the glory of the world for one sin.

(1.) Saith faith, Hadst thou the whole world’s empire, with all bowing before thee, *this would not add to thy stature one cubit in the eye of God.* But thy sin which thou payest for the purchase blots thy name in his thoughts; yea, makes thee odious in his sight. God must first be out of love with himself before he can love a sinner as such. Now, wilt thou incur this for that? Is it wisdom to lose a prize, to draw a blank?

(2.) Saith faith, The world’s pomp and glory *cannot satisfy thee.* It may kindle thirstings in thy soul, but quench none; it will beget a thousand cares and fears, but quiet none. But thy sin that procures these hath a power to torment and torture thy soul.

(3.) When thou hast the world’s crown on thy head, *how long shalt thou wear it?* They are sick at Rome, as he said, and die in princes’ courts, as well as at the spital; yea, kings themselves are put as naked to their beds of dust as others. In that day all thy thoughts will perish with thee. But the guilt of thy sin, which was the ladder by which thou didst climb up the hill of honour, will dog thee into another world. These and such like are the considerations by

which faith breaks off the bargain.

4. Faith *presents the Christian with the exploits of former saints, who have renounced the world's honour and applause*, rather than defile their consciences, and prostitute their souls to be deflowered by the least sin. Great Tamerlane carried the lives of his ancestors into the field with him, in which he used to read before he gave battle, that he might be stirred up not to stain the blood of his family by cowardice or any unworthy behaviour in fight. Thus, faith peruses the roll of Scripture-saints, and the exploits of their faith over the world, that the Christian may be excited to the same gallantry of spirit. This was plainly the apostle's design in recording those worthies, with the trophies of their faith, Heb. 11—that some of their nobleness might steal into our hearts while we are reading of them, as appears, 'Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,' Heb. 12:1. Oh, what courage does it put into the soldier to see some before him run upon the face of death! Elisha, having seen the miracles of God wrought by Elijah, smites the waters of Jordan with his mantle, saying, 'Where is the Lord God of Elijah?'—'and they parted,' II Kings 2:14. Thus faith makes use of the exploits of former saints and turns them into prayer. Oh where is the Lord God of Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and those other worthies, who by faith have trampled on the world's pomp and glory, subdued temptations, stopped the mouths of lion-like lusts? Art not thou, O God, god of the valleys—the meanest saints, as well as of the mountains—more eminent heroes? Do not the same blood and spirits run in the veins of all believers? Were they victorious, and shall I be the only slave, and of so prostrate a spirit, like Issachar, to couch under my burden of corruption without shaking it off? Help me, O my God, that I may be avenged of these my enemies. And when it hath been with God it will also plead with the Christian himself. 'Awake,' saith faith, 'O my soul, and prove thyself akin to these holy men—that thou art born of God as they were—by thy victory over the world.'

[Faith's victory over the world distinguished from that attained by some of the better heathens.]

*Objection.* But some may say, if this be all faith enables to, this is no more than some heathens have done. They have trampled on the profits, pleasures of the world, who never knew what faith meant.

*Answer.* Indeed, many of them have done so much by their moral principles, as may make some, who would willingly pass for believers, ashamed to be outgone by them who shot in so weak a bow. Yet it will appear that there is a victory of faith, which, in the true believer, outshoots them more than their moral conquest doth the debauched conversations of looser Christians.

1. *Distinction.* Faith *quenches the lust of the heart.* Those very embers of corruption, which are so secretly raked up in the inclination of the soul, find the force and power of faith to quench them. Faith purifies the heart, Acts 15:9. Now none of their conquests reach the heart. Their longest ladder was too short to reach the walls of this castle. They swept the door, trimmed a few outward rooms; but the seat and sink of all, in the corruption of man's nature, was never cleansed by them; so that the fire of lust was rather pent in than put out. How is it possible that could be cleansed, the filthiness of which was never known to them? Alas! they never looked so near themselves to find that enemy within them which they thought was without. Thus, while they laboured to keep the thief out he was within, and they knew it not. For they did either proudly think that the soul was naturally endued with principles of virtue, or vainly imagined it to be but an *abrasa tabula*—white paper, on which they might write good or evil as they pleased. Thus you see the seat of their war was in the world without them, which, after some sort, they conquered; but the lust within remained untouched, because a *terra incognita*—an unknown region to them. It is faith from the word that first discovers this unfound land.

2. *Distinction.* Faith's victory is *uniform*. Sin in Scripture is called a 'body,' Rom. 6:6, because made up of several members, or as the body of an army, consisting of many troops and regiments. It is one thing to beat a troop or put a wing of an army to flight, and another thing to rout and break the whole army. Something hath

been done by moral principles, like the former. They have got some petty victory, and had the chase of some more gross and exterior sin; but then they were fearfully beaten by some other of sin's troops. When they seemed to triumph over 'the lust of the flesh' and 'eye'—the world's profits and pleasures—they were at the same time slaves to 'the pride of life,' mere *gloria animalia*—creatures of fame—kept in chains by the credit and applause of the world. As the sea which, they say, loses as much in one place of the land as it gains in another; so, what they got in a seeming victory over one sin they lost again by being in bondage to another, and that a worse, because more spiritual. But now, faith is uniform, and routs the whole body of sin, that not one single lust stands in its unbroken strength. 'Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace,' Rom. 6:14. 'Sin shall not'—that is, no sin; it may stir like a wounded soldier on his knees—they may rally like broken troops, but never will they be long master of the field where true faith is seen.

3. *Distinction.* Faith enables the soul not only to quench these lusts, but, the temptation being quenched, it enables him to use the world itself against Satan, and so beat him with his own weapon by striking his own cudgels to his head. Faith quenches the fire of Satan's darts, and then shoots them back on him. This it doth by reducing all the enjoyments of the world which the Christian is possessed of into a serviceableness and subordination for the glory of God.

Some of the heathens' admired champions, to cure 'the lust of the eyes,' have from a blind zeal plucked them out; to show the contempt of riches, have thrown their money into the sea; to conquer the world's honour and applause, have sequestered themselves from all company in the world—a preposterous way that God never chalked. Shall we call it a victory or rather a frenzy? The world by this time perceives their folly. But faith enables for a nobler conquest. Indeed, when God calls for any of these enjoyments, faith can lay all at Christ's feet. But while God allows them, faith's skill and power is in sanctifying them. It corrects the windiness and flatulent nature of them so, that what on a naughty heart rots and corrupts, by faith turns to good nourishment in a gracious soul. If a house were on fire, which would you count the wiser

man—he that goes to quench the fire by pulling the house down, or he that by throwing good store of water on it, doth this as fully, and also leaves the house standing for your use? The heathen and some superstitious Christians think to mortify by taking away what God gives us leave to use; but faith puts out the fire of lust in the heart, and leaves the creature to be improved for God's glory and enjoyed to the Christian's comfort.

[Use or Application.]

*Use First.* This may be a touchstone for our faith, whether of the right make or no; is thy faith a temptation-quenching faith? Many say they believe. Yes, that they do! They thank God they are not infidels. Well, what exploits canst thou do with thy faith? Is it able to defend thee in a day of battle, and cover thy soul in safety when Satan's darts flee thick about thee? Or is it such a sorry shield that lets every arrow of temptation pierce thy heart through it? Thou believest, but still as very a slave to thy lust as ever. When a good fellow calls thee out to a drunken meeting, thy faith cannot keep thee out of the snare, but away thou goest, as a fool to the stocks. If Satan tells thee thou mayest advantage thy estate by a lie, or cheat in thy shop, thy faith stands very tamely by and makes no resistance. In a word, thou hast faith, and yet drivest a trade of sin in the very face of it! Oh! God forbid that any should be under so great a spirit of delusion to carry such a lie in their hand and think it a saving faith. Will this faith ever carry thee to heaven that is not able to bring thee out of hell? for there thou livest while under the power of thy lust. 'Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely,... and come and stand before me,' Jer. 7:9. If this be faith, well fare and honest heathens who escaped these gross pollutions of the world, which you like beasts with your faith lie wallowing in. I had rather be a sober heathen than a drunken Christian, a chaste heathen than an unclean believer.

Oh venture not the life of your souls with such a paper shield. Come to him for a faith that is the faith maker—God I mean. He will help thee to a faith that shall quench the very fire of hell itself, though kindled in thy bosom, and divide the waves of thy lust in which now thou art ever drowned—as once he did the sea for

Israel—that thou shalt go on dry land to heaven, and thy lusts not be able to knock off the wheels of thy chariot. But, if thou attemptest this with thy false faith, the Egyptians' end will be thine. 'By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned,' Heb. 11:29. Though true faith gets safely through the depths of temptation, yet false faith will drown by the way.

But, perhaps thou canst tell us better news than this, and give us better evidence for the truth of thy faith than so. Let us therefore hear what singular thing hath been done by thee since a believer. The time was thou wert as weak as water; every puff of wind, blast of temptation, blew thee down; thou wert carried as a dead fish with the stream. But, canst thou say [that] since thou hast been acquainted with Christ thou art endued with a power to repel those temptations which before held thy heart in perfect obedience to their commands? Canst thou now be content to bring thy lusts, which once were of great price with thee—as those believers did their conjuring books, Acts 19:19—and throw them into the fire of God's love in Christ to thy soul, there to consume them? Possibly thou hast not them at present under thy foot in a full conquest. Yet have they begun to fall in thy thoughts of them? and is thy countenance changed towards them to {from} what it was? Be of good comfort, this is enough to prove thy faith of a royal race. 'When Christ cometh,' said the convinced Jews, 'will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?' John 7:31. And when Christ comes by faith into the heart, will he do greater works than these thy faith hath done?

*Use Second.* This helps to answer that objection by which many poor souls are discouraged from believing and closing with the promise. 'Oh,' saith the tempted soul, 'ye bid me believe—alas! how dare I, when I cannot get victory of such a lust, and am overcome by such a temptation? What have such as I to do with a promise?' See here, poor soul, this Goliath prostrated. Thou art not to believe because thou art victorious, but that thou mayest be victorious. The reason why thou art so worsted by thy enemy is for want of faith. 'If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established,' Isa. 7:9. Wouldst thou be cured before thou goest to the physician? that sounds harsh to thy own reason, and is as if thou

shouldst say thou wilt not go to the physician till thou hast no need of him. No; go and touch Christ by faith that virtue may flow from him to thy soul; thou must not think to eat the fruit before thou plantest the tree. Victory over corruption is a sweet fruit; but found growing upon faith's branches. Satan does by thee as Saul did by the Israelites, who weakened their hands in battle by keeping them fasting. Up and eat, Christian, a full meal on the promise, if thou wouldst find thy eyes enlightened and thy hands strengthened for the combat with thy lusts. It is one part of the 'doctrine of devils,' which we read of, 1 Tim. 4:3, to forbid 'meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving.' But the grand doctrine of the devil which above all he would promote is, to keep poor trembling souls from feeding by faith on the Lord Jesus; as if Christ were some forbidden fruit! Whereas, God hath appointed him above all other, that he should be received with thanksgiving of all humble sinners. And therefore, in the name of God, I invite you to this feast. Oh, let not your souls—who see your need of Christ, and are pinched at your very heart for want of him—be lean from day to day from your unbelief; but come, 'eat, and your souls shall live.' Never was child more welcome to his father's table than thou art to Christ's, and that feast which stands on the gospel board.

*Use Third.* Make use of faith, O ye saints, as for other ends and purposes, so particularly for this, of *quenching this kind of fiery darts, viz. enticing temptations*. It is not the having of a shield, but the holding and wielding of it, that defends the Christian. Let not Satan take thee with thy faith out of thy hand, as David did Saul in the cave, with his spear sticking in the ground which should have been in his hand.

*[Directions how to use the shield of faith to quench enticing temptations.]*

*Question.* But how would you have me use my shield of faith for my defence against these fiery darts of Satan's enticing temptations?

*Answer.* By faith engage God to come in to thy succour against them. Now, there are three engaging acts of faith which will bind God—as we may so say with reverence—to help thee, because he binds himself to help such.

*Direction 1.* The first is the *prayerful act of*



*faith.* Open thy case to God in prayer, and call in help from heaven—as the governor of a besieged castle would send a secret messenger to his general or prince to let him know his state and straits. The apostle James saith, ‘Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not,’ chap. 4:2. Our victory must drop from heaven if we have any. But it stays till prayer comes for it. Though God had a purpose to deliver Israel out of Egypt, yet no news of his coming till the groans of his people rang in his ears. This gave heaven the alarm, ‘Their cry has come up to God,... and God heard their groaning, and remembered his covenant,’ Ex. 2:24. Now the more to prevail upon God in this act of faith, fortify thy prayer with those strong REASONS which saints have used in like cases. As,

(1.) *Engage God from his promise* when thou prayest against any sin. Show God his own hand in such promises as these, ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you,’ Rom. 6:14. ‘He will subdue our iniquities,’ Micah 7:19. Prayer is nothing but the promise reversed, or God’s word formed into an argument, and retorted by faith upon God again. Know, Christian, thou hast law on thy side; bills and bonds must be paid, Ps. 119:37. David is there praying against the sins of a wanton eye and a dead heart, ‘Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.’ And see how he urgeth his argument in the next words—‘Stablish thy word unto thy servant.’ A good man is as good as his word, and will not a good God? But where finds David such a word for help against these sins? surely in the covenant; it is the Magna Charta. The first promise held forth thus much, ‘The seed of the woman shall break the serpent’s head.’

(2.) *Plead with God from relation* when thou art against any sin. Art thou one God hath taken into his family? Hast thou chosen God for thy God? Oh what an argument hast thou here! ‘I am thine, Lord, save me,’ saith David. Who will look after the child if the father will not? Is it for thy honour, O God, that any child of thine should be a slave to sin? ‘Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name.’ ‘Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me,’ Ps. 119:132.

(3.) *Engage God from his Son’s bloody death* to help thee against thy lusts that were his murderers. What died Christ for but to ‘redeem

us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people,’ Titus 2:14. And shall not Christ be reimbursed of what he laid out? Shall he not have the price of his blood and purchase of his death? In a word, what is Christ praying for in heaven, but what was in his mouth when praying on earth? That his Father would ‘sanctify them, and keep them from the evil of the world.’ Thou comest in a good time to beg that of God which thou findest Christ hath asked for thee.

*Direction 2.* A second way to engage God is *by faith’s expecting act*; when thou hast been with God expect good from God. ‘I will direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up,’ Ps. 5:3. For want of this many a prayer is lost. If you do not believe, why do you pray? and if you believe, why do you not expect? By praying, you seem to depend on God; by not expecting, you again renounce your confidence and ravel out your prayer. What is this but to take his name in vain, and to play bo-peep with God? as if one that knocks at your door should, before you came to open it to him, go away and not stay to be spoken with. Oh Christian, stand to your prayer in a holy expectation of what you have begged upon the credit of the promise, and you cannot miss of the ruin of your lusts.

*Question.* O, but, saith the poor soul, shall not I presume to expect when I have prayed against my corruptions that God will bestow on me so great a mercy as this is?

*Answer* (1.) Dost thou know what it is to presume? He presumes that takes a thing before it is granted. He were a presumptuous man indeed that should take your meat off your table who never was invited. But I hope your guest is not over-bold that ventures to eat of what you set before him. For one to break into your house, upon whom you shut the door, were presumptuous; but to come out of a storm into your house when you are so kind as to call him in, is no presumption, but good manners. And, if God opens not the door of his promise to be a sanctuary to poor humbled sinners fleeing from the rage of their lust, truly then I know none of this side heaven that can expect welcome. God hath promised to be a king, a lawgiver, to his people. Now it is no presumption in subjects to come under their princes’ shadow and expect protection from them, Isa. 33:21, 22. God there promiseth he ‘will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams; wherein shall go no galley

with oars, neither shall gallant ships pass thereby.' 'For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.' God speaks to his people as a prince or a state would to their subjects. He will secure them in their traffic and merchandise from all pirates and pickpockets; they shall have a free trade. Now, soul, thou art molested with many pirate lusts that infest thee and obstruct thy commerce with heaven—yea, thou hast complained to thy God what loss thou hast suffered by them; is it now presumption to expect relief from him, that he will rescue thee from them, that thou mayest serve him without fear who is thy liege-lord?

*Answer* (2.) You have the saints for your precedents, who, when they have been in combat with their corruptions, yea, been foiled by them, have even then acted their faith on God, and expected the ruin of those enemies which for the present have overrun them. Iniquities prevail against me, Ps. 65:3—he means his own sins and others' wrath. But see his faith. At the same time they prevailed over him he beholds God destroying of them, as appears in the very next words, 'As for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.' See here, poor Christian, who thinkest thou shalt never get above deck. Holy David has a faith not only for himself, but also [for] all believers—of whose number I suppose thee one—'as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away!' And mark the ground he hath for his confidence, taken from God's choosing act, 'Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts,' ver. 4. As if he had said, 'Surely he will not let them be under the power of sin or want of his gracious succour whom he sets so nigh himself.' This is Christ's own argument against Satan in the behalf of his people. 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee,' Zech. 3:2.

*Answer* (3.) Thou hast encouragement for this expecting act of faith from what God already hath enabled thee to do. Thou canst, if a believer indeed, through mercy say, that sin is not in that strength within thy soul as it was before thy acquaintance with Christ, his word and ways. Though thou art not what thou wouldst be, yet also thou art not what thou hast been. There was a time when sin played *rex*—

king, in thy heart without control. thou didst go to sin as a ship to sea before wind and tide. Thou didst dilate and spread thy affections to receive the gale of temptation. But now the tide is turned, and runs against those motions, though weakly—being but new flood; yet thou findest a secret wrestling with them, and God seasonably succouring thee, so that Satan hath not all his will on thee. Well, here is a sweet beginning, and let me tell thee, this promiseth thee a readiness in God to perfect the victory; yea, God would have thy faith improve this into a confidence for a total deliverance. 'Moses,' when he slew the Egyptian, 'supposed his brethren would have understood,' by that little hint and essay, 'how that God by his hand would deliver them,' Acts 7:25. Oh it is a bad improvement of the succours God gives us, to argue from them to unbelief: 'He smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, can he give bread also?' He broke my heart, saith the poor creature, when it was a rock, a flint, and brought me home when I was walking in the pride of my heart against him; but, can he give bread to nourish my weak grace? I am out of Egypt; but can he master those giants in iron chariots that stand betwixt me and Canaan? He helped me in such a temptation; but what shall I do the next bout? Oh, do not grieve a good God with these heart-aching questions. You have 'the former rain,' why should you question 'the latter?' Benjamin was a good pawn to make old Jacob willing to go himself to Egypt. The grace which God hath already enriched thee with is a sure pledge that more is coming to it.

*Direction* 3. The expecting act of faith *must produce another—an endeavouring act, to set the soul on work in the confidence of that succour it expects from God.* When Jehoshaphat had prayed and stablished his faith on the good word of promise, then he takes the field and marches out under his victorious banner against his enemies, II Chr. 20. Go, Christian, do as he did, and speed as he sped. What David gave in council to his son Solomon, that give I to thee, 'Arise therefore, and be doing, and the Lord be with thee,' I Chr. 22:16. That faith which sets thee on work for God against thy sins as his enemies, will undoubtedly set god on work for thee against them as thine. The lepers in the gospel were cured, not sitting still but walking. 'And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were

cleansed,' Luke 17:14. They met their cure in an act of obedience to Christ's command. The promiset saith, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you;' the command bids, 'Mortify your members which are on earth.' Go thou and make a valiant attempt against thy lusts, upon this word of command, and in doing thy duty thou shalt find the performance of the promise. The reason of so many fruitless among Christians concerning the power of their corruptions lies in one of these two miscarriages—either they endeavour without acting faith on the promise (and such indeed go at their own peril, like those bold men, Num. 14:40, who presumptuously went up the hill to fight the Canaanites, though Moses told them the Lord was not among them, thus slighting the conduct of Moses their leader, as if they needed not his help to the victory; a clear resemblance of those who go in their own strength to resist their corruptions and so fall before them)—or else they pretend to believe, but it is *ostiâ fide*—an easy faith; their faith doth not set them on a vigorous endeavour. They use faith as an eye but not as a hand; they look for victory to drop from heaven upon their heads, but do not fight to obtain it. This is a mere fiction, a fanciful faith. He that believes God for the event, believes him for the means also. If the patient dare trust the physician for the cure, he dare also follow his prescription in order to it. And therefore, Christian, sit not still, and say thy sin shall fall, but put thyself in array against it. God, who hath promised thee victory calls thee to thy arms and means to use thy own hands in the battle if ever thou gettest it. 'Get thee up,' said the Lord to Joshua, 'wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face,' Joshua 7:10. God liked the prayer and moan he made very well; but there was something else for him to do besides praying and weeping, before the Amorites could be overcome. And so there is for thee, Christian, with thy faith to do, besides praying and expecting thy lusts down, and that is searching narrowly into thy heart, whether there be not some neglect on thy part, as an Achan, for which thou art so worsted by sin, and fleest before the face of every temptation.

#### FAITH'S SECOND QUENCHING POWER.

*[Satan's fiery darts of AFFRIGHTING  
TEMPTATIONS, and faith's power  
to quench them.]*

Having thus despatched the first kind of fiery darts—temptations which are enticing and alluring—we now proceed to the second kind—*such as are of an affrighting nature*, by which Satan would dismay and dispirit the Christian. And my task [in this] is still the same, to show the power of faith in quenching these fiery darts. Let then the point be this.

DOCTRINE. That faith, and only faith, can quench the fiery darts of Satan's affrighting temptations. This sort of fiery dart is our enemy's reserve. When the other, viz. pleasing temptations, prove unsuccessful, then he opens this quiver and sends a shower of these arrows to set the soul on flame, if not of sin, yet of terror and horror. When he cannot carry a soul laughing to hell through the witchery of pleasing temptations, he will endeavour to make him go mourning to heaven by amazing him with the other. And truly it is not the least support to a soul exercised with these temptations to consider they are a good sign that Satan is hard put to it when these arrows are upon his string. You know an enemy that keeps a castle will preserve it as long as he can hold it; but, when he sees he must out, then he sets it on fire, to render it, if possible, useless to them that come after him. While the strong man can keep his house under his own power, he labours to keep it in peace; he quenches those fire-balls of conviction that the Spirit is often shooting into the conscience; but, when he perceives it is no longer tenable, [when] the mutiny increases, and there is a secret whisper in the soul of yielding unto Christ, now he labours to set the soul on fire by his affrighting temptations. Much more doth he labour to do it when Christ hath got the castle out of his hands, and keeps it by the power of his grace against him. It is very observable that all the darts shot against Job were of this sort. He hardly made any use of the other. When God gave him leave to practice his skill, why did he not tempt him with some golden apple of profit, or pleasure, or such like enticing temptations? Surely the high testimony that God gave to this eminent servant discouraged Satan from this method; yea, no doubt he had

tried Job's manhood before this as to those, and found him too hard; so that now he had no other way left probable to attain his design but this. I shall content myself with three instances of this sort of fiery darts, showing how faith quenches them all—temptations to atheism, blasphemy, and despair.

*[Satan's first affrighting temptation  
—THE FIERY DART OF ATHEISM.]*

*First Dart of affrighting temptations.* The first of Satan's affrighting temptations is his temptation to atheism, which, for the horrid nature thereof, may well be called a fiery dart; partly because by this he makes so bold an attempt, striking at the being of God himself; as also because of the consternation he produceth in a gracious soul wounded with it. It is true the devil, who cannot himself turn atheist, is much less able to make a child of God an atheist, who hath not only in common with other men an indelible stamp of a deity in his conscience, but such a sculpture of the divine nature in his heart, as irresistibly demonstrates a God; yea, lively represents a holy God, whose image it is; so that it is impossible a holy heart should be fully overcome with this temptation, having an argument beyond all the world of wicked men and devils themselves to prove a deity, viz. a new nature in him, 'created after God in righteousness and true holiness,' by which, even when he is buffeted with atheistical injections, he saith in his heart, 'There is a God,' though Satan in the paroxysm of his temptation, clouds his reasoning faculty for the present with this smoke of hell, which doth more offend and affright than persuade his gracious heart to espouse such a principle as it doth in a wicked man; who, when, on the contrary, he is urged by his conscience to believe a God, 'saith in his heart there is no God,' that is, he wisheth there were none. And this may exceedingly comfort a saint—who, notwithstanding such injections to atheism, clings about God in his affections, and dares not for a world allow himself to sin against him, no, not when most oppressed with this temptation—that he shall not pass for an atheist in God's account, whatever Satan makes him believe. As the wicked shall not be cleared from atheism by their naked profession of a deity, so long as those thoughts of God are so loose and weak as

not to command them into any obedience to his commands—'The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes,' Ps. 36:1; the holy prophet argues from the wickedness of the sinner's life to the atheism of his heart—so, on the contrary, the holy life of a gracious person saith in mine heart that the fear of God is before his eyes; it appears plainly that he believes a God, and reveres that God whom he believes to be. Well, though a gracious heart can never be overcome, yet he may be sadly haunted and disquieted with it. Now, in the next place, I am to show you how the Christian may quench this fiery dart, and that is by faith alone.

*[How faith quenches  
the fiery dart of atheism.]*

*Question.* But what need of *faith*? Will not reason serve the turn to stop the devil's mouth in this point? Cannot the eye of reason spy a deity except it look through the spectacles of faith?

*Answer.* I grant that this is a piece of natural divinity, and reason is able to demonstrate the being of a God. Where the Scriptures never came a deity is acknowledged: 'For all people will walk every one in the name of his god,' Micah 4:5, where it is supposed that every nation owns some deity, and hath a worship for that god they own. Yet in a furious assault of temptation it is faith alone that is able to keep the field and quench the fire of this dart.

1. That light which reason affords *is duskish and confused*, serving for little more than in general to show there is a God; it will never tell who or what this God is. Till Paul brought the Athenians acquainted with the true God, how little of this first principle in religion was known among them, though that city was then the very eye of the world for learning! And if the world's eye was so dark as not to know the God they worshipped, what then was the world's darkness itself—those barbarous places, I mean, which wanted all tillage and culture of humane literature to advance and perfect their understandings? This is a Scripture notion; and so is the object of faith rather than reason, 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is,' Heb. 11:6. Mark that, he '*must believe*.' Now faith goes upon the credit of the word, and takes all upon trust from its authority. He '*must believe* that he

is;’ which, as Mr. Perkins on the place saith, is not nakedly to know there is a God, *but to know God to be God*’—which reason of itself can never do. Such is the blindness and corruption of our nature, that we have very deformed and misshapen thoughts of him, till with the eye of faith we see his face in the glass of the word; and therefore the same learned man is not afraid to affirm that all men who ever cam of Adam —Christ alone excepted—are by nature atheists, because at the same time that they acknowledge a God, they deny him his power, presence, and justice, and allow him to be only what pleaseth themselves. Indeed it is natural for every man to desire to accommodate his lusts with such conceptions of God as may be most favourable to, and suit best with, them. God chargeth some for this: ‘Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself,’ Ps. 50:21—sinners doing with God as the Ethiopians with angels, whom they picture with black faces that they may be like themselves.

2. Suppose thou wert able by reason to demonstrate what God is, yet it were *dangerous to enter the list and dispute it out by thynaked reason with Satan*, who hath, though the worst cause, yet the nimbler head. There is more odds between thee and Satan —though the reason and understanding of many the ripest wits were met in thee—than between the weakest idiot and the greatest scholar in the world. Now who would put a cause of so great importance to such a hazard as thou must do, by reasoning the point with him that so far outmatches thee? But there is a divine authority in *the word* which faith builds on, and this hath a throne in the conscience of the devil himself, he flies at this; for which cause Christ, though he was able by reason to have baffled the devil, yet to give us a pattern what arms to use for our defence in our conflicts with Satan, he repels him only by lifting up the shield of the word. ‘It is written,’ saith Christ, Luke 4:4, and again, ‘it is written,’ ver. 8. And it is very observable how powerful the word quoted by Christ was to nonplus the devil; so that he had not a word to reply to any scripture that was brought, but was taken off upon the very mention of the word and forced to go to another argument. Had Eve but stood to her first answer, ‘God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it,’ Gen. 3:3, she had been too hard for the devil; but letting her hand-hold go which she had by faith

on the word, presently she fell into her enemy's hand. Thus in this particular, when the Christian in the heat of temptation by faith stands upon his defence, interposing the word between him and Satan's blows—I believe that God is; though I cannot comprehend his nature nor answer thy sophistry, yet I believe the report the word makes of God; Satan may trouble such a one, but he cannot hurt him. Nay, it is probable he will not long trouble him. The devil's antipathy is so great to the word, that he loves not to hear it sound in his ear. But, if thou throwest down the shield of the word, and thinkest by the dint or force of thy reason to cut thy way through the temptation, thou mayest soon see thyself surrounded by thy subtle enemy, and put beyond an honourable retreat. This is the reason, I conceive, why, among those few who have professed themselves atheists, most of them have been great pretenders to reason—such as have neglected the word, and gone forth in the pride of their own understanding, by which, through the righteous judgment of God, they at last have disputed themselves into flat atheism. While they have turned their back upon God and his word, [and] thought, by digging into the secrets and bowels of nature, to be admired for their knowledge above others, that hath befallen them which sometimes doth those in mines that delve too far into the bowels of the earth—a damp from God's secret judgment hath come to put out that light which at first hey carried down with them; and so that of the apostle is verified on them, ‘Where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?’ I Cor. 1:20. Indeed it is the wisdom of God that the world by wisdom—their own trusted to —should not know God.

3. He that assents to this truth, that there is a God, merely upon grounds of reason and not of faith, and rests in that, *doth not quench the temptation; for still he is an infidel and a Scripture atheist*. He doth not believe there is a God at the report of God's word, but at the report of his reason; and so indeed he doth but believe himself and not God, and in that makes himself a god, preferring the testimony of his own reason before the testimony of God's word, which is dangerous.

*Question.* But, may some say, is there no use of reason in such principles as this which are within its sphere? May I not make use of my

reason to confirm me in this truth that there is a God?

*Answer.* It is beyond all doubt that there is [use of reason]. Wherefore else did God set up such a light if not to guide us? But it must keep its own place, and that is to follow faith, not to be the ground of it, or to give law and measure to it. Our faith must not depend on our reason, but our reason on faith. I am not to believe what the word saith merely because it jumps with my reason, but believe my reason because it is suitable to the word. The more perfect is to rule the less. Now the light of the word—which faith follows—is more clear or sure than reason is or can be; for therefore it was written, because man's natural light was so defective. Thou readest in the word there is a God, and that he made the world. Thy eye of reason sees this also. But thou layest the stress of thy faith on the word, not on thy reason. And so of other truths. The carpenter lays his rule to the timber, and by his eye sees it to be right or crooked; yet, it is not the eye but the rule that is the measure—without which his eye might fail him. All that I shall say more to such as are annoyed with atheistical injections is this, fix thy faith strongly on the word, by which you shall be able to overcome this Goliath, and when thou art more free and composed, and the storm is over, thou shalt do well to back thy faith what thou canst with thy reason. Let the word, like David's stone in the sling of faith, first prostrate the temptation; and then, as he used Goliath's sword to cut off his head, so mayest thou with more ease and safety make use of thy reason to complete the victory over these atheistical suggestions.

*[Satan's second affrighting temptation  
—THE FIERY DART OF BLASPHEMY.]*

*Second Dart of affrighting temptations.* The second fiery dart with which he frightens the Christian is his *temptation to blasphemy*. Every sin, in a large sense, is blasphemy; but here we take it more strictly. When a man does, speaks, or thinks anything derogatory to the holy nature or works of God, with an intent to reproach him or his ways, this properly is blasphemy. Job's wife was the devil's solicitor, to provoke her husband to this sin: 'Curse God,' saith she, 'and die.' The devil was so impudent {as} to assault Christ himself with this sin, when he bade him

'fall down and worship him.' But he hath an advantage of making a nearer approach to a saint than he bade to Christ. All that he could do to him was to offend his holy ear with an external motion. It would not stand with the dignity or holiness of Christ's person to let him come any farther. But he can shoot this fiery dart into the imagination of a saint, to the great disturbance of his thoughts, endeavouring thereby to stir up some unworthy thoughts of God in him—though these are commonly no more welcome to a gracious soul than the frogs which crept into the bed-chamber of Pharaoh were to him. Two things Satan aims at by these injections. 1. To set the saint a defaming God, which he loves a life to hear. But if this fails, then, 2. He is content to play at lower game, and intends the Christian's vexation by forcing these unwelcome guests upon him. Now faith, and only faith, can quench these fireballs in both respects.

*[How faith quenches the fiery dart of blasphemy,  
and Satan's DOUBLE DESIGN therein.]*

*First Design.* Satan aims, by the stirring up of unholy thoughts, *to set the saint a defaming God*. There is a natural disposition in every wicked man to blaspheme God. Let God but cross a carnal wretch in this way, and then suffer Satan to edge his corruption, and he will soon flee in God's face. If the devil's supposition had been true—as it was indeed most false—that Job was a hypocrite, then that tale which he brought against him to God would have been true also—'Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face,' Job 1:11. Had Job been the man he took him for, the devil had not lied; because it is natural to every wicked man to have base thoughts of God; and, when provoked, the inward rancour of his heart will appear in the foulness of his tongue—'This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?' II Kings 6:33—a loud blasphemy, the seed of which is found in every unbeliever. There is but one spirit of wickedness in sinners, as but one spirit of grace in saints. Simon Magus he was 'in the gall of bitterness,' Acts 8:23; that is, in a state of sin. Every unbeliever is of a bitter spirit against God and all that bears his name. There is no trusting of the tameest of them all, though cooped up by restraining grace. Let

the lion out of his grate and he will soon show his bloody nature. An unbeliever hath no more in him to quench such a temptation, than dry wood hath to quench the fire that is put to it. But now, let us see what exploits faith can do in quenching this fiery dart, and how faith does it. Generally it is by keeping the soul from entertaining any unbecoming or blasphemous thoughts of God; but,

1. Faith sets God *before the soul—within sight and hearing of all its thoughts and ways*; and this keeps the soul in awe, that it dares harbour nothing unworthy of God in its most secret thoughts. David gives the reason why the wicked are so bold, 'They have not set thee before them,' Ps. 54:3. Such as defame and asperse the name of others do it commonly behind their backs. Sin, in this life, seldom comes to such a ripeness as to blaspheme God to his face. This is properly the language of hell. There is a mixture of atheism with the blasphemy of sinners while on earth. They do with God as those wretched miscreants did with Christ; they cover his face and then smite him; they draw a curtain by some atheistical principles betwixt God and them, and then they belch out their blasphemies against that God whose omniscience they do not believe. Now faith eyes God eyeing the soul, and so preserves it. 'Curse not the king,' saith Solomon, 'no not in thy thought,... nor the rich in thy bedchamber; for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter,' Ecc. 10:20. Such kind of language faith useth. Blaspheme not, saith faith, O my soul, the God of heaven; thou canst not whisper it so softly, but the voice is heard in his ear who is nearer to thee than thou to thyself. And thus it breaks the snare the devil lays. Those unbecoming speeches which dropped from Job's mouth, through the length and extremity of his troubles, though they did not amount to blasphemy, yet, when God presented himself to him in his majesty, they soon vanished, and he covered his face with shame before the Lord for them—'Now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,' Job 42:5, 6.

2. Faith *credits no report of God but from God's own mouth*; and thus it quencheth temptations to blasphemy. It is impossible that a soul should have any but holy and loyal thoughts

of God, who shapes his apprehensions of him by the word of God, which is the only true glass to behold God in, because it alone presents him like himself in all his attributes, which Satan by this sin of blasphemy one way or other asperses. Faith conceives its notions of God by the word, resolves all cases of conscience, and deciphers all providences which God writes in mysterious figures, by the word; for want of which skill, Satan drives the creature very oft to have hard thoughts of God, because he cannot make presently good sense of his administrations in the world. Thus, there have been [those] who foolishly have charged God's justice, because some outrageous sinners have not been overtaken with such speedy judgment as they deserve. Others have charged as deeply his care and faithfulness in providing no better for his servants, whom they have seen kept long under the hatches of great afflictions; like him, that seeing a company of Christians in poor ragged clothes, said he would not serve that God who kept his servants no better. These, and such like, are the broken glasses that Satan presents God in, that he may disfigure him to the creature's eye; and truly if we will look no further, but judge God to be what he appears to be by them, we will soon condemn the holy One, and be within the whirl of this dangerous temptation.

3. Faith quenches temptations to blasphemy, *as it is praiseful*. It disposeth the Christian to bless God in the saddest condition that can befall it. Now these two, blessing and blasphemy, are most contrary. By the one we think and speak evil, and by the other good, of God; and therefore [they] cannot well dwell under the same roof. They are like contrary tunes. They cannot be played on the same instrument without changing all the strings. It is past Satan's skill to strike so harsh a stroke as blasphemy is, on a soul tuned and set to praise God. Now faith doth this, 'My heart is fixed,' saith David. There was his faith. Then follows, 'I will sing and give praise,' Ps. 57:7. It was faith that turned his spirit and set his affections praise-way. And would not Satan, think you, have found it a hard task to have made David blaspheme God while his heart was kept in a praising frame? Now, two ways faith doth this.

(1.) Faith *espies mercy in the greatest affliction*—an eye of white in the saddest mixture of

providence; so that when the devil provokes to blasphemy from the evil that the creature receives from God, faith shows more good received than evil.

Thus Job quenched this dart which Satan shot at him from his wife's tongue. 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall not we receive evil?' Shall a few present troubles be a grave to bury the remembrance of all my past and present mercies? 'Thou speakest as one of the foolish women.' What God takes from me is less than I owe him, but what he leaves me is more than he owes me. Solomon bids us, 'In the day of adversity consider,' Ecc. 7:14. Our unbeseeming thoughts and words of God are the product of a rash hasty spirit. Now faith is a considering grace; 'He that believeth will not make haste'—no not to think or speak of God. Faith hath a good memory, and can tell the Christian many stories of ancient mercies; and when his present meal falls short, it can entertain the soul with a cold dish, and not complain that God keeps a bad house neither. Thus David recovered himself when he was even tumbling down the hill of temptation. 'This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the Lord: surely I will remember thy wonders of old,' Ps. 77:10, 11. Therefore, Christian, when thou art in thy depths of affliction, and Satan tempts thee to asperse God as if he were forgetful of thee, stop his mouth with this, 'No, Satan, God hath not forgot to do for me, but I have forgot what he hath done for me, or else I could not question his fatherly care at present over me!' Go, Christian, play over thy old lessons. Praise God for past mercies; and it will not be long before thou hast a new song put into thy mouth for present mercy.

(2.) As faith spies mercy in every affliction, so it *keeps up an expectation in the soul for more mercy*; which confidence disposeth the soul to praise God for, as if the mercy were then in being. Daniel, when in the very shadow of death—the plot the plot laid to take away his life—'three times a day he prayed and gave thanks before his God.' To have heard him pray in that great strait would not have afforded so much matter of wonder; but to have his heart in tune for thanksgiving in such a sad hour, this was admirable, and his faith enabled him, Dan. 6:10. Mercy in the promise is as the apple in the

seed. Faith sees it growing up, the mercy a coming. Now, a soul under the expectation of deliverance, how will it scorn a blasphemous notion! When relief is known to be on its way for a garrison besieged, it raiseth their spirits; they will not then hearken to the traitorous motion of the enemy. It is when unbelief is the counsellor, and the soul under doubts and suspicions of God's heart to it, that Satan finds welcome upon such an errand. An excellent instance for both we have in one chapter, Isa. 8. We find, ver. 17, what is the effect of faith, and that is a cheerful waiting on God in straits —'I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him;' and, ver. 21, we have the fruit of unbelief—and that is no less than blasphemy—'And it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward.' Faith keeps the believer in a waiting posture; and unbelief sets the sinner a cursing both God and man. None escapes his lash that crosseth him in his way, no, not God himself.

4. Faith quenches this fiery dart, *by purifying the heart of that enmity against God* which, in man's corrupt nature, is fuel for such a temptation. 'Backbiters, haters of God, and despiteful,' are joined together, Rom. 1:30. No wonder that a man whose spirit is full of rancour against another, should be easily persuaded to revile him he hates so much. Every unbeliever is a hater of God, and so is in a disposition to blaspheme God when his will or lust is crossed by God. But faith slays this enmity of the heart; yea, it works love in the soul to God, and then works by this love. Now it is one property of love 'to think no evil,' 1 Cor. 13:5. That is, a man will neither plot any evil against him he loves, nor easily suspect any evil to be plotted by him against himself. Love reads the actions of a friend through such clear glasses of candour and ingenuity, as will make a dark print seem a fair character. It interprets all he doth with so much sweetness and simplicity, that those passages in his behaviour towards her, which to another would seem intricate and suspicious, are plain and pleasing to her; because she ever puts the most favourable sense upon all he doth that is possible. The believer dares not himself plot any evil of sin against God, whom, from the report that faith hath made of him to his soul, he



loves so dearly. And, as love will not suffer him to turn traitor against a good God, so neither will it suffer him to harbour any jealous thoughts of God's heart towards him, as if he, who was the first lover, and taught the soul to love him by making love to her, could, after all this, frame any plot of real unkindness against it. No, this thought, though Satan may force it in a manner upon the Christian, and violently press for its entertainment, under the advantage of some frowning providence, which seems to countenance such a suspicion, yet it can never find welcome, so far as to be credited in the soul where love to God hath anything to do. And surely there is no fear that soul will be persuaded wickedly to belch out blasphemies against God, who so abominates but the surmising the least suspicion of God in her most secret thoughts.

*Second Design.* Satan aims by these blasphemous temptations *to effect the Christian's trouble and vexation*. Though he doth not find the Christian so kind as to take these his guests in and give them lodging for his sake, yet he knows it will not a little disturb and break his rest to have them continually knocking and rapping at his door; yea, when he cannot pollute the Christian by obtaining his consent to them, even then he hopes to create him no little disquiet and distraction, by accusing him for what he will not commit; and so of a defiler—which rather he would have been—he is forced to turn slanderous reviler and false accuser. Thus the harlot sometimes accuseth the honest man, merely to be avenged on him because he will not yield to satisfy her lust. Joseph would not lie with his mistress and she raiseth a horrible lie on him. The devil is the blasphemer, but the poor Christian, because he will not join with him in the fact, shall have the name and bear the blame of it. As the Jews compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry Christ's cross, so Satan would compel the tempted Christian to carry the guilt of his sin for him. And many time he doth so handsomely, and with such sleight of hand, shift it from himself to the Christian's back, that he, poor creature, perceives not the juggler's art of conveying it unto him, but goes complaining only of the baseness of his own heart. And as it sometimes so falls out, that a true man in whose house stolen goods are found suffers, because he cannot find out the thief that left them there;

so the Christian suffers many sad terrors from the mere presence of these horrid thoughts in his bosom, because he is not able to say whose they are—whether shot in by Satan, or the steaming forth of his own naughty heart. The humble Christian is prone to fear the worst of himself, even where he is not conscious to himself; like the patriarchs, who, when the cup was found in Benjamin's sack, took the blame to themselves, though they were innocent in the fact. And such is the confusion sometimes in the Christian's thoughts, that he is ready to charge himself with those brats that should be laid at another door—Satan's, I mean. Now here I shall show you how faith defeateth this second design of the devil in these blasphemous motions. And this it doth two ways. 1. By helping the Christian to discern Satan's injections from the motions of his own heart. 2. By succouring him, though they rise of his own heart.

1. Faith teaches the Christian to *discern and distinguish those fireballs of temptations which are thrown in at his window by Satan, from those sparks of corruption which fly from his own hearth and take fire at his own sinful heart*. And certainly those blasphemous thoughts, of which many gracious souls make such sad complaint, will be found very often of the former sort, as may the more probably appear if we consider, (1.) The *time* when they first stir and are most busy. (2.) The *manner* how they come. And, (3.) The *effect* they have on the Christian's heart.

(1.) The *time* when they begin to stir and the soul to be haunted with them; and that is ordinarily when the work of conversion hath newly passed or is passing on him. When the creature falls off from his old sinful course to embrace Christ, and declares for him against sin and Satan, this is the time when these blasphemous suggestions begin to make their apparition, and those vermin are seen to crawl in the Christian's bosom—a strong probability that they do not breed there, but are sent from Satan by way of revenge for the soul's revolt from him. The devil deals by the Christian in this, and not much unlike what his own sworn servants—witches, I mean—are known to do, who to express their spite against those that cross them, sometimes cause them to swarm with lice, or such kind of vermin, to make them loathsome to themselves. And, as one that never found

such vermin crawling about him before, might well wonder to see himself so suddenly stocked with a multitude of them—yea, might rather impute it to the witch's malice than to the corruption of his own body that bred them—so in this case. Indeed, it is very improbable to think that the creature should in this juncture of time above all fall so foul with God by sinning against him at such a height as this. Is it likely that he can, while he is in tears for the sins of his past life, commit a greater than any of them he mourns for? or that he dare, while he is crying for pardoning mercy with a trembling heart, block up the way to his own prayers, and harden God's heart into a denial of them, by such horrid sins as these are? In a word, seems it not strange, that all the while he was a stranger to, yea an enemy against, God, he durst not venture on this sin for the prodigious nature of it, and that now he begins to love God those blasphemies should fit his mouth which were too big and horrid before for him to meddle with?

(2.) The *manner* how these blasphemies rise in the Christian's thoughts, will increase the probability that they are injections from Satan without, rather than motions of the Christian's own heart within. They are commonly violent and sudden. They come like lightning, flashing into the Christian's thoughts before he hath time to deliberate with himself what he is doing. Whereas that lust, which is the ebullition of our own hearts, is ordinarily gradual in its motion; it moves in a way more still and suitable to man's nature; it doth entice the soul, and by degrees slyly inveigles it into a consent; making first the affections on its side, which then it employeth to corrupt the understanding, and take it off from appearing against it, by putting its eye out with some bribe of sensual pleasure and profit; and so, by these paces it comes at last to have a more easy access to and success over the will, which being now deprived of her guard, yields the sooner to the summons that lust makes. But these sudden dartings of blasphemous thoughts, they make a forcible entry upon the soul without any application used to gain its good-will to come in. Their driving is like the driving of that hellish Jehu. It is the devil that is got into the box; who else could drive so furiously? Yea, not only their suddenness and violence, but incoherence with the Christian's former thoughts and course, do still heighten the probability that

they are darts shot from the devil's bow. Peter was once known to be of Christ's company by his voice: 'Thy speech,' say they, 'bewrayeth thee.' He spake like them, therefore he was judged one of them. On the contrary, we may say of these blasphemous motions, 'They are not the Christian's, their language bewrays them to be rather the belching of a devil than the voice of a saint. If they were woven by the soul, they would be something like the whole piece from which they are cut off.' There is ordinarily a dependency in our thoughts. We take the hint for one thought from another. As circle riseth out of circle in the moved water, so doth thought out of thought, till they spread into a discourse.

Now, may not the Christian well wonder to see —may be when he is at he worship of God, and taken up with holy and heavenly meditations—a blasphemous thought on a sudden appear in the midst of such company to which it is so great a stranger? and also how it should get in among them? If a holy thought surpriseth us on a sudden, when we stand as it were with our back on heaven, and there be nothing in the discourse our hearts at present are holding to usher it in, we may take it as a pure motion of the Spirit of Christ. Who, indeed, but he, could be so soon in the midst of the soul when the door is shut, even before the creature can turn his thoughts to open it for him? And probably these blasphemies, which rush upon thee, O Christian, at a time when thy soul is at the farthest distance from such thoughts, yea, sailing to the clean contrary point, in thy praying to and praising of God, are the irruptions of that wicked one, and that on purpose to interrupt thee in that work which of all other he fears and hates most.

(3.) The *effect these blasphemous notions have on the heart* may make us think they are Satan's brats rather than the birth of the Christian's own heart; —and that is a dismal horror and consternation of the Christian's spirit, which reacheth often to the discomposure of the body. So that an apparition of the devil to their bodily eyes could not affright them more than these blasphemies do that walk in their imagination. Yea, they do not only cause a horror, but stir up a vehement indignation and abhorrency, in the soul at their presence. If now they be the birth of the Christian's own heart, why this horror? whence this indignation? Those motions which

arise from ourselves use to please us better. It is natural for men to love the children of their own loins though black and deformed; and as natural to like the conceptions of their own minds. Solomon found out the true mother by her tenderness to the child. If these blasphemies were the issue of the heart, familiarity with them might be expected rather than horror at the sight of them; favour to them rather than abhorrency of them. Were it not more likely, poor soul, that thou wouldst kiss them, if thy own, than seek to kill them?—draw out thy breast to nurse and suckle them, than the sword of the Spirit to destroy them? And if so, saith faith, that these be Satan's brats, why then art thou troubled because he lays them at thy door? Is the chaste woman the more whore, because some foul tongue calls her so? Have patience a little, poor soul; the judge is at the door, and when he comes thou shalt be called by thy right name. Sit not thou any longer wounding thy soul with his dart, and troubling thyself for the devil's sin, but go and complain of him to thy God; and when thou hast spread his blasphemies before the Lord, as Hezekiah did Rabshakeh's, comfort thyself with this, that God will spread thy cause against this false accuser, and send him away with as much shame and as little success as he did that barking dog who so reviled God and railed on his people. But,

2. Suppose these blasphemous notions to be the Christian's own sins, bred in his own heart, and not the devil's brats falsely fathered on him; yet here faith *relieves the Christian when distressed with the guilt of them, and Satan labours most to aggravate them*. Now the *succour* faith brings the soul here is manifold.

(1.) *Succour*. Faith can assure the soul upon solid Scripture bottom that these blasphemous thoughts *are pardonable*. 'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men,' Matt. 12:31. And it were strange if thy fancy should be so wild and melancholy as to think thou seest this only unpardonable blasphemy, which is ever marked on the forehead with final impenitency and desperate hatred against God, in those loose roving thoughts that never yet could gain any consent from thy heart to them, but continues to disavow and protest against them. I say it were very strange That thou couldst long

mistake those unwelcome guests for that wicked sin. Now, for thy comfort, thou hearest all manner of blasphemy besides that one shall be forgiven. Pardon for them may be sued out in the court of mercy, how terrible and amazing soever their circumstances are to thy trembling soul. And if the creature believes this, Satan's dart is quenched; for his design is to make use of these temptations as a trap-door by which he may let thy soul down into despair.

(2.) *Succour*. Faith resolves the soul that the ebullition<sup>cc</sup> of such thoughts is *not inconsistent with the state of grace*; and if the soul be well satisfied in this point, the devil's fiery dart hath lost its envenomed head, which uses so much to drink up the Christian's spirits. The common inference which he makes tempted souls draw from the presence of these thoughts in them is, 'Surely I am not a saint. This is not the spot of God's children.' But faith is able to disprove this, and challenges Satan to show—as well-read as he is in the Scriptures—one place in all the Bible that countenanceth such a conclusion. Indeed there is none. It is true the blasphemy of blasphemies—I mean the sin against the Holy Ghost—with this the evil one shall never touch a true believer. But I know no kind of sin, short of that, from which he hath any such protection or immunity, as makes it impossible he should for a time be foiled by it. The whole body of sin indeed is weakened in every believer, and a deadly wound given by the grace of God to his corrupt nature, which it shall never claw off, but at last die by it. Yet as a dying tree may bear some fruit, though not so much, nor that so full and ripe, as before; and a dying man may move his limbs, though not so strongly as when he was in health; so original corruption in a saint will be stirring, though but feebly, and showing its fruit, though it be but crumpled and unripe. And thou hast no cause to be discouraged that it stirs; but to be comforted that it can but stir. O be thankful thou hast got thy enemy, who even now was master of the field, and had thee tied to his triumphant chariot, now himself on his knees under the victorious sword of Christ and his grace, ready to drop into his grave, though lifting up his hand against thee to show his enmity continues when his power fails to do execution as he would.

(3.) *Succour*. Faith can clear it to the soul that these blasphemous thoughts, as they are

commonly entertained in a saint, *are not so great sins in God's account as some other that pass for less in our account.* The Christian commonly contracts more guilt by a few proud, unclean, covetous thoughts than by many blasphemous ones, because the Christian seldom gets a so clear a victory over those as over these of blasphemy. The fiery darts of blasphemy may scare Christians more, but fiery lusts wound sooner and deeper. It was the warm sun made the traveller open his cloak which the blustering wind made wrap closer to him. Temptations of pleasure entice the heart to them, whereas the horrid nature of the other stirs up the Christian to a more valiant resistance of them. O, the Christian is soon overtaken with these; they are like poison in sweet wine, they are down before he is aware, and diffuse apace into his affections, poisoning the Christian's spirits. But these of blasphemy are like poison in some bitter potion; either it is spit out before it is down, or vomited up by the Christian before it hath spread itself far into his affections. Sins are great or small by the share the will hath in the acting of them. And blasphemous thoughts, commonly having less of the Christian's will and affections in them than the other, cannot be a greater sin.

(4.) *Succour.* Faith tells the soul that God may have, yea, undoubtedly *hath, gracious ends in suffering him to be haunted with such troublesome guests, or else they should not be sent to quarter on him.* Possibly God saw some other sin thou wert in great danger of, and he sends Satan to trouble thee with these temptations, that he may not overcome thee in the other. And though a plaster or poultice be very offensive and loathsome, yet better endure that a while than a disease that will hazard thy life. Better tremble at the sight of blasphemous thoughts than strut thyself in the pride of thy heart at the sight of thy gifts and privileges. The first will make thee think thyself as vile as the devil himself in thy own eyes; but the other will make thee prodigiously wicked and so indeed like the devil in God's eyes.

(5.) *Succour.* Faith will put the Christian on some noble exploits for God, *thereby to vindicate himself, and prove the devil's charge a lie,* as one that is accused for some traitorous design against his prince, to wipe off that calumny doth undertake some notable enterprise for the honour of his prince. This indeed is the fullest

revenge the Christian can take either of Satan for troubling him with such injections, or [of] his own heart for issuing out such impure streams. When David preferred Saul's life in the cave above a kingdom, which one hearty blow might have procured him, he proved all his enemies liars that had brought him under a suspicion at court. Thus, Christian, do thou but prefer the honour of God when it cometh in competition with sin and self, and thou wilt stop the devil's mouth, who is sometimes ready to make thee jealous of thyself as if thou wert a blasphemer. Such heroic acts of zeal and self-denial would speak more for thy purgation before God and thy own conscience than these sudden thoughts can do against thee.

*[Satan's third affrighting temptation  
—THE FIERY DART OF DESPAIR.]*

*Third Dart of affrighting temptations.* The third fiery dart which Satan lets fly at the Christian is *his temptation to despair.* This cursed fiend thinks he can neither revenge himself further on God, nor engrave his own image deeper on the creature, than by this sin; which at once casteth the greatest scorn upon God, and brings the creature nearest the complexion of devils and damned souls, who, by lying continually under the scorching wrath of God, in hell's horrid zone, are blacked all over with despair. This is the sin that of all Satan chiefly aims at. Other sins are but as previous dispositions to introduce that, and make the creature more receptive for such a temptation. As the wool hath a tincture of some lighter colours given it before it can be dyed into a deep grain, so Satan hath his more lightsome and pleasant sins, which he at first entices to, that he may the better dispose the creature to this. But this is kept by him as a great secret from the creature's knowledge. The devil is too cunning a fowler to lay his net in the bird's sight he means to take. Despair is the net. Other sins are but the shrap, whereby he covers it, and so flatters them into it, which done, he hath them safe to eternity. This, above all sins, puts a man into a kind of actual possession of hell. Other sins bind over to wrath, whereby he covers it, but this gives fire to the threatening, and sets the soul on a light flame with horror. As it is faith's excellency to give a being to the word of

promise; so it is the cruelty of despair that it gives an existence to the torments of hell in the conscience. This is the arrow that drinks up the spirit, and makes the creature executioner to itself. Despair puts a soul beyond all relief; the offer of a pardon comes too late to him that hath turned himself off the ladder. Other temptations have their way to escape. Faith and hope can open a window to let out the smoke that offends the Christian in any condition, be it at present never so sad and sorrowful; but then the soul must needs be choked, when it is shut up within the despairing thoughts of its own sins, and no crevice left to be an outlet to any of that horror with which they fill him.

*How faith quenches the fiery dart of despair drawn from THE GREATNESS OF SIN.]*

I might here instance in those many media or arguments Satan useth to dispute souls into despair from, and how able faith, and only faith, is to answer and refer<sup>cci</sup> them. But I shall content myself with one to dilate upon—which is the chief of all Satan's strength—and that is taken from all the *greatness and multitude* of the creature's sins. This when the creature is enlightened to see, and hath the brawniness of its conscience pared off to feel with remorse, and then God but do allow Satan to use his rhetoric in declaiming against the heinousness of them, it must needs be in a doleful condition, and of necessity sink into the depths of despair, for all the help it can find from itself within or any other creature without doors. Perhaps some of you, who have slighty thoughts of your own sins, think it proves but a childish impotent spirit in others to be so troubled for theirs; and in this you show that you never were in Satan's stocks pinched by his temptations. Those who have will speak in another language, and tell you that the sins which are unfelt by you have lain like a mountain of lead upon their spirits. O, when a breach is once made in the conscience, and the waves of guilt pour in amain upon the soul, it soon overtops all the creature's shifts and apologies, as the flood did the old world, that covered the tallest trees and the highest mountains. As nothing then was visible but sea and heaven; so in such a soul, nothing but sin and hell. His sins stare him on the face, as with the eyes of so many devils, ready to drag him

into the bottomless pit. Every silly fly dares creep upon the lion while asleep, whose voice all the beasts in the forest tremble at when he awakes. Fools can make a mock of sin when conscience' eye is out or shut. They can then dance about it, as the Philistines about blind Samson. But when God arms sin with guilt, and causeth this serpent to put forth his sting upon the conscience, then the proudest sinner of them all flees before it. Now it is faith that alone can grapple with sin in its strength; which it doth several ways. *First.* Faith gives the soul a view of the great God. *Second.* Faith quenches this fiery dart of despair drawn from the greatness of sin, by opposing to that the greatness of the promises. *Third.* Faith teaches the soul to oppose the greatness of this one sin of despair to the greatness of all its other sins.

*[To the greatness of sin, faith opposes  
A VIEW OF THE GREAT GOD.]*

*First.* Faith gives the soul *a view of the great God.* It teacheth the soul to set his almightiness against sin's magnitude, and his infinitude against sin's multitude; and so quencheth temptation. The reason why the presumptuous sinner fears so little, and the despairing soul so much, is for want of knowing God as great. Therefore, to cure them both, the serious consideration of God under this notion is propounded. 'Be still, and know that I am God,' Ps. 46:10. As if he had said, 'Know, O ye wicked, that I am God, who can avenge myself when I please upon you, and cease to provoke me by your sins to your own confusion.' Again, 'Know ye, trembling souls, that I am God, and therefore able to pardon the greatest sins; and cease to dishonour me by your unbelieving thoughts of me.' Now faith alone can thus show God to be God. Two things are required to the right conceiving of God.

1. In order to the right conceiving of God, *we must give him the infinitude of all his attributes;* that is, conceive of him not only as wise—for that may be a man's name—but infinitely wise; not mighty, but almighty, &c.

2. This infinitude which we give to God, *we must deny to all besides him, what or whosoever they be.* Now faith alone can realize and fix this principle so in the heart that the creature shall act suitably thereunto. Indeed, none are so

wicked who will not say, if you will believe them, that they believe that God is infinite in his knowledge, and omnipresent—at their heels wherever they go; infinite in his power, needing no more to effect their ruin than his speaking it. But, would they then in the view of these go and sin so boldly? They durst as well run their heads into a fiery oven, as do it in the face of such a principle. So others; they believe God is infinite in mercy. But, would they then carry a hell flaming in their bosoms with despair, while they have infinite mercy in their eye? No, it is plain God appears not in his true greatness to such. Despair robs God of his infinitude and ascribes it to sin. By it the creature saith his sin is infinite and God is not—too like those unbelieving Israelites: ‘They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea,’ Ps. 106:7. They could not see enough in God to serve their turn in such a strait; they saw a multitude of Egyptians to kill, and multitude of waters to drown them, but could not see multitude enough of mercies to deliver them. Thus the despairing sees multitude of great sins to damn, but not an infinitude of mercy to save him. Reason, alas! is low of stature, like Zaccheus, and cannot see mercy in a crowd and press of sins. It is faith alone that climbs the promise; then and not till then will the soul see Jesus. Faith ascribes mercy to God with an overplus, ‘He will abundantly pardon,’ Isa. 55:7—*multiply to pardon*, so the Hebrew. He will drop pardons with our sins which are most. ‘He will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea’. This is faith’s language; he will pardon with an overflowing mercy. Cast a stone into the sea, and it is not barely covered, but buried many fathom deep. God will pardon thy greatest sins, saith faith, as the sea doth a little pebble thrown into it. A few sins poured out upon the conscience—like a pail of water spilt upon the ground—seems like a great flood; but the greatest poured into the sea of God’s mercy are swallowed up and not seen. Thus, when ‘the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for,’ the Scripture saith, ‘and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.’ And why so? ‘For I will pardon,’ Jer. 50:20. There is the reason.

*Objection.* ‘O but,’ saith the trembling soul, ‘the consideration of God’s infinitude, especially


in TWO OF HIS ATTRIBUTES, drives me fastest to despair. Of all other my perplexed thoughts, when I think how infinitely *holy* God is, may I not fear what will become of an unholy wretch? When again, I look upon him as *just*, yea, infinitely just, how can I think he will remit so great wrongs as I have done to his glorious name?’

*Answer.* Faith will, and none but faith’s fingers can, untie this knot, and give the soul a satisfactory answer to this question.

1. *Attribute.*—*The holiness of God.* For this attribute faith hath two things to answer.

*Answer.* (1.) That though the infinite holiness of God’s nature *doth make him vehemently hate sin, yet the same doth strongly incline his heart to show mercy to sinners.* What is it in the creature that makes him hard-hearted but sin? ‘The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel,’ Prov. 12:10. If wicked then cruel, and the more holy the more merciful. Hence it is that acts of mercy and forgiveness are with so much difficulty drawn, many times, from those that are saints; even like milk out of awarded breast; because there are remainders of corruption in them, which cause some have hardness of heart and unwillingness to that work. ‘Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,’ Rom. 12:21—implying it is a hard work, which cannot be done till a victory be got over the Christian’s own heart; which hath contrary passions, that will strongly oppose such an act. How oft, alas! do we hear such language as this from those that are gracious! ‘My patience is spent; I can bear no longer, and forgive no more.’ But God, who is purity without dross, holiness without the least alloy and mixture of sin, hath nothing to sour his heart into any unmercifulness. ‘If ye then, being evil,’ saith Christ, ‘know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?’ Matt. 7:11. Christ’s design in this place is to help them to larger apprehensions concerning the mercifulness of God’s heart; which that he may do, he directs them to the thoughts of his holiness as that which would infallibly demonstrate the same. As if Christ had said, ‘Can you persuade your hearts, distempered with sinful passions, to be kind to your children? how much more easy is it to think that God, who is holiness itself, will be so to his poor creatures prostrate at his feet for

mercy?’

(2.) Faith can tell the soul that the holiness of God *is no enemy to pardoning mercy*; for it is the holiness of God that obligeth him to be faithful in all his promises. And this, indeed, is as full a breast of consolation as I know any to a poor trembling soul. When the doubting soul reads those many precious promises which are made to returning sinners, why doth he not take comfort in them? Surely it is because the truth and faithfulness of God to perform them is yet under some dispute in his soul. Now the strongest argument that faith hath to put this question out of doubt, and make the sinner accept the promise as a true and faithful word, is that which is taken from the holiness of God, who is the promise-maker. It must be true, saith faith, what the promise speaks; it can be no other, because a holy God makes it. Therefore, God, to gain the more credit to the truth of his promise in the thoughts of his people, prefixeth so often this attribute to his promise, ‘I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel,’ Isa. 41:14 That which in the Hebrew is *mercies*, in the Septuagint is often —*holy things*. See Isa. 55:3. Indeed the mercies of God are founded in holiness, and therefore are sure mercies. The reason of man’s unfaithfulness in promises proceeds from some unholiness in his heart. The more holy a man is, the more faithful we may expect him to be. A good man, we say, will be as good as his word. To be sure a good God will. How many times did Laban change Jacob’s wages after promise? But God’s covenant with him was inviolably kept, though Jacob was not so faithful on his part as he ought—and why? but because he had to do with a holy God in this, but with a sinful man in the other, whose passions altered his thoughts and changed his countenance towards him; as we see the clouds and wind do the face of the heavens and temper of the seasons.

2. *Attribute*. We come to the second attribute which scares the tempted soul, and seems so little to befriend this pardoning act of God’s mercy; and that is *his justice*. This proves often matter of amazement to the awakened sinner rather than encouragement, especially when the serious thoughts of it possess his heart. Indeed, my brethren, the naked consideration of this attribute rent from the other, and the musing on it without a gospel-

comment—through which alone it can be safely and comfortably viewed by a sin-smitten soul—must needs appall and dispirit him, whoever he be, yea, kindle a fire of horror in his bosom; for the creature, seeing no way that God hath to vindicate his provoked justice but by the eternal destruction and damnation of the sinner, cannot, without a universal consternation of all the powers of his soul, think of that attribute which brings to his thoughts so fearful an expectation and looking for of judgment. Heman, though a holy man, yet even lost his wits with musing on this sad subject. ‘While I suffer thy terrors I am distracted,’ Ps. 88:15, 16. But faith can make good work of this also. Faith will enable the soul to walk in this fiery attribute with his comforts unsinged, as those three worthies, Dan. 3, in the flaming furnace; while unbelieving sinners are scorched, yea, swallowed up into despair, when they do but come in their thoughts near the mouth of it. There is a **THREEFOLD CONSIDERATION** with which faith relieves the soul when the terror of his attribute takes hold on it. (1.) Faith shows, and this on the best evidence, that God may pardon the greatest sinner, if penitent and believing, without the least prejudice to his justice. (2.) Faith goes farther, and shows that God, in pardoning the believing sinner, doth not only save his justice, but advance the honour of it. (3.) Faith shows that God doth not only save and advance his justice in pardoning a believing soul; but, as things stand now, he hath no other way to secure his justice but by pardoning the believing soul his sins. Be they never so great. These three well digested, will render this attribute as amiable, lovely, and comfortable to the thoughts of a believer, as that of mercy itself.

*[A threefold consideration with which faith relieves the soul from terror of God’s justice.]*

*Consideration 1.* Faith shows to the soul—and that upon the best evidence—that God *may pardon its sins, though never so great and mountainous, with safety to the justice of God*. That question is not now to be disputed, whether God can be just and righteous in pardoning sinners. This, saith faith, was debated and determined long ago, at the council-board of heaven by God himself, before so much as a vote, yea, a thought, could pass from God’s heart for the

benefit of poor sinners. God expresseth thus much in the promise: 'I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment,' Hosea 2:19. Who is this that God means to marry? one that had played the whore, as appears by the former part of the chapter. What doth he mean by betrothing? No other but that he will pardon their sins, and receive them into the arms of his love and peculiar favour. But how can the righteous God take one that hath been a filthy strumpet into his bosom? —betroth such a whorish people, pardon such high-climbing sins? How? Mark, he will do it 'in judgment and in righteousness.' As if God had said, 'Trouble not your thoughts to clear my justice in the act. I know what I do. The case is well weighed by me. It is not like the sudden matches that are huddled up by men in one day, and repented of on the next; but is the result of the counsel of my holy will so to do.' Now when Satan comes full mouth against the believer with this objection, 'What! such a wretch as thou find favour in the eyes of God?' faith can easily retort, 'Yes, Satan, God can be as righteous in pardoning me as in damning thee. God tells me it is 'in judgment and in righteousness.' I leave thee therefore to dispute this case out with God, who is able to justify his own act.'

Now, though this in the lump were enough to refel Satan, yet faith is provided with a more particular evidence, for the vindication of the justice and righteousness of God in this pardoning act. And this is founded on the full satisfaction which Christ hath given to God for all the wrong the believer hath done him by his sin. Indeed, it was the great undertaking of Christ to bring justice to kiss mercy, that there might not be a dissenting attribute in God when this vote should pass, but the act of pardoning mercy carried clear, *nullo contradicente*—without a dissentient voice. Therefore, Christ, before he solicits the sinner's cause with God *by request*, performs first the other of satisfaction *by sacrifice*. He pays, and then prays for what he hath paid—presenting his petition in the behalf of believing sinners written with his own blood, that so justice might not disdain to read or grant it. I will not dispute whether God could by a prerogative mercy, without a satisfaction, have issued out an act of pardon; but in this way of satisfaction, the righteousness of God, I am

sure, may be vindicated in the conscience of the greatest sinner on earth; yea, the devil himself is but a faint disputant when faith pinches him with this argument; it is a trench which he is not able to climb. Indeed, God laid our salvation in this method, that even we weak ones might be able to justify him, in justifying us, to the head of the most malicious devil in hell. Peruse that incomparable place, which hath balm enough in it to heal the wounds of all the bleeding consciences in the world, where there is but faith to drop it in; and for ever to quench the fire of this dart, which is headed with the justice of God. 'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,' Rom. 3:24-26. O what work will faith make of this scripture! A soul castled with these walls is impregnable.

(a) Observe, Christ is here called a *propitiation*, or, if you will, a *propitiatory*—<sup>8"FJZD4@</sup>—*alluding to the mercy-seat*, where God promised to meet his people that he might converse with them, and no dread from his majesty fall upon them, Ex. 25. Now, you know, the mercy-seat was placed over the ark, to be a cover thereunto, it being the ark wherein the holy law of God was kept, from the violation of which all the fears of a guilty soul arise. Therefore it is observable that the dimensions of the one were proportioned to the other. The mercy-seat was to be as long and broad to the full as the ark was, that no part thereof might be unshadowed by it, ver. 10, compared with ver. 17. Thus, Christ our true propitiatory covers all the law, which else would come in to accuse the believer; but not one threatening now can arrest him, so long as this screen remains for faith to interpose between God's wrath and the soul. Justice now hath no mark to level at. God cannot see the sinner for Christ that hides him. 'this is not the man,' saith wrath, 'that I am to strike. See how he flees to Christ, and takes sanctuary in his satisfaction, and so is got out of my walk and reach, that being a privileged place where I must not come to arrest any.' It is usual, you know, in battles to wear a riband, hand-



kerchief, or some such thing, to distinguish friends from foes. Christ's satisfaction worn by faith is the sign that distinguisheth God's friends from his enemies. The scarlet thread on Rahab's window kept the destroying sword out of her house; and the blood of Christ, pleaded by faith, will keep the soul from receiving any hurt at the hands of divine justice.

(b) Observe *what hand Christ hath his commission from*: 'whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.' Christ, we see, is the great ordinance of heaven; him the Father hath sealed; he is singled out from all others, angels and men, and set forth as the person chosen of God to make atonement for sinners, as the lamb was taken out of the flock and set apart for the passover. When, therefore, Satan sets forth the believer's sins in battle-array against him, and confronts him with their greatness, then faith runs under the shelter of this castle into the holes of this rock. Surely, saith faith, my Saviour is infinitely greater than my greatest sins. I should impeach the wisdom of God's choice to think otherwise. God, who knew what a heavy burden he had to lay upon his shoulders, was fully satisfied of his strength to bear it. He that refused sacrifice and burnt-offering for their insufficiency, would not have called him had he not been all-sufficient for the work. Indeed, here lies the weight of the whole building; a weak faith may save, but a weak saviour cannot. Faith hath Christ to plead for it, but Christ hath none to plead for him. Faith leans on Christ's arm, but Christ stood upon his own legs, and if he had sunk under the burden of our sins, he had been past the reach of any creature in heaven or earth to help him up.

(c) Observe the *why God chose this way of issuing out his pardoning mercy*; and that is 'to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins.' Mark! not to declare his *mercy*. That is obvious to every eye. Every one will believe him merciful that is forgiving. But, to conceive how God should be righteous in forgiving sinners—this lies more remote from the creature's apprehensions, and therefore it is ingeminated and repeated, 'To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,' ver. 26. As if God had said, 'I know why it seems so incredible, poor sinners, to your thoughts, that I

should pardon all your iniquities, so great and many. You think, because I am a righteous God, that I will sooner damn a thousand worlds of sinners than asperse my justice, and bring my name under the least suspicion of unrighteousness, and that thought is most true. I would indeed damn them over and over again, rather than stain the honour of my justice—which is myself. But I declare, yea, again I declare it, and command you and the greatest sinners on earth, upon pain of damnation, to believe it, that I can be just, and yet the justifier of those sinners who believe in Jesus.' O what boldness may the believer take at this news! Methinks I see the soul that was even now pining to death with despair, and lotting upon hell in his thoughts—as one already free among the dead—now revive and grow young again at these tidings; as Jacob, when he heard Joseph was alive. 'What? Is justice—the only enemy I feared, and attribute in God's heart which my thoughts fled from—now become my friend! Then cheer up, my soul, who shall condemn if God justifies? And how can God himself be against thee, when his very justice acquits thee?'

*Objection.* But Satan will not thus leave the soul. Dost thou, poor creature, saith he, believe this strange divinity? Is it just for God to pardon thee for the satisfaction that another makes? One man commit the murder, and another man that is innocent hanged for it!—call, you this just? The law demands the person sinning to be delivered up to justice. We find no mention of a surety to be allowed by the covenant: 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'

*Answer (a).* Faith teaches the soul to acquiesce in the declaration that God makes of his own mind. Now, though the threatening at first acquaints us with the sinner's name only, yet faith finds a gracious relaxation of that threatening in the gospel covenant, where, to the believer's everlasting comfort, God promiseth to accept the sinner's debt at Christ's hand, whom therefore we find arrested upon our action. 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed,' Isa. 53:5. Here is bottom strong enough for faith to rest on. And why should we, shallow creatures, ruffle gospel truths, to the ensnarling our own

thoughts, by thinking to fathom the bottomless depths of God's justice with the short cordage of our reason, which we see dunced by the meanest piece of God's work of creation? Faith spies a devil in this beautiful serpent, Reason, which, for its smooth tongue, Satan useth on a mischievous design to undermine, as other, so in particular, this one most sweet and fundamental truth of the gospel—I mean the satisfaction of Christ; and therefore faith protests against the illegality of reason's court. What indeed hath reason to call before her lower bench these mysteries of our faith, that are purely supernatural, and so not under her cognizance? And O that those, in this proud age of ours, would consider it, who go to law, as I may so say, with the highest gospel truths, before this heathen judge, Reason! whereby they evacuate one great end of the gospel, which is to sacrifice our shallow reason on faith's altar, that so we might give the more signal honour to the truth of God, in believing the high mysteries of the gospel upon this naked report of them in the word, though our own reason with its little span cannot comprehend them.

*Answer (b).* The believer can *clear God as just in receiving the debt as Christ's hand, from that near union that is betwixt Christ and his people.* The husband may lawfully be arrested for his wife's debt, because this union is voluntary; and it is to be supposed he did, or ought to have considered, what her estate was, before he contracted so near a relation to her. A suit may justly be commenced against a surety, because it was his own act to engage for the debt. To be sure Christ was most free in engaging himself in the sinner's cause. He knew what a sad plight man's nature was in; and he had an absolute freedom to please himself in his choice, whether he would leave man to perish, or lend his helping hand towards his recovery. He had also an absolute power of his own life, which no mere creature hath; so that being his own offer—upon his Father's call—to take our nature in marriage, thereby to interest himself in our debt, and for the payment of it, to disburse and pour out his own precious blood to death; how dare proud flesh call the justice of God to the bar, and bring his righteousness in this transaction into question, for which God promised himself the highest expression of love and thankfulness at his creature's hands?

*Consideration 2.* Faith doth not only *bear witness to the justice of God, that he may pardon a poor believing sinner, and yet be just; but it shows that he may advance the honour of his justice by pardoning the believing soul, more than in damning the impenitent sinner.* And surely God had no less design in the gospel-covenant than this. He that would not the death of a sinner but to vindicate his justice, would not certainly have consented to the death of his only Son, but for the higher advance and further glorifying of his justice in the eye of his creature. Christ saith he came not only that we sinners 'might have life,' but that we might 'have it more abundantly,' John 10:10—that is, more abundantly than we should have inherited it from innocent Adam. May we not therefore say, that Christ did not die that God might only have his due debt, but that he might have it more abundantly paid by Christ, than he could have had it at the creature's hands? But more particularly the justice of God will appear here clothed with four glorious circumstances, that cannot be found in the payment which the sinner by his own personal sufferings makes unto it.

(a) If we consider *the person at whose hand divine justice receives satisfaction.* When the sinner is damned for his own sins, it is but a poor sorry creature that is punished; but, when Christ suffereth, the debt is paid by a more honourable hand: God hath it from one who is near to himself, yea, equal with himself. 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts,' Zech. 13:7. Who will not say a judge gives more eminent testimony of his justice, when he condemns his own son, than when he arraigns a stranger? Here God indeed declared his utmost hatred to sin, and inflexible love to justice, in that he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.

(b) If we consider *the manner how the debt is paid.* When the sinner is damned, it is in a poor beggarly way by retail; now a few pence, and then a few more. He is ever paying, but never comes to the last farthing, and therefore must for ever lie in prison for non-payment. But, at Christ's hands God receives all the whole debt in one lump, so that Christ could truly say, 'It is finished,' John 19:30—as much as if he had said, There are but a few moments, and the work of redemption will be finished. I ave the sum now

in my hand to pay God his whole debt, and as soon as I have bowed my head, and the breath is once out of my body, all will be finished. Yea, he hath his discharge for the receipt of the whole sum due to God's justice from the mouth of God himself, in which we find him triumphing. 'He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me?' Isa. 50:8. Yea, still more, Christ hath not only discharged the old debt, but by the same blood hath made a new purchase of God for his saints; so that God, who was even now the creditor, is become the debtor to his creature, and that for no less than eternal life, which Christ hath paid for, and given every believer authority, humbly to claim of God in his name. See them both in one place. 'But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,' Heb. 10:12-14. He hath not only crossed the debt-book for believers, but perfected them for ever; that is, made as certain provision for their perfection in glory, as for their salvation from hell's punishment. From which he exhorts them to 'draw near in full assurance of faith,' ver. 22. Let us not fear but we shall receive at God's hands what Christ hath paid for.

(c) When God damns the sinner, *his justice indeed appears*—those condemned miscreants have not one righteous syllable to charge their judge withal—but *mercy is not seen to sit so glorious on the throne, in this sentence pronounced on the sinner*. But when Christ suffered, justice had mercy met. Indeed justice appears never more orient in God or man than when it is in conjunction with mercy. Now in the Lord Christ's death they shone both in all their glory, and did mutually set off each the other. Here the white and the red—the roses and the lilies—were so admirably tempered, that it is hard to say which presents the face of justice most beautiful to our eye, God's wrath upon Christ for us, or his mercy to us for his sake.

(d) When God damns the sinner, *justice is glorified only passively*. God forceth his glory from devils and damned souls; but they do not willingly pay the debt. They acknowledge God just, because they can do no other, but at the same time they hate him, while they seem to vindicate him. Now, in the satisfaction that

Christ gives, justice is glorified *actively*, and that both from Christ—who was not dragged to the cross, or hauled to his sufferings, as the damned are to their prison and torment, but 'gave himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God,' Eph. 5:2; suffering as willingly for us as ever we sinned against him—and also from believing souls, who now sing praises to the mercy and justice of God that redeemed them, and will for ever in heaven run division on the same note. Now by how much the voluntary sufferings of Christ are better than the forced torments of the damned; and the cheerful praises of the saints in heaven more melodious in God's ear than the extorted acknowledgments of damned souls in hell; by so much the justice of God is more glorified by Christ's sufferings than theirs. O what incomparable boldness may this send the soul withal to the throne of grace—who, when he is begging pardon for Christ's sake, may, without any hazard to his eternal salvation, say, 'Lord, if my damnation will glorify thy justice more, or so much, as the death of Christ for me hath done, and the everlasting praises which my thankful heart shall resound in heaven to the glory of all thy attributes for my salvation, will do, let me have that rather than this.'

*Consideration 3.* Faith doth not only see justice *preserved*, yea, *advanced in this act of pardoning mercy*; but it will tell the soul, and can make good what it saith, *that God, as things now stand, cannot be just, if he doth not pardon the sins of a repenting, believing soul, how great soever they have been*. One great part of justice consists in a faithful and punctual performance of promises; he is, we say, a just man that keeps his word. And, can God be a just God if he doth not? The word is gone out of his mouth that he will forgive such. Yea, he is willing to be accounted just or unjust by us, as he makes performance thereof. See where he lays this his attribute to pawn upon this very account—'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,' 1 John 1:9. He doth not say *merciful*, but 'just,' as the attribute which we most fear should vote against us. This he would have us know is bound for the performance of the promise. It was mercy in God to make the promise; but justice to perform what mercy hath promised. 'Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham,' Micah 7:20. God was not bound to make a

promise to Abraham and his seed; but having once passed his word to him, it was 'truth to Jacob,' who was heir to that bond which God had left in his father's hand.

*[To the greatness of sin faith opposes*  
THE GREATNESS OF THE PROMISES.]

*Second.* Faith quenches this temptation to despair, drawn from the greatness of sin, *by opposing the greatness of the promises to sin's greatness.* Faith only can see God in his greatness; and therefore none but faith can see the promises in their greatness, because the value of promises is according to the worth of him that makes them. Hence it comes to pass that promises have so little efficacy on an unbelieving heart, either to keep from sin, or to comfort under terror for sin. Promises are like the clothes we wear, which, if there be heat in the body to warm them, then they will warm us; but if they receive no heat from the body, they give none to it. Where there is faith to chase the promise, there the promise will afford comfort and peace abundantly; it will be as a strong cordial glowing with inward joy in the creature's bosom; but on a dead unbelieving heart it lies cold and ineffectual; it hath no more effect on such a soul than a cordial which is poured sown a dead man's throat hath on him. The promises have not comfort *actually* and formally as fire hath heat; then it were only going to them, and we should be warm, taking them up in our thoughts and we should be comforted; but *virtually* as fire is in the flint, which requires some labour and art to strike it out and draw it forth. Now none but faith can learn us this skill of drawing out the sweetness and virtue of the promise, which it doth these three ways among many others: —1. Faith leads the soul to the spring-head of the promises, where it may stand with best advantage to take a view of their greatness and preciousness. 2. Faith attends to the end of the promises, which gives a further prospect of their greatness. 3. Faith presents the Christian with a cloud of witnesses to which the promise hath been fulfilled, and these as great sinners as himself.

[THREE WAYS *by which faith teaches the soul*  
*to draw out the virtue of the promises.*]

1. *Way.* Faith leads the soul to the spring-head

*of the promises,* where it may stand with best advantage, to take a view of their greatness and preciousness. Indeed we understand little of things till we trace them to their originals and can see them lying in their causes. Then a soul will know his sins to be great when he sees them in their spring and source flowing from an envenomed nature that teems with enmity against God. Then the sinner will tremble at the threatenings which roll like thunder over his head, ready to fall every moment in some judgment or other upon him, when he sees from whence they are sent; the perfect hatred that God bears to sin, and infinite wrath with which he is inflamed against the sinner for it. In a word, then the poor trembling soul will not count the consolation of the promises small when it sees from what fountain it flows—the bosom of God's free mercy. This indeed is the original source of all promises. The covenant itself, which comprehends them all is called 'mercy,' because the product of mercy. 'To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant,' Luke 1:72. Now, saith faith, if the promises flow from the sea of God's free mercy, then they must needs be infinite as he is, boundless and bottomless as that is; so that to reject the promise, or question the sufficiency of the provision made in it upon this account, because thy sins are great or many, casts a dishonourable reflection on that mercy, in whose womb the promise was conceived; and God will certainly bring his action of defamation against thee, for aspersing this his darling attribute, which he can least endure to see slandered and traduced. God makes account you have done your worst against him, when once you report him to be unmerciful or but scant in his mercy. How great a sin this is may be conceived by the thoughts which God hath of this disposition and frame of spirit in his creature. An unmerciful heart is such an abomination before the Lord that it hath few like it. This lies at the bottom of the heathen's charge, as the sediment and grossest part of all their horrid sins—they were 'implacable, unmerciful,' Rom. 1:31. Now, to attribute that to God which he so abhors in his creature, must needs make a heart tender of the good name of God to tremble and exceedingly fear. It was a dreadful punishment that God brought upon Jehoram, king of Judah, whom he 'smote in his bowels with an incurable disease,'

that after two years' torment his very bowels fell out, II Chr. 21:18, 19. And why did this sore and heavy plague befall him? Surely to let him know his want of bowels of mercy to his brethren and princes, whom he most cruelly butchered. He had not bowels in his heart, and he shall therefore have none in his body. Now, darest thou, saith faith, impute want of bowels to God, that he will not show mercy to thee, who penitently seeks it in Christ's name, when thou seest what testimony he gives of his incensed wrath against those men who have hardened their bowels against their brethren, yea, their enemies? O, have a care of this. To shut thy own bowels of compassion from thy brother in need is a grievous sin, and brings it into question whether the love of God dwells in thee, I John 3:17; but, to asperse the merciful heart of God, as if his bowels of compassion were shut against a poor soul in need, that desires to repent and return, is transcendently the greater abomination, and it puts out of all question—where it is persisted in—that the love of God dwells not in him. It is impossible that love to God should draw such a misshapen portraiture of God as this is.

2. Way. Faith *attends to the end of the promises*, which give a further prospect of their greatness. Now a word, which is the light faith goes by, discovers a double end of promises, especially of the promise of pardoning mercy.

(1.) *End.* The *exalting and magnifying the riches of free grace*, which God would have appear in all its glory—so far, I mean, as it is possible to be exposed to the creature's view; for the full sight of God's glory is an object adequate to his own eye and none else. See this counsel and mysterious design sweetly opened, Eph. 1:6, 9, 11, 12. The sums of it all will amount to this, that God in himself hath taken up a purpose of pardoning and saving a company of poor sinners for Christ's sake; and this he hath promulgated in the promises of the gospel. And the plot of all is, that he might gather these all together at last in heaven—some of which are already there, others of them at present on earth, and some yet unborn—and, when they shall all meet together in one glorious choir, that there they may, by their triumphant songs and hallelujahs, fill the heavens with praiseful acclamations of thankfulness to the glory of that mercy which hath thus pardoned and saved

them. Now, faith observing the praise of God's mercy to be the end aimed at by him in the promise, comes with good news to the trembling soul, and tells it that if God will be but true to his own thoughts, and keep his eye on that mark where at first he hath set it, impossible it is that he should reject any poor penitent sinner merely for the greatness of the sins he hath committed.

It is the exaltation of his mercy, saith faith, that God hath in his eye, when he promiseth pardon to poor sinners. Now, which exalts this most? to pardon little or great sinners? Whose voice will be highest and shrillest in the song of praise, thinkest thou? Surely his to whom most is forgiven; and therefore God cannot but be most ready to pardon the greatest sinners when truly penitent. A physician that means to be famous will not send away those that most need his skill and art, and only practise upon such diseases as are slight and ordinary. They are the great cures which ring far and near. When one, given over by himself and others as a dead man, is, by the skill and care of a physician, rescued out of the jaws of death that seemed to have inclosed him, and raised to health; this commends him to all that hear of it, and gains him more reputation than a whole year's practice in ordinary cures. The great revenue of praise is paid into God's exchequer from those who have had great sins pardoned. He that hath five hundred pence forgiven will love more than he that hath but fifty, by Christ's own judgment, Luke 7:43. And where there is most love there is like to be most praise;—love and praise being symbolical, the one resolving into the other. The voice of a Manasseh, a Magdalene, and a Paul, will be heard, as I may so say, above all the rest in heaven's concert. The truth is, greatness of sin is so far from putting a bar to the pardoning of a penitent sinner in God's thoughts; that he will pardon none—how little sinners soever they have been—except they see and acknowledge their sins to be great, before they come to him on such an errand. And therefore he useth the law to make way, by its convictions and terrors on the conscience, for his pardoning mercy, to ascend the throne in the penitent sinner's heart with the more magnificence and honour, Rom. 5:20. 'The law entered'—that is, it was promulgated first by Moses, and is still preached—'that the offence might abound:'—that is in the conscience by a deeper sense and remorse.

And why so, but that 'where sin abounded, grace might much more abound?' We must needs shape our thoughts of the mercy that pardons our sins, suitable to the thoughts we frame to ourselves of the sins we have committed. If we conceive these little, how can we think the other great? And if we tremble at the greatness of our sins, we must needs triumph and exult at the transcendency of the mercy which so far exceeds their bulk and greatness. He that wonders at the height of some high mountain, would much more wonder at the depth of those waters which should quite swallow and cover it from being seen.

(2.) *End.* The second end of the promise is *the believer's comfort*. The word, especially this part of it, was on purpose writ, that 'through patience and comfort of the Scriptures they might have hope,' Rom. 15:4. God was willing to give poor sinners all the security and satisfaction that might be, concerning the reality of his intentions, and immutability of that counsel which his mercy had resolved upon from eternity, for the saving of all those who would embrace Christ, and the terms offered through him in the gospel; which, that he might do, he makes publication in the Scripture, where he opens his very heart and exposeth the purposes of his love—that from everlasting he had taken up for the salvation of poor sinners—to their own view in the many precious promises, that run like veins throughout the whole body of the Scriptures, and these with all the seals and ratifications which either his wisdom could find, or man's jealous unbelieving heart desire, and all this on a design to silence the querulous spirit of poor tempted souls, and make their life more comfortable, who, pursued by the hue and cry of their high climbing sins, take sanctuary for their lives in Christ Jesus. As we have it *in totidem verbis*—in so many words, 'That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to *lie*, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us,' Heb. 6:18. And because that of the greatness and multitude of the creature's sins, is both the heaviest millstone which the devil can find to tie about the poor sinner's neck, in order to the drowning him in despair, and that knife also which is the oftenest taken up by the tempted sinner's own hands for the murdering his faith; therefore the more frequent and

abundant provision is made by God against this. Or read for this purpose these choice scriptures, Ex. 34:5; Jer. 3, the whole chapter; Isa. 1:18; 45:7-9, 12; Heb. 7:25; I John 1:9; these, and such like places, are the strongholds which faith retreats into when this battery is raised against the soul.

Canst thou for shame be gravelled, saith faith, O my soul, with an argument drawn merely from the greatness of thy sins, which is answered in every page almost in the Bible, and to confute which so considerable part of Scripture was written? Thus faith hisseth Satan away with this his argument, that he counts so formidable, as they would do a wrangling sophister out of the schools, when he boldly and ridiculously denies some known principle, acknowledged by all for a truth that have not lost their wits. But I would not be here mistaken. God forbid, that while I am curing despair I should cause presumption in any. These two distempers of the soul are equally mortal and dangerous, and so contrary, that, like the cold stomach and the hot liver in the same person, while the physician thinks to help nature in the one to a heat for digesting its food, he sometimes unhappily kindles a fire in the other that destroys nature itself. Thus, while we labour to cheer the drooping soul's spirits, and strengthen him to retain and digest the promise for his comfort, we are in danger of nourishing that feverish heat of presumptuous confidence, which is a fire will soon eat out all care to please, and fear to displease, God; and consequently all ground of true faith in the soul. Faith and fear are like the natural heat and radical moisture in the body, which is never well but when both are preserved. 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.' Let me therefore caution thee, Christian. As thou meanest to find any relief from the mercy of God in a day of distress, take heed thou dost not think to befriend thyself with hopes of any favour thou mayest find from it, though thou continuest thy friendship with thy lusts. [It were] a design as infecable as to reconcile light and darkness, and bring day to dwell with night. Thou needest not indeed fear to believe the pardon of thy sins—if thou repentest of them—merely because they are great; but tremble to think of sinning boldly, because the mercy of God is great. Though

mercy be willing to be a sanctuary to the trembling sinner, to shelter him from the curse of his sin; yet it disdains to spread her wing over a bold sinner, to cover him while he is naught with his lust. What! sin because there are promises of pardon, and these promises made by mercy, which as far exceeds our sins as God doth the creature! Truly this is the antipodes to the meaning that God's mercy had in making them, and turns the gospel with its heels upwards. [It is] as if your servant should get to your cellar of strong waters, and with them make himself drunk, which you keep for them when sick or faint, and then only to be used. O take heed of quaffing thus in the bowls of the sanctuary. It is the sad soul, not the sinning, that this wine of consolation belongs to.

3. *Way.* Faith *presents the Christian with a cloud of witnesses* to whom the promise hath been fulfilled; and these as great sinners as himself is. Scripture examples are promises verified. They are book-cases, which faith may make use of by way of encouragement, as well as promises. God would never have left the saints' great blots to stand in the Scriptures, to the view of the world in all succeeding generations, had not it been of such use and advantage to tempted souls, to choke this temptation, which of all other makes the most dangerous breach in their souls—so wide sometimes, that despair itself is ready to enter in at it. Blessed Paul gives this very reason why such acts of pardoning mercy to great sinners are recorded, Eph. 2. He shows first what foul filthy creatures himself and other believers contemporary with him were before they were made partakers of gospel grace. 'Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh,' Eph. 2:3; and then he magnifies the rich mercy of God, that rescued and took them out of that damned desperate state. 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,... hath quickened us together with Christ,' ver. 4.

And why must the world know all this? O, God had a design and plot of mercy in them to more than themselves—'That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus,' ver. 7. Wherever the gospel comes this shall be spoken of, what great sins he had forgiven to them, that unbelief might have her mouth stopped to the end of the world, and this

arrow which is so oft on Satan's string made headless and harmless. God commanded Joshua to take twelve stones out of the midst of Jordan and set them up. And observe the reason, 'That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever,' Joshua 4:6, 7. Thus God hath, by his pardoning mercy, taken up some great notorious sinners out of the very depths of sin, who lay at the very bottom, as it were, of hell, swallowed up and engulfed in all manner of abomination; and these he hath set up in his word, that when any poor tempted souls to the end of the world—who are even overwhelmed with fears from the greatness of their sins—shall see and read what God hath done for these, they may be relieved and comforted with these examples, by God intended to be as a memorial of what he hath done for others in time past, so a sign what he shall do, yea, will, for the greatest sinners to the world's end, upon their repentance and faith. No sins, though as great and many as the waters of Jordan themselves, shall be able to stand before the mercy of God's gracious covenant, but shall all be cut off and everlastingly pardoned to them.

O who can read a Manasseh, a Magdalene, a Saul, yea, an Adam—who undid himself and a whole world with him—in the roll of pardoned sinners, and yet turn away from the promise, out of a fear that there is not mercy enough in it to serve his turn? These are as landmarks, that show what large boundaries mercy hath set to itself, and how far it hath gone, even to take into its pardoning arms the greatest sinners, that make not themselves incapable thereof by final impenitency. It were a healthful walk, poor doubting Christian, for thy soul to go this circuit, and oft to see where the utmost stone is laid and boundary set by God's pardoning mercy—farther than which he will not go—that thou mayest not turn in the stone to the prejudice of the mercy of God by thy own unbelief, nor suffer thyself to be abused by Satan's lies, who will make nothing to remove God's land-mark, if he may by it but increase thy trouble of spirit,

though he be cursed for it himself. But if, after all this, thy sins seems to exceed the proportion of any one thou canst find pardoned in Scripture—which were strange—yet faith at this plunge hath one way left beyond all these examples for thy soul's succour, and that is to fix thy eye on Christ, who, though he never had sin of his own, yet laid down his life to procure and purchase pardon for all the elect, and hath obtained it; they are all, and shall, as they come upon the stage, be pardoned. 'Now,' saith faith, 'suppose thy sins were greater than any one saint's; yet are they as great as all the sins of the elect together?' Thou darest not surely say or think so. And cannot Christ procure thy pardon, who art but a single person, that hath done it for so many millions of his elect? Yea, were thy sins as great as all theirs are, the sum would be the same; and God could forgive it if it lay in one heap, as well as now when it is in several. Christ is 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,' John 1:29. See here all the sins of the elect world trussed up in one fardel,<sup>ccii</sup> and he carries it lightly away into the land of forgetfulness. Now faith will tell thee, poor soul, that the whole virtue and merit of Christ's blood, by which the world was redeemed, is offered to thee, and shall be communicated to thy soul in particular. Christ doth not retail and parcel out his blood and the purchase of it, some to one and some to another; then thou mightest say something; but he gives his whole self to the faith of every believer. All is yours, you are Christ's. O, what mayest thou not, poor soul, take up from the promise, upon the credit of so great a Redeemer?

[To the greatness of all the rest, faith opposes  
THE GREATNESS OF THIS ONE SIN OF  
DESPAIR.]

*Third.* Faith, to quench this fiery dart headed with the greatness of sin, and shot by Satan to drive the poor and penitent soul to despair, *teacheth him to oppose the greatness of this one sin of despair to the greatness of all his other sins.* 'What,' saith faith, 'would Satan persuade thee, because thou hast been so great and prodigious a sinner, therefore not to believe, or dare to think the promise hath any good news for thee? Retort thou, O my soul, his argument upon himself, and tell him [that] that very thing

by which he would dissuade thee from believing, doth much more deter thee from despairing; and that is the greatness of this sin above all thy other.' Grant to be true what he chargeth thee withal, that thou art such a monster in sin as he sets thee forth—though thou hast no reason to think so upon his bare report, but yield him his saying—dost thou think to mend the matter or better thy condition by despairing? Is this all the kindness he will show thee, to make thee of a great sinner, a desperate sinner like himself? This, indeed, is the only way he can think of to make thee worse than thou art. And, that this is true, faith is able to prove by these four considerations of this bloody horrid sin, which will easily evince more malignity to be in this one sin of despair, than in any other, yea, all other together. 1. Despair opposeth God in the greatest of all his commands. 2. Despair hath a way peculiar to itself of dishonouring God above other sins. 3. Despair strengthens and enrages all other sins in the soul. 4. The greatness of this sin of despair appears in this, that the least sin envenomed by it is unpardonable, and without this the greatest is pardonable.

[FOUR CONSIDERATIONS *proving the sin of despair to exceed all others together.*]

*Consideration 1.* Despair opposeth God in the greatest of all his commands. the greatest command without all compare in the whole Bible, is to believe. When those Jews asked our Lord Jesus, 'What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?' mark his answer, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent,' John 6:28, 29. As if he had said, The most compendious way that I am able to give you, is to receive me into your hearts by faith; do this, and you do all in one. This is the work that is *instar omnium*—all in all. All you do is undone, and yourselves also, till this work be done, for which you shall have as much thanks at God's hands as if you could keep the whole law. Indeed, it is accepted in lieu of it: 'To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,' Rom. 4:5; where 'he that worketh not,' is not meant a slothful lazy sinner that hath no list to work, nor a rebellious sinner whose heart riseth against the work which the holy law of God would employ him in; but the humbled



sinner, who desires and endeavours to work, but is no way able to do the task the law as a covenant sets him, and therefore is said to have a law-sense not to work, because he doth not work to the law's purpose, so as to answer its demands, which will accept nothing short of perfect obedience. This man's faith on Christ is accepted for righteousness; that is, God reckons him so, and so he shall pass at the great day by the judge's sentence, as if he had never trod one step awry from the path of the law. Now, if faith be the work of God above all other, then unbelief is the work of the devil, and that to which he had rather thou shouldst do than drink or drab. And despair is unbelief at the worst. Unbelief among sins is as the plague among disease, the most dangerous; but when it riseth to despair, then it is as the plague with the tokens that bring the certain message of death with them. Unbelief is despair in the bud, despair is unbelief at its full growth.

*Consideration 2. Despair hath a way peculiar to itself of dishonouring God above other sins.* Every sin wounds the law, and the name of God through the law's sides. But this wound is healed when the penitent sinner by faith comes to Christ and closeth with him. God makes account, reparations now are fully made through Christ—whom the believer receives—for the wrong done to his law, and his name vindicated from the dishonour cast upon it by the creature's former iniquities; yea, that it appears more glorious because it is illustrious, by the shining forth of one title of honour, not the least prized by God himself—his forgiving mercy—which could not have been so well known to the creature, if not drawn forth to act upon this occasion. But what would you say of such a prodigious sinner that, when he hath wounded the law, is not willing to have it healed? when he hath dishonoured God, and that in a high provoking manner, is not willing that the dirt he hath cast on God's face should be wiped off? Methinks I see every one of your choler to rise at the reading of this, against such a wretch, and hear you asking, as once Ahasuerus did Esther, 'Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?' Est. 7:5. Would you know? Truly, the adversary and enemy is this wicked despair. The despairing soul is the person that will not let Christ make satisfaction for the wrong that by his sins he hath done to God. Suppose

a man should wound another dangerously in his passion, and when he hath done, will not let any chirurgeon come near to cure the wound he hath made. Every one would say his last act of cruelty was worse than his first.

O my soul, saith faith, thou didst ill, yea, very ill, in breaking the holy laws of God, and dishonouring the name of the great God of heaven and earth thereby; let thy heart ache for this. But thou dost far worse by despairing of mercy. In this act thou rejectest Christ, and keepest him off from satisfying the justice of the law that is injured by thee, and from redeeming the honour of his name from the reproach thy sins have scandalized it with. What language speaks thy despair but this? Let God come by his right and honour as he can, thou wilt never be an instrument active in the helping of him to it, by believing on Christ, in whom he may fully have them with advantage. O what shame would despair put the mercy of God to in the sight of Satan his worst enemy! He claps his hands at this, to see all the glorious attributes of God served alike and divested of their honour. This is meat and drink to him. That cursed spirit desires no better music than to hear the soul ring the promises, like bells, backward; make no other use of them than to confirm it in its own desperate thoughts of its damnation, and to tell it hell-fire is kindled in its conscience, which no mercy in God will or can quench to eternity. As the bloody Jews and Roman soldiers exercised their cruelty on every part almost of Christ's body, crowning his head with thorns, goring his side with a spear, and fastening his hands and feet with nails; so the despairing sinner deals with the whole name of God. He doth, as it were, put a mock crown on the head of his wisdom, setting it all to naught, and charging it foolishly, as if the method of salvation was not laid with prudence by the all-wise God. He nails the hands of his almighty power, while he thinks his sins are of that nature as put him out of the reach and beyond the power of God to save him. He pierceth the tender bowels of God through his mercy, of which he cannot see enough in a God that not only hath, but is, mercy and love itself, to persuade him to hope for any favour or forgiveness at his hands. In a word, the despairing soul transfixeth his very heart and will, while he unworthily frames notions of God, as if he were unwilling to the work of mercy, and

not so inclined to exercise acts of pardon and forgiveness on poor sinners as the word declares him. No, despair basely misreports him to the soul, as if he were a lame God, and had no feet—affections, I mean—to carry him to such a work as forgiving sin is. Now, what does the sum of all this amount to? If you can, without horror and amazement, stand to cast it up, and consider the weight of those circumstances which aggravate the flagitiousness of this unparalleled fact, surely it riseth to no less than the highest attempt that the creature can make for the murdering of God himself; for the infinitude of God's wisdom, power, mercy, and all his attributes, are more intrinsical to the essence and being of God, than the heart-blood is to the life of a mortal man. Shall he that lets out the heart-blood of a man, yea, but attempts to do it, be a murderer—especially if he be a prince or a king the design is against—and deservedly suffer as such a one? and shall not he much more be counted and punished as the worst of all murderers that attempts to take away the life of God—though his arm and dagger be too short for the purpose—by taking from him in his thoughts the infinitude of those attributes which are, as I may say, the very life of God? Surely God will neither part with the glory, nor suffer the dishonour, of his name at the hands of his sorry creature; but will engage all his attributes for the avenging himself on the wretch that attempts it. O tremble therefore at despair. Nothing makes thy face gather blackness, and thy soul hasten faster to the complexion of the damned souls, than this. Now thou sinnest after the similitude of those that are in hell.

*Consideration 3. Despair strengthens and enrageth all other sins in the soul.* None fight so fiercely as those who look for no quarter. They think themselves dead men, and therefore they will sell their lives as dear as they can. Samson despaired of ever getting out of the Philistines' hands—his eyes being now lost, and he unfit to make an escape. What doth he meditate, now his case is desperate, but his enemies' ruin, though it costs him his own? He cares not though he pulls the house on his own head, so it may but fall on the Philistines' also. Absalom, when by the cursed counsel of Ahithophel he had, as he thought, made himself so hateful to David as to put him past all hope of being

treated with, then breaks out with a high rage and seeks the ruin of his royal father with fire and sword. So cruel a thing is despair, it teaches to show no respect where it looks for none. But most clearly it appears in the devil himself, who, knowing himself to be excepted from the pardon, sins with a rage as high as heaven. And the same sin hath the same effects in men that it hath in the devil, according to the degrees of it that are found in them. 'They said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices,' Jer. 18:11, 12. Did you never see a sturdy beggar—after a while knocking at a door, and concluding by the present silence or denial that he shall have nothing given him—fall into a cursing and railing of them that dwell there? Even such foul language doth despair learn the sinner to belch out against the God of heaven. If despair enters it is impossible to keep blasphemy out. Pray, therefore, and do thy utmost to repel this dart, lest it soon set thy soul on a flame with this hell-fire of blasphemy.

Hear, O you souls smitten for sin, that spend your life in sighs, sobs, and tears for your horrid crimes past, would you again be seen fighting against God as fierce as ever? As you would not, take heed of despair. If thou once thinkest that God's heart is hardened against thee, thy heart will not be long hardening against him. And this, by the way, may administer comfort to the thoughts of some gracious but troubled souls, who can find no faith that they have, yea, who are oft reckoning themselves among despairers. Let me ask thee who art in this sad condition, this one thing, Canst thou find any love breathing in thy heart towards God, though thou canst find no breath of love coming at present from him to thee? And art thou tender and fearful of sinning against him, even while thou seemest to thy own thoughts to hope for no mercy from him? If so, be of good comfort; thy faith may be weak, but thou art far from being under the power of despair. Desperate souls do not use to reserve any love for God, or care for the pleasing of him. There is some faith surely in thy soul which is the cause of these motions, though, like the spring in a watch, it be itself unseen, when the other graces moved by it are visible.

*Consideration 4.* The greatness of this sin of despair appears in this, *that the least sin envenomed by it is unpardonable, and without this*

*the greatest is pardonable.* That must needs of all sins be most abominable which makes the creature incapable of mercy. Judas was not damned merely for his treason and murder; for others that had their hands deep in the same horrid fact, obtained a pardon by faith in that blood which through cruelty they shed; but they were these heightened into the greatest malignity possible, from the putrid stuff of despair and final impenitency with which his wretched heart was filled, that he died so miserably of, and now is infinitely more miserably damned for. Such being despair, then, oh, let us shrink from the woful gulf!



## DIRECTION NINTH.

### THE SEVERAL PIECES OF THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD.

#### Fifth Piece—The Christian's Helmet.

*'And take the helmet of salvation' (Eph. 6:17).*

These words present us with another piece of the Christian's panoply—a *helmet* to cover his head in the day of battle—THE HELMET OF SALVATION. It makes the fifth in the apostle's order. And, which is observable, this, with most of the pieces in this magazine, are defensive arms, and all to defend the Christian from sin, none to secure him from suffering.

FIRST. They are most *defensive* arms. Indeed, there is but one of all the pieces in the whole panoply for offence, *i.e.* 'the sword.' It may be to give us this hint, that this spiritual war of the Christian lies chiefly on the defence, and therefore requires arms most of this kind to wage it. God hath deposited a rich treasure of grace in every saint's heart. At this is the devil's great spite; to plunder him of it, and with it of his happiness, he commenceth a bloody war against him. So that the Christian overcomes his enemy when himself is not overcome by him. He wins the day when he doth not lose his grace, his work being rather to keep what is his own than to get what is his enemy's. And truly this one thing well heeded, that the saint's war lies chiefly on the defence, would be of singular use to direct the Christian how to manage his combats both with Satan and also his instruments.

*First. With Satan.* Look, Christian, thou standest always in a defensive posture, with thy armour on, as a soldier, upon thy works, ready to defend the castle of thy soul which God hath set thee to keep, and valiantly to repel Satan's assaults whenever he makes his approach. But be not persuaded out of the line of thy place, and calling that God hath drawn about thee; no, not under the specious pretence of zeal and hope to get the greater victory by falling into the enemies' quarters. Let Satan be the assailant, and come if he will to tempt thee; but go not thou in a bravado to tempt him to do it. It is just he should be foiled that seeks his own danger. This got Peter his fall in the high-priest's hall, who was left therefore cowardly to deny his master, that he might learn humbly to deny himself ever after.

*Second. With Satan's instruments.* May be they revile and reproach thee. Remember thy part lies on the defence. Give not railing for railing, reproach for reproach. The gospel allows thee no liberty to use their weapons, and return them *quid pro quo*—stroke for stroke. 'Be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing,' 1 Peter 3:8, 9. Thou hast here a girdle and breastplate to defend thee from their bullets—the comfort of thy own sincerity and holy walking, with which thou mayest wipe off the dirt thrown upon thy own face—but no weapon for self-revenge. A shield is put into thy hand, which thou mayest lift up to quench their fiery darts, but no darts of bitter words to retort upon them. Thou art '*shod with peace,*' that thou mayest walk safely upon the injuries they do thee, without any prick or pain to thy spirit, but not with pride to trample upon the persons that wrong thee.

SECOND. As most of the pieces are defensive, so all of them *to defend from sin, none to secure the Christian from suffering.* They are to defend him in suffering, not privilege him from it. He must prepare the more for suffering, because he is so well furnished with armour to bear it. Armour is not given for men to wear by the fireside at home, but in the field. How shall the maker be praised, if the metal of his arms be not known? And where shall it be put to the proof, but amidst swords and bullets? He that desires to live all his days in an isle of providence, where the whole year is summer, will never make a good Christian. Resolve for hardship, or lay down thine arms. Here is

the true reason why so few come at the beat of Christ's drum to his standard; and so many of those few that have listed themselves by an external profession under him, do within a while drop away, and leave his colours; it is suffering work they are sick of. Most men are more tender of their skin than conscience; and had rather the gospel had provided armour to defend their bodies from death and danger, than their souls from sin and Satan.

But I come to the words—'*and take the helmet of salvation;*' in which—after we notice the copulative that clasps this to the former piece of armour, viz. '*and,*' showing the connection between the various pieces, we pass to observe—FIRST. The piece of armour itself—THE HELMET OF SALVATION. SECOND. The *use* of this 'helmet,' or the *offices* of hope in the Christian's warfare. THIRD. Several *applications* of the doctrine of the helmet of salvation, alike to those who have and to those who have it not.

#### CONNECTION OF THE HELMET WITH THE SHIELD, AND THE PREVIOUS PIECES OF THE ARMOUR.

Let us notice the copulative '*and.*' '*And take the helmet of salvation;*' that is, with the shield of faith, and all the other pieces of armour here set down, *take this also into the field with you.* See here how every grace is lovingly coupled to its fellow; and all at last, though many pieces, make but one suit; though many links, yet make but one chain. The note which this points at is the concatenation of graces.

[THE CONCATENATION OF GRACES, *in their birth, growth, and decay.*]

NOTE. The sanctifying saving graces of God's Spirit *are linked inseparably together;* there is a connection of them one to the other, and that in their birth, growth, and decay.

*First Connection.* In their *birth.* Where one sanctifying grace is, the rest are all to be found in its company. It is not so in common gifts and graces. These are parcelled out like the gifts Abraham bestowed on the children he had by his concubines, Gen. 25:6. One hath this gift, another hath that, none hath all. He that hath a gift of knowledge may want a gift of utterance, and so of the rest. But sanctifying graces are like the inheritance he gave to Isaac; every true believer hath them all given him. 'He that is in Christ is a new creature.' And, 'Behold all things are become new,' II Cor. 5:17. Now, the new creature contains all. As natural corruption is a universal principle of all sin, that sours the whole lump of man's nature; so is sanctifying grace an universal principle, that sweetly seasons and renews the whole man at once, though not

wholly. Grace comes, saith one, into the soul, as the soul into the body at once. Indeed, it grows by steps, but is born at once. The new creature hath all its parts formed together, though not its degrees. Some one grace may, we confess, be perceived to stir, and so come under the Christian's notice, before another. He may feel his fear of God putting forth itself in a holy trembling, and awe upon his spirit, at the thoughts of God, before he sees his faith in the fiduciary recumbency of his soul upon God; yet the one grace is not in its production before the other. One part of the world hath been discovered to us long after the other; yet all the world was made together. Now this connection of graces in their birth is of double use.

1. *Use.* To relieve the sincere Christian when in doubt of his gracious state, because some one grace which he inquires for, cannot at present be discerned in his soul by him. Possibly it is faith thou hast been looking for, and it is not at any hand to be heard of. Well, Christian, do not presently unsaint thyself till thou hast made further trial of thyself. Send out therefore thy spies to search for some other grace—as thy *love to Christ;* may be thou wilt hear some tidings of this grace, though the other is not in view. Hath not thy love to God and Christ been seen by thee in such a temptation, chasing it away with Joseph's answer to his wanton mistress, 'How...can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' Yea, mayest thou not see it all the day long, either in thy sincere care to please him, or hearty sorrow when thou hast done

anything that grieves him? in which two veins run the life-blood of a soul's love to Christ. Now, know to thy comfort, that thy love can tell thee news of thy faith. As Christ said in another case, 'He that hath seen me hath seen my Father,' John 14:9; so say I to thee, 'Thou that hast seen thy love to Christ, hast seen thy faith in the face of thy love.'

But, may be, thy love to Christ is also lodged in a cloud. Well, then, see whether thou canst spy no evangelical repentance, loathing thee with the sight of thy sins, as also enflaming thee with revenge against them, as those enemies which drew thee into rebellion against God, yea, were the bloody weapon with which thou hast so oft wounded the name and murdered the Son of God. Behold, the grace thou lookest for stands before thee. What is love to God, if zeal against sin as God's enemy be not? Did not Abishai love David, when his heart boiled so over with rage against Shimei for cursing David, that he could not contain, but breaks out into a passion, saying, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head?' II Sam. 16:9. And by thy own acknowledgment it troubles thee as much to hear thy lusts bark against God, and thy will is as good to be the death of them, if God would but say his fiat to it, as ever Abishai's was to strike that traitor's head off his shoulders; and yet art thou in doubt whether thou lovest God or no? Truly then thou canst not see fire for flame, love for zeal. Thus, as by taking hold of one link you may draw up the rest of the chain that lies under water, so by discovering one grace, thou mayest bring all to sight. Joseph and Mary were indeed deceived, when they supposed their son to be in the company of their kindred, Luke 2:44. But so canst thou not here. For this holy kindred of graces go ever together, they are knit, as members of the body, one to another. Though you see only the face of a man, yet you doubt not but the whole man is there.

2. *Use.* As it may relieve the sincere Christian, so it will help to *uncase and put the hypocrite to shame, who makes great pretensions to some one grace when he hates another at the same time*—a certain note of a false heart. He never had any grace that loves not all graces. Moses would not out of Egypt with half his company, Ex. 10. Either all must go or none shall stir. Neither

will the Spirit of God come into a soul with half of his sanctifying graces, but with all his train. If therefore thy heart be set against any one grace, it proves thou art a stranger to the rest; and though thou mayest seem a great admirer and lover of one grace, yet the defiance thou standest in to others washeth off the paint of this fair cover. Love and hatred are of the whole kind; he that loves or hates one saint as such, doth the same by every saint; so he that cordially closeth with one grace, will find every grace endeared to him upon the same account; for they are as like one to another, as one beam of the sun is to another beam.

*Second Connection.* Sanctifying graces are connected in their *growth and decay*. Increase one grace, and you strengthen all; impair one, and you will be a loser in all; and the reason is, because they are reciprocally helpful each to other. So that when one grace is wounded, the assistance it should and would, if in temper, contribute to the Christian's common stock, is either wholly detained or much lessened. When love cools, obedience slacks and drives heavily, because it wants the oil on its wheel that love used to drop. Obedience faltering, faith weakens apace. How can there be great faith when there is little faithfulness? Faith weakening, hope presently wavers; for it is the credit of faith's report, that hope goes on to expect good from God. And hope wavering, patience breaks, and can keep shop windows open no longer, because it trades with the stock hope lends it. In the body you observe there are many members, yet all make but one body; and every member so useful, that the others are beholden to it. So in the Christian there are many graces, but one new creature. And the eye of knowledge cannot say to the hand of faith, 'I have no need of thee,' nor the hand of faith to the foot of obedience, but all are preserved by the mutual care they have of one another. For, as ruin to the whole city may enter at a breach in one part of its wall, and the soul run out through a wound in a particular member of the body; so the ruin of all the graces may, yea must needs, follow on the ruin of any one. There is indeed a stronger bond of necessity between graces of our souls than there is between the members of our body. It is possible, yea ordinary, for some member to be cut off from the body without the death of the

whole, because all the members of the body are not vital parts. But every grace is a vital part in the new creature, and so essential to its very being that its absence cannot be supplied *per vicarium*—by substitution. In the body one eye can make a shift to do the office of its fellow which is put out; and one hand do the other's work that is cut off, though may not be so exactly; but faith cannot do the office of love, nor love the work of obedience. The lack of one wheel spoils the motion of the whole clock. And if one grace should be wanting, the end would not be attained for which this rare piece of workmanship is set up in the saint's heart.

*[Two inferences to be drawn from the connection of graces.]*

*First Inference.* Let it learn thee, Christian, this wisdom, *whenever thou findest any grace weakened, either through thy negligence not tending it, or Satan's temptations wounding it, speedily to endeavour to recovery of it;* because thou dost not only lose the comfort which the exercise of this one grace might bring, but thou weakenest all the others. Is he a bad husband who hazards the fall of his house by suffering a hole or two in the roof go unmended? What, then, art thou that puttest thy whole gracious state in danger, by neglecting a timely repair of the breach made in any one of thy graces? And so when thou art tempted to any sin, look not on it as a single sin, but as having all other sins in its belly. Consider what thou dost before thou gratifiest Satan in any one motion; for by one sin thou strengthenest the whole body of sin. Give to one sin, and that will send more beggars to your door; and they will come with a stronger plea than the former; another, why mayest thou not do this for them, as well as that? Thy best way is to keep the door shut to all; lest, while thou intendest to entertain only one, all crowd in with it. But if it were possible that thou couldst break this connection of sin, so as to take off one link that pleaseth thee best, and not draw the whole chain after thee by committing this, yet know there is a connection of guilt also. 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one

point, he is guilty of all,' James 2:10. As he that administereth to the estate of one deceased, though it be never so little that he takes into his hands, becomes liable to pay all his debts, and brings all his creditors upon him; so by tampering but with one sin, and that a little one, thou bringest the whole law upon thy back, which will arrest thee upon God's suit, as a trespasser and transgressor of all its commands. A man cannot stab any part of the face but he will disfigure the whole countenance, and wrong the whole man. Thus the law is copulative; an affront done to one redounds to the dishonour of all, and so is resented by God the lawgiver, whose authority is equally in all.

*Second Inference.* This may comfort those who trouble themselves with the thoughts of future changes which may befall them, and so alter the scene of their affairs, as to call them to act a part they never much thought upon; and what shall they do then, say they? Now, blessed be God, they make a shift to serve God in their place. But what if straits come? poverty, sickness, or other crosses, make a breach in their bank? How, alas! shall they then behave themselves? Where is their faith, patience, contentment, and other suffering graces, that should enable them to walk on these waves without sinking? They fear, alas! little of these suffering graces is in their hands for such a time. Well, Christian, for thy encouragement know, that if the graces of thy present condition—those I mean which God calls thee to exercise now in thy prosperous state—be lively, and quit themselves well, thou mayest comfortably hope the other suffering graces, which now stand unseen behind the curtain, will do the same, when God changeth the scene of thy affairs and calls them upon the stage to act their part. The more humble thou art now with thy abundance, the more patient thou wilt certainly show thyself in thy penury. So much as thy heart is now above the world's enjoyments, even so much thou wilt then be above the troubles and sorrows of it. Trees, they say, grow proportionably under ground to what they do above ground; and the Christian will find something like this in his graces.



## DIRECTION IX.—FIRST GENERAL PART.

[THE HELMET OF SALVATION, WHAT IT IS.]

*'Take the helmet of salvation'* (Eph. 6:17).

We have done with the connective particle, whereby this piece is coupled to the former, and now come to address our discourse to the piece of armour itself—*'take the helmet of salvation.'* Though we have not here, as in all the other [pieces], the grace expressed, yet we need not be long at a loss for it, if we consult with another place, where our apostle lends us a key to decipher his meaning in this. And none so fit to be interpreter of the apostle's words as himself. The place is, 1 Thes. 5:8, 'And for an helmet, the hope of salvation:' so that, without any further scruple, we shall fasten the grace of 'hope,' as intended by the Holy Ghost in this place. Now, in order to a treatise of this grace, it is requisite that something be said by explication that may serve as a light set up in the entry, to lead us the better into the several rooms of the point which is to be the subject of our discourse; and this I shall do by showing—FIRST. What 'hope' is. SECOND. Why called 'the hope of salvation.' THIRD. Why this 'hope' is compared to 'a helmet.'

*[The nature of the hope that forms the helmet.]*

FIRST INQUIRY. What is the *nature of the hope that forms the Christian's helmet*? A little to open the nature of this grace of hope, we shall do so as it will best be done, by laying down a plain description of it, and briefly explicating the parts. Hope is a supernatural grace of God, whereby the believer, through Christ, expects and waits for all those good things of the promise, which at present he hath not received, or not fully.

*First.* Here is the *author or efficient of hope*—God; who is called 'the God of all grace,' 1 Peter 5:10—that is, the giver and worker of all grace, both as to the first seed and the further growth of it. It is impossible for the creature to make the least pile of grass, or being made, to make it grow; and as impossible to produce the least seed of grace in the heart, or to add one cubit to the stature of it. No, as God is the father of the rain, by which the herbs in the fields spring and grow, so also of those spiritual dews and influences that must make every grace thrive

and flourish. The apostle, in the former place, teacheth us this when he prays that God would 'perfect, establish, strengthen, settle them.' And as of all grace in general, so of this in particular, Rom. 15:13, where he is styled 'the God of hope;' and 'by whom we abound in hope' also. It is a *supernatural hope*; and thereby we distinguish it from the heathens' hope, which, with the rest of their moral virtues, so far as any excellency was found in them, came from God—to whom every man that cometh into the world is beholden for all the light he hath, John 1:9—and is but the remains of man's first noble principles, as sometimes we shall see a broken turret or two stand in the midst of the ruins of some stately palace demolished, that serves for little more than to help the spectator to give a guess what godly buildings once stood there.

*Second.* Here is hope's *subject—the believer*. True hope is a jewel that none wears but Christ's bride; a grace with which none is graced but the believer's soul. Christless and hopeless are joined together, Eph. 2:12. And here it is not amiss to observe the order in which hope stands to faith. In regard of time, they are not one before another; but in order of nature and operation, faith hath preceded hope. First, faith closeth with the promise as a true and faithful word, then hope lifts up the soul to wait for the performance of it. Who goes out to meet him that he believes will not come? The promise is, as it were, God's love-letter to his church and spouse, in which he opens his very heart, and tells all he means to do for her. Faith reads and embraceth it with joy, whereupon the believing soul by hope looks out at his window with a longing expectation to see her husband's chariot come in the accomplishment thereof. So Paul gives a reason for his own hope from his faith, Acts 24:14, 15, and prays for the Romans' faith in order to their hope, Rom. 15:13.






















*Third.* Here is hope's *object*.

1. In general, *something that is good*. If a thing be evil, we fear and flee from it; if good, we hope and wait for it. And here is one note of difference between it and faith. Faith believes

evil as well as good; hope is conversant about good.

2. It is *the good of the promise*. And in this faith and hope agree; both their lines are drawn from the same centre of the promise. Hope without a promise is like an anchor without ground to hold by; it bears the promise on its name. 'I stand and am judged,' saith Paul, 'for the hope of the promise,' Acts 26:6. So David shows where he moors his ship and casts his anchor. 'I hope in thy word,' Ps. 119:81. True hope will trade only for true good. And we can all nothing so that the good God hath not promised; for the promise runs thus, 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly,' Ps. 84:11.

3. *All good things of the promise*. As God hath encircled all good in the promise, so he hath promised nothing but good; and therefore hope's object is all that the promise holds forth. Only, as the matter of the promise hath more degrees of goodness, so hope intends its act, and longs more earnestly for it. God, he is the chief good, and the fruition of him is promised as the utmost happiness of the creature. Therefore true hope takes her chief aim at God, and makes after all other promises in a subserviency to heave and lift the soul nearer unto him. He is called 'the Hope of Israel,' Jer. 17:13. There is nothing beyond God the enjoying of which the believer projects; and nothing short of God that he can be so content with as, for the enjoying of it, to be willing to give God a general and full discharge of what by promise he stands engaged to him for. Now, because God is only enjoyed fully and securely in heaven's blissful state, therefore it is called 'the hope of glory,' Col. 1:27, 'the hope of eternal life,' Titus 3:7, and 'the hope of salvation,' 1 Thes. 5:8.

4. The object of hope is *the good of the promise*, not in hand, but *yet to be performed*. 'Hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?' Rom. 8:24. Futurity is intrinsic to hope's object, and distinguisheth it from faith, which gives a present being to the promise, and is                       

*Second Reason.* It is called 'a hope of salvation,' to distinguish it from the worldling's hope, whose portion, Ps. 16, is in this life, and so his hope also. It is confessed that many of these will pretend to a hope of salvation; but the truth is, they neither have right to it, nor are they very eager of it. They think themselves so well seated in this world, that if they might have their wish, it should be that God would not remove them hence. Even when they say they hope to be saved, their consciences tell them that they had rather stay here than part with this world in hope to mend themselves in the other. They blow up themselves into a hope and desire of salvation, more out of a dread of hell than liking of heaven. None I think so mad among them but had rather be saved than damned—live in heaven than lie in hell—yet the best of the whole pack likes this world better than them both.

[Why hope is compared to a helmet.]

THIRD INQUIRY. Why is hope compared to a helmet? For this conceive a double reason.

*First Reason.* The helmet defends the head, a principal part of the body, from dint of bullet and sword; so this 'hope of salvation' *defends the soul, the principal part of man, and the principal faculties of that*, whereby no dangerous, to be sure no deadly, impression by Satan or sin be made on it. Temptations may trouble but cannot hurt, except their darts enter the will and leave a wound there, by drawing it to some consent and liking of them; from which this helmet of hope, if it be of the right make, and fits sure on the Christian's head, will defend him. It is hard to draw *him* into any treasonable practice against his prince, who is both well satisfied of his favour at present, and stands also on the stairs of hope, expecting assuredly to be called up within a while to the highest preferment that the court can afford or his king give. No, the weapons of rebellion and treason are usually forged and fashioned in discontent's shop. When subject's take themselves to be neglected and slighted by their prince—think that their preferments are now at an end, and [that they] must look for no great favours more to come from him—this softens them to receive every impression of disloyalty that any enemy to the king shall attempt to stamp them withal. As we see in the Israelites; thinking the men of Judah, of whose

tribe the king was, had got a monopoly of his favour, and themselves to be shut out from sharing, at least equally, with them therein; how soon are they—even at a blast or two of Sheba's seditious trumpet—made rebels against their sovereign? 'We have no part in David,' saith Sheba, 'neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel!' II Sam. 20:1. And see how this treason runs, even like a squib upon a rope. 'Every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba,' ver. 2. Thus, if once the soul fears it hath no part in God, and expects no inheritance from him, I know no sin so great but it may at the sound of the tempter's trumpet be drawn to commit.

*Second Reason.* As the helmet defends the soldier's head from wounding, *so his heart also from swooning*. It makes him bold and fearless in battle though amidst swords and bullets. Goliath with his helmet of brass and other furniture, how confidently and daringly did the man come on! As if he had been so enclosed in his armour that it was impossible that any we apon could come near to deliver a message of death unto him! This made him carry his crest so high, and defy a whole host, till at last he paid his life for his pride and folly. But here is a helmet that whoever wears it need never be put to shame for his holy boasting. God himself allows him so to do, and will bear him out in this rejoicing of his hope. 'Thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me,' Isa. 49:23. This made holy David so undaunted in the midst of his enemies, 'Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear,' Ps. 27:3. His hope would not suffer his heart so much as beat within him for any fear of what they could do to him. He had this 'helmet of salvation' on, and therefore he saith, 'Mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me,' ver. 6. A man cannot drown so long as his head is above water. Now it is the proper office of hope to do this for the Christian in times of any danger. 'When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh,' Luke 21:28. A strange time, one would think, for Christ then to bid his disciples lift up their heads in, when they see other 'men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth,' ver. 26, yet, now is the time of the

rising of their sun when others' is setting, and blackness of darkness overtaking them; because now the Christian's feast is coming, for which hope hath saved its stomach so long—'your redemption draweth nigh.' Two things make the head hang down—fear and shame. Hope easeth the Christian's heart of both these;

and so forbids him to give any sign of a desponding mind by a dejected countenance. And so much may suffice for explication of the words. I come now to lay down the one general point of doctrine, from which our whole discourse on this one piece of armour shall be drawn.

## DIRECTION IX.—SECOND GENERAL PART.

### [USE OF THE HELMET, OR THE OFFICES OF HOPE IN THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.]

The doctrine now then is, that hope is a grace of *singular use and service to us all along our spiritual warfare and Christian course*. We are directed to take the helmet of salvation—and this, not for some particular occasion and then hang it by till another extraordinary strait calls us to take it down and use it again—but we must take it so as never to lay it aside till God shall take off this helmet to put on a crown of glory in the room of it. 'Be sober and hope to the end,' is the apostle Peter's counsel, 1 Peter 1:13. There are some engines of war that are of use but now and then, as ladders for scaling of a town or fort; which done, [they] are laid aside for a long time and not missed. But the helmet is of continual use. We shall need it as long as our war with sin and Satan lasts. The Christian is not beneath hope so long as above ground, nor above hope so long as beneath heaven. Indeed when once he enters the gates of that glorious city, then 'farewell hope and welcome love forever.' He may say, with the holy martyr, Armour becomes earth, but robes heaven. Hope goes into the field and waits on the Christian till the last battle be fought and the field cleared, and then faith and hope together carry him in the chariot of the promise to heaven door, where they deliver up his soul into the hands of love and joy, which stand ready to conduct him into the blissful presence of God. But that I may speak more particularly of hope's serviceableness to the Christian, and the several offices it performeth for him, I shall reduce all to these four heads. FIRST. Hope puts the Christian upon high and noble exploits. SECOND. Hope makes him diligent and faithful in the meanest services. THIRD. Hope keeps him patient amidst the

greatest sufferings. FOURTH. Hope composeth and quiets the spirit, when God stays longest before he comes to perform promises. First of the first.

#### FIRST OFFICE.

[*Hope, as the Christian's helmet,*  
STIRS HIM TO NOBLE EXPLOITS.]

Hope of salvation *puts the Christian upon high and noble exploits*. It is a grace born for great actions. Faith and hope are the two poles on which all the Christian's noble enterprises turn. As carnal hope excites carnal men to their achievements which gain them any renown in the world, so is this heavenly hope influential unto the saints' undertakings. What makes the merchant sell house and land, and ship his whole estate away to the other end almost of the world—and this amidst a thousand hazards from pirates, waves and winds—but hope to get a greater by this bold adventure? What makes the daring soldier rush into the furious battle, upon the very mouth of death itself, but hope to snatch honour and spoil out of its jaws? *Hope* is his helmet, shield, and all, which makes him laugh on the face of all danger. In a word, what makes the scholar beat his brains so hard — sometimes with the hazard of breaking them, by overstraining his parts with too eager and hot a pursuit of learning—but hope but hope of commencing some degrees higher in the knowledge of those secrets in nature that are locked up from vulgar understandings?—who, when he hath attained his desire, is paid but little better for all his pains and study, that have worn nature in him to the stumps, than he is that tears

the flesh off his hands and knees with creeping up some craggy mountain, which proves but a barren bleak place to stand in, and wraps him up in the clouds from the sight of others, leaving him little more to please himself with but this, that he can look over other men's heads, and see a little farther than they. Now if these peddling hopes can prevail with men to such fixed resolutions for the obtaining of these poor sorry things, which borrow part of their goodness from men's fancy and imagination, how much more effectual must the Christian's hope of eternal life be to provoke him to the achievement of more noble exploits! Let a few instances suffice. FIRST. This hope raiseth in the Christian a heroic resolution against those lusts that held him before in bondage. SECOND. This hope ennobles and enables the Christian to contemn the present world with all its pomp, treasure, and pleasure, to which the rest of the sons of men are, every man of them, basely enslaved. THIRD. This hope, where it is steadfast, makes the Christian active and zealous for God. FOURTH. It begets in the Christian a holy impatience after further attainments, especially when it grows to some strength.

[INSTANCES *wherein hope has raised the Christian to noble exploits.*]

FIRST INSTANCE. This hope raiseth in the Christian *heroic resolution against those lusts that held him before in bondage*. The Israelites who couched so tamely under the Egyptian burdens, without any attempt made by them to shake off the oppressor's yoke, when once Moses came from God to give them hope of an approaching salvation, and his report had gained some credit to be believed by them, it is strange to see what a mighty change the impression of their new-conceived hope made upon them. On a sudden their mettle returns, and their blood, that with anguish and despair had so long chilled, and been even frozen in their veins, grows warm again. They who had hardly durst let their groans be heard—so cowed were their spirits with hard labour—dare now, fortified with hope, break open their prison doors, and march out of Egypt towards the place of rest promised, maugre [in spite of] all the power and wrath of enraged Pharaoh, who pursued them. Truly, thus it is with a soul in regard of sin's bondage.

O how impotent and poor-spirited is a soul void of this heavenly hope! what a tame slave hath Satan of him! He is the footstool for every base lust to trample upon. He suffers the devil to back and ride him whither he pleaseth, without wincing. No puddle so filthy, but Satan may draw him through it with a twine thread. The poor wretch is well enough contented with his ignoble servitude, because he knows no better master than him he serves, nor better wages than the swill of his sensual pleasures which his lusts allow him. But, let the news of salvation come to the ear of this sin-deluded soul, and a spiritual eye be given him to see the transcendent glory thereof, with a crevice of hope set open to him, that he is the person that shall inherit it, if willing to make an exchange of Satan for Christ, and of the slavery of his lusts for the liberty of his Redeemer's service—O what havoc then doth the soul begin to make among his lusts! He presently vows the death of them all, and sets his head at work how he may soonest and most effectually rid his hands of them. 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure,' 1 John 3:3. He now looks upon his lusts with no better eye than a captive prince would do on his cruel keepers, out of whose hands could he but make an escape, he would presently enjoy his crown and kingdom; and therefore meditates his utmost revenge upon them. There may be some hasty purposes taken up by carnal men against their lusts, upon some accidental discontent they meet with now and then in the prosecution of them; but, alas! the swords they draw against them are soon in their sheaths again, and all the seeming fray comes to nothing in the end. They, like Esau, go out full and angry in a sudden mood, but a present comes from their lusts that bribes them from hurting them; yea, so reconciles them to them, that, as he did by his brother, they can fall upon the necks of those lusts to kiss them, which a while before they threatened to kill; and all for want of a true hope of heaven to outbid the proffers their lusts make to appease their anger, which would never yield a peace should be patched up with them on such infinite hard terms as it must needs be, the loss of eternal salvation. He that hath a mind to provide himself with arguments to arm him against sin's motions, need not go far to seek them; but he that handles this one well,

and drives it home to the head, will not need many more.

What is the sin this would not prostrate? Art thou tempted to any sensual lust? Ask thy hope what thou lookest to be in heaven. And canst thou yield to play the beast on earth, who hopest to be made like the pure and holy angels in heaven?

Is it a sin of profit that bewitcheth thee? Is not a hope of heaven a spell strong enough to charm this devil? Can gold bear any sway with thee that hopest to be heir of that city where gold bears no price? Wherefore is that blissful place said to be paved with gold, but to let us know it shall be there trampled upon as of no account? And wilt thou let *that* now lie in thy heart, that will ere long be laid under thy feet?

Is it a sin of revenge? Dost thou not hope for a day when thy dear Saviour will plead thy cause, and what needest thou then take his work out of his hand? Let him be his own judge that hath no hope; the Judge, when he comes, will take his part.

SECOND INSTANCE. This hope *ennobles and enables the Christian to condemn the present world, with all its pomp, treasure, and pleasure*, to which the rest of the sons of men are, every man of them, basely enslaved and held by the leg as a prisoner by this chain. When once faith makes a discovery of land that the Christian hath lying in heaven, and, by hope, he begins to lot upon it as that which he shall shortly take up at his remove from earth; truly then the price of this world's felicity falls low in his account; he can sell all his hopes from it very cheap, yea, he can part with what he hath in hand of this world's growth, when God calls him to it, more freely than Alexander did the cities he took; because, when all this is gone, he shall leave himself a better hope than that great monarch had to live upon. The hopes of heaven leave a blot upon the world in the Christian's thoughts. It is no more now to him, than the asses were to anointed Saul.

Story tells us of some Turks who have, upon the sight of Mahomet's tomb, put their eyes out, that they might not defile them, forsooth! with any common object after they had been blessed with seeing one so sacred. I am sure many a gracious soul there hath been, who by a prospect of heaven's glory—the palace of the great God—set before the eye of their faith,


have been so ravished with the sight, that they have desired God even to seal up their eyes by death, with Simeon, who would not by his good-will have lived a day after that blessed hour in which his eyes had beheld the 'salvation' of God. Abraham was under the hope of this salvation, and therefore 'he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country;...for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,' Heb. 11:9, 10. Canaan would have liked [pleased] him well enough, if God had not told him of a heaven that he meant to give him, in comparison to which, Canaan is now but Cabul—a dirty land, in his judgment. So Paul tells us not only the low thoughts he hath himself of the world, but as they agree with the common sense of all believers, whose hope is come to any consistency and settlement, 'for our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour,' Php. 3:20. Mark, he sets the saint with his back upon earth; and draws his reason from their hope—'from whence we look,' &c. Indeed, he that looks on heaven must needs look off earth. The soul's eye can as little as the body's eye be above and below at the same time. Every man converseth most where he hopes for to receive his greatest gains and advantage. The publican sits at the receipt of custom: there come in his gains. The courtier stands at his prince's elbow. The merchant, if you will find him, look for him in his warehouse or at the exchange. But the Christian's hope carries him by all these doors. Here is not my hope, saith the soul; and therefore not my haunt. My hope is in heaven, from whence I look for the Saviour to come, and my salvation to come with him; there I live, walk, and wait.

Nothing but a steadfast well-grounded hope of salvation can buy off the creature's worldly hopes. The heart of man cannot be in this world without a hope; and if it hath no hope for heaven, it must of necessity take in at earth, and borrow one there such as it can afford. What indeed can suit an earthly heart better than an earthly hope? And that which is a man's hope—though poor and peddling—is highly prized, and hardly parted with. As we see in a man like to drown, and [who] hath only some weed or bough by the bank's side to hold by; he will die with it in his hand rather than let go; he will endure blows and wounds rather than lose his hold. Nothing can take him from it, but that which he hopes

may serve better to save him from drowning. Thus it is with a man whose hope is set upon the world, and whose happiness [is] expected to be paid in from thence. O how such a one hugs and hangs about the world! You may as soon persuade a fox to come out of his hole, where he hath taken sanctuary from the dogs. Such a one to cast off his hopes! No, he is undone without this pelf and that honour; it is that he hath a lid up his hopes in, and hope and life are ever kept in the same hand. Scare and threaten him with what you will, still the man's heart will hold its own. Yea, throw hell-fire into his bosom, and tell him this love of the world, and making gold his hope, will damn him another day, still he will hold to his way.

Felix is a fit instance for this, Acts 24:26. Paul preached a thundering sermon before him; and though the preacher was at the bar, and Felix on the bench, yet God so armed the word, that he 'trembled' to hear the prisoner speak 'of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.' Yet this man, notwithstanding his conscience was struggling with the fears of judgement, and some sparks of divine vengeance had taken fire on him, could at the same time be sending out his heart on a covetous errand, to look for a bribe, for want of which he left that blessed servant of God in his bloody enemies' hands; for it is said, ver. 26, 'he hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him.' But he missed his market; for, as a sordid hope of a little money made him basely refuse to deliver Paul, so the blessed hope which Paul had for another world made him more honourably disdain to purchase his deliverance at his hands with a bribe.

THIRD INSTANCE. This hope of salvation, where it is steadfast, *makes the Christian active and zealous for God*. It is called 'a lively hope,' 1 Peter 1:3. They are men of mettle that have it. You may expect more from him than many others, and not be deceived. Why are men dull and heavy in their service of God? Truly because their hopes are so. Hopeless and lifeless go together. No marvel the work goes hardly off a-hand, when men have no hope, or but little, to be well paid for their labour in doing of it. He that thinks he works for a song, as we say, will not sing at his work—I mean, be forward and cheery in it. The best customer is

sure to be served best and first, and him we count the best customer that we hope will be the best paymaster. If God be thought so, we will leave all to do his business. This made Paul engage so deep in the service of the gospel, [as] even to lose his worldly friends, and lay his own life to stake, it was 'for the hope of the promise,' Acts 26:6. This made the other Israelites that feared God follow the trade of godliness so close, 'unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come,' ver. 7. Mark, they are both instant, and constant, . They run with full speed, stretching themselves forth as in a race; and this, at night and day—no stop or halt in their way, but ever putting on. And what is it that keeps them in breath? even the hope that they shall at last come to that salvation promised. Nothing better to expectorate and clear the soul of this dull phlegm of sloth and listlessness of spirit in the service of God, than hope well improved and strengthened. It is the very physic which the apostle prescribes for this disease: 'We desire that every one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful,' Heb. 6:11, 12.

FOURTH INSTANCE. Hope begets in the Christian *a holy impatience after further attainments, especially when it grows to some strength*. The higher our hopes of salvation rise, the more will our hearts widen and distend themselves in holy desires. 'Not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body,' Rom. 8:23. Methinks rejoicing would better become them for what they have already, than groaning for what they have not. Who may better stay long for their dinner, than they who have their stomachs stayed with a good breakfast? This would hold in bodily food, but not spiritual. No doubt, the sweetness which they tasted from their first-fruits in hand did cheer their spirits; but the thoughts of what was behind made them groan. Hope waits for all, and will not let the soul sit down contented till all the dishes be on the board—till the whole harvest that stands on the field of the promise be reaped and well inned; yea, the more the Christian hath received in partial payments, the deeper groans hope

makes the soul fetch for what is behind. And that,

*First.* Because these foretastes do *acquaint the Christian more with the nature of those joys which are in heaven, and so enlarge his understanding to have more raised conceptions of the felicity those enjoy that are arrived there.* And the increasing of his knowledge must needs enlarge his desires; and those desires break out into sad groans, to think what sweet wine is drunk in full bowls by glorified saints, and he living where only a sip is allowed, that doth not satisfy but kindle his thirst. It is harder now for him to live on this side heaven than before he knew so much. He is like one that stands at the door within which is a rich feast. He hears them how merry they are. Through the keyhole he sees what variety they have; and by a little which he licks from the trenchers that are brought out is sensible how delicious their fare is. O how such a one's teeth would water after their cheer; which another misse th not that hears not of it, or only hears, and tastes not of their dainties! The nearer the soul stands to heaven, and the more he knows of their joys, the more he blesseth them and pities himself. None long for heaven more than those who enjoy most of heaven. All delays now are exceedingly tedious to such. Their continual moan is, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariot?' The last year is thought longer by the apprentice than all his time before, because it is nearer out. And if delays be so tedious, what then are desertions to such a soul, who hath his hopes of salvation raised high by the sweet illapses of the Spirit and foretastes of glory! No doubt Moses' death so nigh Canaan, after he had tasted of the fruit of the land at the spies' hand, was exceeding grievous. To lose a child grown up, when we seem ready to reap our hopes conceived of him, is more than to part with two in the cradle, that have not yet drawn our conceptions far. The Christian indeed, cannot quite lose his hopes. Yet he may have them nipped and set back, as a forward spring, by after-claps of winter weather, which pinches so much the more because the warm beams of the sun had made the herbs come forth and disclose themselves. And so desertions from God do make the saddest impression upon those, above all others, whose expectation had advanced far, and, by the present sense of

divine goodness, been unfolded into a kind of rejoicing through hope of glory. Now to meet with a damp from the frowns of the Almighty, and to be benighted by the withdrawing of that light which did so ravish it, O how dreadful must this sudden change be to the soul!

*Second.* These present attainments of grace or comfort, they do *embolden the soul to expect yet more; and so provoke the Christian to press on for the full payment of all.* See both these in David: 'Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice,' Ps. 63:7. The present boon he hath got makes him rejoice in hope of what is yet to come, and by this scent he is carried out with full cry to pursue the chase for more, as appears in the very next words, 'my soul followeth hard after thee,' ver. 8. And no wonder, if we consider that God gives his people their experiences with this very notion stamped on them, *i.e.* to raise their expectations for further mercies at his hand: 'I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope,' Hosea 2:15. God is there speaking to a soul converted and newly taken into covenant, what blessings he will bestow on it, as the happy effects of its reconciliation to God and marriage with Christ, and he alludes to his dealing with Israel, who came out of a desolate wilderness—where they had wandered, and endured unspeakable hardship, forty years—into a pleasant fruitful country, in the very entrance where whereof this Achor lay, which, when God gave them, he would not have them look on it as in itself it was a little spot of ground, and not so much worth, but as the opening of a door through which he would undertake to let them into the possession of the whole land in process of time; which circumstance, believed by them, made Joshua advance his banners with so much courage against the proudest of his enemies, well knowing that man could not shut that door upon them which God had opened to them.

Thus every particular assistance God gives the Christian against one corruption, is intended by God to be an Achor—'a door of hope,' from which he may expect the total overthrow of that cursed seed in his bosom. When he adds the least degree of strength to his grace or comfort he gives us an Achor, or door of hope, that he will consummate both in glory. O what courage this must needs bring to thee, poor heart, in thy



fears and faintings! Paul had many enemies at Ephesus to oppose him, but having ‘an effectual door opened unto him,’ for his encouragement, he went on undauntedly, 1 Cor. 16:9. As an army, when, after stubborn resistance by the enemy, who labour what they can to keep them out, the door or gate of the city flies open, then the soldiers press in amain with a shout, ‘the city is our own.’ Thus when, after long tugging, and much wrestling with God for pardon of sin, or strength against sin, the door of the promise flies open, and God comes in with some assisting, comforting presence, now hope takes heart, and makes the soul fall on with double force and zeal.

## SECOND OFFICE.

*[Hope, as the Christian’s helmet, makes him FAITHFUL IN THE MEANEST SERVICES.]*

As hope raiseth the Christian’s spirit to attempt great exploits, so it *makes him diligent and faithful in the meanest and lowest services that the providence of God calls him to;*—for the same providence lays out every one his work and calling, which sets bounds for their habitations on the earth. Some he sets on the high places of the earth, and appoints them honourable employments, suitable to their place. Others he pitcheth down on lower ground, and orders them in some obscure corner, to employ themselves about work of an inferior nature all their life, and we need not be ashamed to do that work which the great God sets us about. The Italians say true, ‘No man fouls his hands in doing his own business.’ Now, to encourage every Christian to be faithful in his particular place, he hath made promises that are applicable to them all. Promises are like the beams of the sun: they shine in as freely at the window of the poor man’s cottage as of the prince’s palace. And these hope trades with, and from these animates the Christian at his work. Indeed, we are no more faithful in our callings than [we are] acted by faith and hope therein.

Now, you shall observe, God lays his promise, so as it may strengthen our hands and hearts against the chief discouragement that is most like to weaken them in their callings. The great discouragement of those high and public

employments—magistracy and ministry—is the difficulty of the province, and opposition they find from the angry world. These therefore are guarded and supported with such promises as may fortify their hearts against the force and fury with which the world comes forth to oppose them. ‘I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee: be strong and of a good courage,’ Joshua 1:5, [a promise] which was given to Israel’s chief magistrate. And the minister’s promise suits well with this, as having ordinarily the same difficulties, enemies, and discouragements: ‘Go ye therefore and teach all nations;...and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,’ Matt. 28:19, 20. Again, the temptation which usually haunts persons in low and more ignoble callings, is the very meanness of them; which occasions discontent and envy in some, to see themselves on the floor, and their brother preferred to more honourable services; in others, dejection of spirit, as if they were, like the eunuch, but dry trees, unprofitable, and brought no glory to God, while others, by their more eminent places and callings, have the advantage of being highly serviceable to God in their generations. Now, to arm the Christian against this temptation, and remove this discouragement, God hath annexed æ great a reward in the promise to his faithfulness in the meanest employment, as the most honourable is capable of. What more mean and despicable than the servant’s employment? yet no less than heaven itself is promised to them if faithful. He is speaking there to such. ‘Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ,’ Col. 3:23, 24. Where observe,

*First. What honour he puts on the poor servants’ work.* He serves the Lord Christ; yea, in the lowest piece of work that belongs to his office. His drudgery is divine service, as well as his praying and hearing; for he saith, ‘Whatsoever ye do.’ Again observe,

*Second. The reward that is laid up for such;* and that is as great as he shall receive that hath been faithful in ruling kingdoms, ‘the reward of the inheritance.’ As if God had said, ‘Be not, O my child, out of love with thy coarse homely work. Ere long thou shalt sit as high as he that sways sceptres. Though your employment now be not the same with his, yet your acceptance is

the same, and so shall your reward also be.' Thus we see, as we bestow more abundant honour on those members which we think less honourable; so doth Christ with those members of his body which, by reason of their low place in the world, may be thought to be most despised—he puts an abundant honour upon them in his promise. And where hope is raised, the Christian cannot but take sweet satisfaction from the expectation thereof. The poor ploughman that is a saint, and plows in hope of reaping salvation, would be as well contented with his place and work as the bravest courtier is with his. Think of this, when any of you have a servant to choose; if you would have your work faithfully and heartily done, employ such about it—if they be to be had—as have a hope of salvation. This will not suffer them to wrong you, though they could. Their helmet will defend them from such temptations. Jacob was a true drudge for his master Laban by day and by night, though he used him none of the best in chopping and changing his wages so oft. But Jacob served in hope, and expected his reward from a better master than Laban; and this made him faithful to an unfaithful man. Joseph would not wrong his master, though at the request of his mistress. He chose to suffer his unjust anger, rather than accept of her unchaste love. The evidence of this grace in a servant is better security for his faithfulness than a bond of a thousand pounds.

### THIRD OFFICE.

*[Hope, as the Christian's helmet,*  
SUPPORTS HIM IN THE GREATEST AFFLICTIONS.]

This hope of salvation supports the soul *in the greatest afflictions*. The Christian's patience is, as it were, his back, on which he bears his burdens; and some afflictions are so heavy, that he needs a broad one to carry them well. But if hope lay not the pillow of the promise between his back and his burden, the least cross will prove insupportable; therefore it is called 'the patience of hope,' 1 Thes. 1:3. There is a patience, I confess, and many know not a better, when men force themselves into a kind of quietness in their troubles because they cannot help it, and there is no hope. This I may call a desperate

patience, and it may do them some service for a while, and but for a while. If despair were a good cure for troubles, the damned would have more ease; for they have despair enough, if that would help them. There is another patience also very common in the world, and that is a blockish stupid patience, which, like Nabal's mirth, lasts no longer than they are drunk with ignorance and senselessness; for they no sooner come to themselves to understand the true state they are in, but their hearts die within them.

But 'the patience of hope,' we are now treating of, is a sober grace, and abides as long as hope lasts; when hope is lively and active, then it floats, yea even danceth aloft the waters of affliction, as a tight sound ship doth in a tempestuous sea; but when hope springs a leak, then the billows break into the Christian's bosom, and he sinks apace, till hope, with much labour at the pump of the promise, clears the soul again. This was David's very case. 'Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul,' Ps. 69:1. What means he by 'coming unto his soul?' Surely no other than this, that they oppressed his spirit, and as it were sued into his very conscience, raising fears and perplexities there, by reason of his sins, which at present put his faith and hope to some disorder, that he could not for a while see to the comfortable end of his affliction, but was as one under water, and covered with his fears; as appears by what follows, 'I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing,' ver. 2. He compares himself to one in a quagmire, that can feel no firm ground to bear him up. And observe whence his trouble rose, and where the waters made their entrance: 'O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee,' ver. 5. This holy man lay under some fresh guilt, and this made him so uncomfortable under his affliction, because he saw his sin in the face of that and tasted some displeasure from God for it in his outward trouble, which made it so bitter in the going down; and therefore, when once he hath humbled himself in a mournful confession of his sin, and was able to see the coast clear betwixt heaven and him, so as to believe the pardon of his sin, and hope for good news from God again, he then returns to the sweet temper, and can sing in the same affliction where before he did sink. But more particularly I shall show what powerful influence hope hath on the Christian in

affliction, and how. FIRST. What influence it hath. SECOND. Whence and how hope hath this virtue.

[THE INFLUENCE of hope on the Christian in affliction.]

FIRST. What influence hope hath on the Christian in affliction.

*First Influence.* Hope stills and silenceth the Christian under affliction. It keeps the king's peace in the heart, which else would soon be in an uproar. A hopeless soul is clamorous. One while it chargeth God, another while it reviles instruments. It cannot long rest, and no wonder, when hope is not there to rock it asleep. Hope hath a rare art in stilling a froward spirit when nothing else can; as the mother can make the crying child quiet by laying it to the breast, when the rod makes it cry worse. This way David took, and found it effectual. When his soul was out of quiet, by reason of his present affliction, he lays his soul to the breast of the promise. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God,' Ps. 43:5. And here his soul sweetly sleeps, as the child with the teat in his mouth. And that this was his usual way, we may think by the frequent instances we find to this purpose. Thrice we find him taking this course in two psalms, Ps 42 and 43. When Aaron and Miriam were so uncivil with Moses, and used him so ill in their foul language, no doubt it was a heavy affliction to the spirit of that holy man, and aggravation of his sorrow, to consider out of whose bow these sharp arrows came; yet it is said, 'Moses held his peace'—waiting for God to clear his innocency. And his patience made God, no doubt, the more angry to see this meek man wronged, who durst trust him with the righting of his name; and therefore [it was that] with such speed he wiped off the dirt they had thrown on him, before it could soak in to the prejudice of his good name in the thoughts of others. Indeed this waiting on God for deliverance in an afflicted state, consists much in a holy silence. 'Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation,' Ps. 62:1—or, as the Hebrew, 'my soul is silent.' It is a great mercy, in an affliction that is sharp, to have our bodily senses, so as not to lie raving or roaring, but still and quiet; much more to have the heart silent and patient. And

we find the heart is as soon heat into a distemper, as the head. Now, what the sponge is to the cannon when hot with often shooting, that is hope to the soul in multiplied afflictions; it cools the spirit, and meekens it, that it doth not fly apieces, and break out into distempered thoughts or words against God.

*Second Influence.* This hope fills the afflicted soul with such inward joy and consolation, that it can laugh while tears are in the eye—sigh and sing all in a breath. It is called 'the rejoicing of hope,' Heb. 3:6. And hope never affords more joy than in affliction. It is on a watery cloud that the sun paints those curious colours in the rainbow. 'Rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and not only so, but we glory in tribulations,' Rom. 5:2, 3. Glorifying is rejoicing in a ravishment—when it is so great that it cannot contain itself within the Christian's own breast, but comes forth in some outward expression, and lets others know what a feast it sits at within. The springs of comfort lie high indeed when his joy pours out at the mouth. And all this joy with which the suffering saint is entertained, is sent in by hope at the cost of Christ, who hath provided such unspeakable glory for them in heaven as will not suffer them to pity or bemoan themselves for those tribulations that befall them on the way to it. *Dum mala pungunt, bona promissa unguunt*—while calamities smite with oppression, the gracious promises anoint with their blessings. Hope breaks the alabaster box of the promise over the Christian's head, and so diffuseth the consolations thereof abroad the soul, which, like a precious ointment, have a virtue, as to exhilarate and refresh the spirit in its faintings, so to heal the wounds and remove the smart which the Christian's poor heart may feel from its affliction, according to the apostle in the aforementioned place: 'Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts,' Rom. 5:5.

There are two graces which Christ useth above any other to fill the soul with joy; and they are faith and hope, because these two fetch all their wine of joy without doors. Faith tells the soul what Christ hath done for it, and so comforts it. Hope revives the soul with news of what Christ will do. Both draw at one tap—Christ and his promise. Whereas the other graces present the soul with its own inherent excellencies—what it doth and suffers for him,

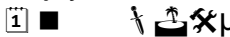

rather than what he does for them; so that it were neither honourable for Christ, nor safe for the saint, to draw his joy from this vessel. Not honourable to Christ! This were the way to have the king's crown set on the subject's head, and cry Hosanna! to the grace of Christ in us, which is due only to the mercy of God in us. For thither we will carry our praise whence we have our joy; and therefore upon our allegiance we are only to 'rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,' Php. 3:3. And it would be no more safe for us than honourable for him, because of the instability of our hearts, and unconstant actings of our graces, which are as oft ebbing as flowing. And so our joy could not be constant, because our graces are not; but as these springs lie high or low, so would this rise and fall. Yea, we were sure to drink more water than wine —oftener want joy than have it. Whereas now, the Christian's cup need never be empty, because he draws his wine from an undrainable Fountain that never sends any poor soul away ashamed, as the brook of our inherent grace would certainly, at one time or other, do.

[WHENCE AND HOW *hope hath its supporting influence in affliction.*]

SECOND. Whence and how hope hath its virtue; or what are the ingredients in hope's cordial that thus exhilarates the saint's spirit in affliction.

*First Answer.* Hope brings *certain news of a happy issue, that shall shortly close up all the wounds made by his present sufferings.* When God comes to save his afflicted servants, though he may antedate their hopes, and surprise them before they looked for him, yet he doth not come unlooked for. Salvation is that they lot upon: 'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end,' Jer. 29:11—that is, an end suitable to the hopes and expectations taken up by you. Hope is a prying grace; it is able to look beyond the exterior transactions of providence. It can, by the help of the promise, peep into the very bosom of God, and read what thoughts and purposes are written there concerning the Christian's particular estate, and this it imparts to him, bidding him not to be at all troubled to hear God speaking

roughly to him in the language of his providence. 'For,' saith hope, 'I can assure thee he means thee well, whatever he saith that sounds otherwise. For as the law, which came hundreds of years after the promise made to Abraham, could not disannul it, so neither can any intervening afflictions make void those thoughts and counsels of love which so long before have been set upon his heart for thy deliverance and salvation.' Now, such a one must needs have a great advantage above others for the pacifying and satisfying his spirit concerning the present proceedings of God towards him; because, though the actings of God on the outward stage of providence be now sad and grievous, yet he is acquainted with heaven's plot therein, and is admitted as it were into the attiring room of his secret counsel, where he sees garments of salvation preparing, in which he shall at last be clad, and come forth with joy. The traveller, when taken in a storm, can stand patiently under a tree while it rains, because he hopes it is but a shower, and sees it clear up in one part of the heavens, while it is dark in another. Providence, I am sure, is never so dark and cloudy but hope can see fair weather a-coming from the promise. 'When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh,' Luke 21:28. And this is as black a day as can come.

When the Christian's affairs are most disconsolate, he may soon meet with a happy change. The joy of that blessed day, 1 Cor. 15:52, comes  —'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,' we shall be 'changed.' In one moment sick and sad, in the next well and glad, never to know more what groans and tears mean. Now clad with the rags of mortal flesh, made miserable with the thousand troubles that attend it; 'in the twinkling of an eye' arrayed with robes of immortality, embossed and enriched with a thousand times more glory than the sun itself wears in the garment of light which now dazzleth our eyes to look on. 'It is but winking,' said a holy martyr to his fellow-sufferer in the fire with him, 'and our pain and sorrow is all over with.' Who can wonder to see a saint cheerful in his afflictions that knows what good news he looks to hear from heaven, and how soon he knows not? You have heard of the

weapon-salve, that cures wounds at a distance. Such a kind of salve is hope. The saints' hope is laid up in heaven, and yet it heals all their wounds they receive on earth. But this is not all. For, as hope prophesies well concerning the happy end of the Christian's afflictions, so it assures him he will be well tended and looked to while he lies under them. If Christ sends his disciples to sea, he means to be with them when they most need his company. The well child may be left a while by the mother, but the sick one she will by no means stir from. 'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,' Isa. 43:2.

You know what God said to Moses when he was sick of his employment, and made so many mannerly or rather unmannerly excuses from his own inability—and all that he might have leave to lay down his commission: 'Go,' saith God, 'and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,' Ex. 4:12. And again, 'Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee,' ver. 14. Thus God did animate him, and toll [draw] him on to like that hard province he was called to. Methinks I hear hope, as God's messenger, speaking after the same sort to the drooping soul oppressed with the thoughts of some great affliction, and ready to conclude he shall be able to stem so rough a tide—bear up cheerfully and lift up his head above such surging waves. 'Go, O my soul,' saith hope, 'for thy God will be with thee, and thou shalt suffer at his charge. Is not Christ thy brother? yea, is he not thy husband? He, thou thinkest, can tell how to suffer, who was brought up to the trade from the cradle to the cross. Behold, even he comes forth to meet thee, glad to see thy face, and willing to impart some of his suffering skill unto thee.' That man indeed must needs carry a heavy heart to prison with him, who knows neither how he can be maintained there nor delivered thence. But hope easeth the heart of both these, which taken away, suffering is a harmless thing and not to be dreaded.

*Second Answer.* Hope assures the Christian not only of the certainty of salvation coming, but also of *the transcendency of this salvation to be such, as the sorrow of his present sufferings bears no proportion to the joy of that.* This kept the primitive Christians from swooning while their enemies let out their blood. They had the scent

of this hope to exhilarate their spirits: 'For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day,' II Cor. 4:16. Is not this strange, that their spirit and courage should increase with the losing of their blood? What rare unheard-of cordial was this? 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' ver. 17. Behold here the difference betwixt hopes of heaven and hopes of the world. These latter, they are fanciful and slighty, seem great in hope but prove nothing in hand; like Eve's apple, fair to look on as they hang on the tree, but sour in the juice, and of bad nourishment in the eating. They are, as one calls them wittily, 'nothing between two dishes.' It were well if men could in their worldly hopes come but to the unjust steward's reckoning, and for a hundred felicities they promise themselves from the enjoyments they pursue, find but fifty at last paid them. No, alas! they must not look to come to so good a market, or have such fair dealings, that have to do with the creature, which will certainly put them to greater disappointments than so. They may bless themselves if they please for a while in their hopes, as the husbandman sometimes doth in the goodly show he hath of corn standing upon his ground; but by that time they have reaped their crop and thrashed out their hopes, they will find little besides straw and chaff—emptiness and vanity—to be left them. A poor return, God knows, to pay them for the expense of their time and strength which they have laid out upon them! Much less suitable to recompense the loss he is put to in his conscience; for there are few who are greedy hunters after the world's enjoyments, that do drive this worldly trade without running in debt to their consciences. And I am sure he buys gold too dear, that pays the peace of his conscience for the purchase. But heaven is had cheap, though it be with the loss of all our carnal interests, even life itself. Who will grudge with a sorry lease of a low-rented farm, in which he also hath but a few days left before it expires (and such our temporal life is), for the perpetuity of such an inheritance as is to be had with the saints in light? This hath ever made the faithful servants of God carry their lives in their hands, willing to lay them down, 'while they look not at the things which are seen, but at the things

which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal,' II Cor. 4:18.

*Third Answer.* As hope assures the soul of the certainty and transcendency of heaven's salvation, *so also of the necessary subserviency that his afflictions have towards his obtaining this salvation.* 'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?' Luke 24:26. As if Christ had said, 'What reason have you so to mourn, and take on for your Master's death, as if all your hopes were now split and split? Ought he not to suffer? Was there any other way he could get home, and take possession of his glory that waited for him in heaven? And if you do not grudge him his preferment, never be so inordinately troubled to see him onwards to it, though through the deep and miry land of suffering.' And truly the saint's way to salvation lies in the same road that Christ went in: 'If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together,' Rom. 8:17; only with this advantage, that his going before hath beaten it plain, so that now it may be forded, which but for him had been utterly impassable to us. Afflictions understood with this notion upon them—that they are as necessary for our waftage to glory as water is to carry the ship to her port, which may as soon sail without water, as a saint land in heaven without the subserviency of afflictions—this notion, I say, well understood, would reconcile the greatest afflictions to our thoughts, and make us delight to walk in their company. This knowledge Parisiensis calls *unus de septem radiis divini scientiæ*—one of the seven beams of divine knowledge; for the want of which we call good evil, and evil good—think God blesseth us when we are in the sunshine of prosperity, and curseth when our condition is overcast with a few clouds of adversity. But hope hath an eye that can see heaven in a cloudy day, and an anchor that can find firm land under a weight of waters to hold by; it can expect good out of evil. The Jews open their windows when it thunders and lightens, expecting, they say, their Messiah to come at such a time to them. I am sure hope opens her window widest in a day of storm and tempest: 'I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord,' Zeph. 3:12, and, Micah 7:7, 'Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for

the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.' See what strong hold hope's anchor takes. And it is a remarkable 'therefore,' if you observe the place. Because all things were at so desperate a pass in the church's affairs—as there you will find them to be in man's thinking—'therefore,' saith the saint, 'I will look, I will wait.' Indeed, God doth not take the axe into his hand to make chips. His people, when he is hewing them, and the axe goes deepest, they may expect some beautiful piece at the end of the work.

It is a sweet meditation Parisiensis hath upon 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God,' Rom. 8:28. *Ubi magis intrepida magis pensata esse debes, quàm inter cooperarios meos, et coadjutores meos?*—Where, O my soul, shouldst thou be more satisfied, free of care and fear, then when thou art among thy fellow-labourers, and those that come to help thee to attain thy so-much desired salvation, which thy afflictions do? They work together with ordinances and other providential dealings of God for good; yea, thy chief good, and thou couldst ill spare their help as any other means which God appoints thee. Should one find, as soon as he riseth in the morning, some on his house-top tearing off the tiles, and with axes and hammers taking down the roof thereof, he might at first be amazed and troubled at the sight, yea, think they are a company of thieves and enemies come to do him some mischief; but when he understands they are workmen sent by his father to mend his house, and make it better than it is—which cannot be done without taking some of it down he is satisfied and content to endure the present noise and trouble, yea thankful to his father for the care and cost he bestows on him. The very hope of what advantage will come of their work makes him very willing to dwell a while amidst the ruins and rubbish of his old house. I do not wonder to see hopeless souls so impatient in their sufferings—sometimes even to distraction of mind. Alas! they fear presently—and have reason so to do—that they come to pull all their worldly joys and comforts down about their ears; which gone, what, alas! have they left to comfort them, who can look for nothing but hell in another world? But the believer's heart is eased of all this, because assured from the promise that they are sent on a better errand to him from his heavenly Father, who intends him no hurt, but rather

good—even to build the ruinous frame of a his soul into a glorious temple at last; and these afflictions come, among other means, to have a hand in the work; and this satisfies him, that can say, ‘Lord, cut and hew me how thou wilt, that at last I may be polished and framed according to the platform [pattern] which love hath drawn in thy heart for me.’ Though some ignorant man would think his clothes spoiled when besmeared with fuller’s earth or soap, yet one that knows the cleansing nature of them will not be afraid to have them so used.

#### FOURTH OFFICE.

*[Hope, as the Christian’s helmet, QUIETS HIS SPIRIT WHEN GOD DELAYS TO PERFORM HIS PROMISE.]*

The fourth and last office of hope propounded is, *to quiet and compose the Christian’s spirit when God stays long before he come to perform promises*. Patience, I told you, is the back on which the Christian’s burdens are carried, and hope the pillow between the back and the burden, to make it sit easy. Now patience hath two shoulders; one to bear the present evil, and another to forbear the future good promised, but not yet paid. And as hope makes the burden of the present evil of the cross light, so it makes the longest stay of the future good promised short. Whereas, without this, the creature could have neither the strength to bear the one, nor forbear and wait for the other. ‘And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord,’ Lam. 3:18; implying thus much, that where there is no hope there is no strength. The soul’s comfort lies drawing on, and soon gives up the ghost, where all hope fails. God undertook for Israel’s protection and provision in the wilderness, but when their dough was spent, and their store ended, which they brought out of Egypt, they fall foul with God and Moses. And why? but because their hope was spent as soon as their dough. Moses ascends the mount, and is but a few days out of their sight, and in all haste they must have a golden calf. And why? but because they gave him for lost, and never hoped to see him more. This is the reason why God hath so few servants that will stick fast to him, because God puts them to wait for what he means to give, and

most are short-spirited, and cannot stay. You know what Naomi said to her daughters, ‘If I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands?’ Ruth 1:12, 13. The promise hath salvation in the womb of it; but will the unbeliever, a soul without heavenly hope, stay till the promise ripens, and this happiness be, as I may so say, grown up? No, sure, they will rather make some match with the beggarly creature, or any base lust that will pay them in some pleasure at present, than wait so long, though it be for heaven itself. Thus as Tamar played the strumpet because the husband promised was not given her so soon as she desired, Gen. 38, so it is the undoing of many souls because the comfort, joy, and bliss of the promise is withheld at present, and his people are made to wait for their reward; therefore they throw themselves into the embraces of this adulterous world that is present. ‘Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,’ II Tim. 4:10. The soul only that hath this divine hope will be found patiently to stay for the good of the promise. Now, in handling this last office of hope, I shall do these three things—

FIRST. I shall show you that God oft stays long before he pays in the good things of the promise.

SECOND. That when God stays longest before he performs his promises, it is our duty to wait.

THIRD. That hope will enable the soul to wait when he stays longest.

*[GOD OFT STAYS LONG before he fulfills his promise.]*

FIRST. God *oft stays long before he pays in the good things of the promise*. The promise contains the matter of all our hopes;—called therefore ‘the hope of the promise.’ To hope without a promise is to claim a debt that never was owing. Now the good things of the promise are not paid down presently; indeed, then there would be not such use of the promises. What need of a bond where the money is presently paid down? God promised Abraham a son, but he stayed many years for him after the bond of the promise was given him. He promised Canaan to him and his seed, yet hundreds of years interposed between the promise and performance. Esau was spread into a kingdom before the heirs of promise had

their inheritance, or one foot of land [was] given them in it. Yea, all the patriarchs, who were the third generation after Abraham, died, 'not having received the promises,' Heb. 11:13. Simeon had a promise 'he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ,' Luke 2:26. But this was not performed till he had one foot in the grave, and was even taking his leave of the world.

In a word, those promises which are the portion of all the saints, and may be claimed by one as well as by another, their date is set in the book of God's decree, when to be paid in to a day; some sooner, some later; but not expressed in the promise. He hath engaged to answer the prayers of his people, and 'fulfil the desires of those that fear him,' Ps. 145:19. But it proves a long voyage sometimes before the praying saint hath the return of his adventure. There comes oft a long and sharp winter between the sowing time of prayer and the reaping. He hears us indeed as soon as we pray, but we oft do not hear him so soon. Prayers are not long on their journey to heaven, but long a-coming thence in a full answer. Christ at this day in heaven hath not a full answer to some of those prayers which he put up on earth. Therefore he is said to 'expect till his enemies be made a footstool,' Heb 10:13. Promises we have for the subduing sin and Satan under our feet, yet we find these enemies still skulking within us; and many a sad scuffle we have with them before they are routed and outed our hearts. And so with others. We may find sometime the Christian—as great an heir as he is to joy and comfort—hardly able to show a penny of his heavenly treasure in his purse. And for want of well pondering this one clause, poor souls are oft led into temptation, even to question their saintship. 'Such promises are the saints' portion,' saith one; 'but I cannot find them performed to me, therefore I am none of them. Many a prayer I have sent to heaven, but I hear no news of them. The saints are conquerors over their lusts; but I am yet often foiled and worsted by mine. There is a heaven of comfort in the promise, but I am as it were in the belly of hell, swallowed up with fears and terrors.' Such as these are the reasonings of poor souls in the distress of their spirits; whereas all this trouble they put themselves to might be prevented, if they had faith to believe this one principle of undoubted truth—that God performs not his

promises all at once, and that what they want in hand they may see on the way coming to them.

[OUR DUTY IS TO WAIT, *when God stays his longest before fulfilling his promise.*]

SECOND. When God stays long before he makes payment of the promise, *then it is the believer's duty to wait for it.* 'Though it tarry, wait for it,' Hab. 2:3. He is speaking there of the good of the promise, which God intended to perform in the appointed time; and because it might tarry longer than their hasty hearts would, he bids them wait for it. As one that promiseth to come to a friend's house sends him word to sit up for him, though he tarry later than ordinary, for he will come at last assuredly. This is hard work indeed! What! wait? When we have stayed so long, and no sight of God's coming after this prayer, and that sermon! So many long looks given at the window of his ordinances and providences, and no tidings to be heard of his approach in mercy and comfort to my soul; and after this, still am I bid wait? This is wearisome work. True, to flesh and blood it is; yea, weak faith is oft out of breath, and prone to sit down, or turn back, when it hath gone long to meet God in the returns of his mercy, and misseth of him; and therefore the apostle ushers in his duty with an affectionate prayer. 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ,' II Thes. 3:5. He had laid down a strong ground of consolation for them in the preceding chapter, in that they were 'chosen to salvation,' and 'called by the gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ,' II Thes. 2:13, 14, and assured them that God, who is 'faithful,' would 'stablish them, and keep them from evil,' II Thes. 3:3. He means [this] so as they should not miscarry, and at last fall short of the glory promised; but, being sensible how difficult a work it was for them amidst their own present weaknesses, the apostasies of others, and the assaults of Satan upon themselves, to hold fast the assurance of their hope unto the end, he turns himself from them to speak to God for them. 'The Lord direct your hearts.' And, as if he had said, it is a way you will never find, a work you will never be able to do of yourselves—thus to wait patiently till Christ come, and bring the full reward of the promise with him; the Lord therefore direct your hearts



into it. And Moses, it seems, before he ascended the mount, had a fear and jealousy of what afterward proved too true, that the Israelites' unbelieving hearts would not have the patience to wait for his return, when he should stay some while with God there out of their sight; to prevent which, he gave express command before he went up that they should tarry there for him, Ex 14:14. Indeed, a duty more contrary than this of waiting quietly and silently on God, bear our manners, and lackey after us, before we do what he commands: but if the promise comes not galloping full speed to us, we think it will never be at us.

*Question.* But why doth God, when he hath made a promise, *make his people wait so long?*

*Answer.* I shall answer this question by asking another. Why doth God make *any promise at all to his creature?* This may be well asked, considering how free God was from owing any such kindness to his creature; till, by the mere good pleasure of his will, he put himself into bonds, and made himself, by his promise, a debtor to his elect. And this proves the former question to be saucy and over-bold. As if some great rich man should make a poor beggar that is a stranger to him his heir, and when he tells him this, he should ask, 'But why must I stay so long for it?' Truly, any time is too soon for him to receive a mercy from God that thinks God's time in sending it too late. This hasty spirit is as grievous to God as his stay can be to us. And no wonder God takes it so heinously, if we consider the bitter root that bears it.

*First.* It proceeds *from a selfishness of spirit*, whereby we prefer our own content and satisfaction before the glory of God, and this becomes not a gracious soul. Our comfort flows in by the performance of the promise, but the revenue of God's honour is paid into him by our humble waiting on him in the interval between the promise and the performance, and is the main end why he forbears the paying it in hastily. Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and God sure may better make us wait, before the promise is given in to our embraces by the full accomplishment of it. 'For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise,' Heb. 10:36. It is very fit the master should dine before the man. And if he would not like a servant that would think much to stay so long from his meal

as is required at his hands for waiting at his master's table, how much more must God dislike the rudeness of our impatient spirits, that would be set at our meal, and have our turn served in the comfort of the promise, before he hath the honour of our waiting on him!

*Second.* It proceeds *from deep ingratitude*; and this is a sin odious to God and man. 'They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel,' Ps. 106:13. God was not behindhand with his people. It was not so long since he had given them an experiment of his power and truth. He had but newly lent them his hand, and led them dry-shod through a sea, with which they seemed to be much confirmed in their faith, and enlarged in their acknowledgments, when they came safe to shore: 'then believed they his words; they sang his praise,' Ps. 106:12. One would have thought that God's credit now would have gone for a great sum with them ever after. But it proved nothing so. They dare not trust God with so much as their bill of fare—what they shall eat and drink; and therefore it is said, 'they waited not for his counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness.' That is, they prevented the wisdom and providence of God, which would have provided well for them, if they could but have stayed to see how God would have spread their table for them. And why all this haste? 'They forgot his works.' They had lost the thankful sense of what was past, and therefore cannot wait for what was to come.

[HOPE WILL ENABLE THE SOUL TO WAIT  
when the promise stays longest.]

THIRD. Hope will *enable the soul to wait when the promise stays longest*. It is the very nature of hope so to do. 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord,' Lam. 3:26. Hope groans when the mercy promised comes not, but does not grumble. Hope's groans are from the spirit sighed out to God in prayer, Rom. 8:26, and these lighten the soul of its burden of fear and solicitous care; whereas the groans of a hopeless soul are vented in discontented passions against God, and these are like a loud wind to a fire, that makes it rage more. 'They shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them,' Jer. 25:16. It is spoken of the enemies of God and his people. God had prepared them a draught which should have strange effects—'they should be moved;' as a man, whose brain is disturbed with strong drink, is restless and unquiet: yea, 'be mad.' As some, when they are drunk, quarrel with every one they meet, so should their hearts be filled with rage even at God himself, who runs his sword into their sides, because they had no hope to look for any healing of their wounds at his hand. But now where there is hope, the heart is soon quieted and pacified. Hope is the handkerchief that God puts into his people's hands to wipe the tears from their eyes, which their present troubles, and long stay of expected mercies, draw from them. 'Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy, and there is hope in thine end,' Jer. 31:16, 17. This, with some other comfortable promises which God gave his prophet Jeremiah in a vision, did so overrun and fill his heart with joy, that, he was as much recruited and comforted as a sick or weary man is after a night of sweet sleep: 'Upon this I awaked,...and my sleep was sweet unto me,' ver. 26. When, however, the promise seems to stay long, hope pacifies the Christian with a threefold assurance. *First*. Hope assures the soul, that though God stays a while before he performs the promise, yet he doth not delay. *Second*. That when he comes he will abundantly recompense his longest stay. *Third*. That while he stays to perform one promise, he will leave the comfort of another promise, to bear the Christian company in the absence of that.

[A THREEFOLD ASSURANCE *which hope gives the Christian when God delays to perform his promise.*]

*First Assurance.* Hope assures the soul that *though God stays a while before he performs the promise, yet he doth not delay.* 'The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry,' Hab. 2:3. How is this? 'Though it tarry it will not tarry!' How shall we reconcile this tarrying and not tarrying? Very well. Though the promise tarryes till the appointed time, yet it will not tarry beyond it. 'When the time of the promise drew nigh,' it is said, 'which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,' Acts 7:17. As the herbs and flowers which sleep all winter in their roots underground without any mention of them, when the time of spring approacheth, presently they start forth of their beds, where they had lain so long unperceived. Thus will the promise in its season do. He delays who passeth the time appointed, but he only stays that waits for the appointed time, and then comes. Every promise is dated, but with a mysterious character; and for want of skill in God's chronology, we are prone to think God forgets us, when, indeed, we forget ourselves, in being so bold to set God a time of our own, and in being angry that he comes not just then to us. As if a man should set his watch by his own hungry stomach rather than by the sun, and then say it is noon, and chide because his dinner is not ready. We are over greedy of comfort, and expect the promise should keep time with our hasty desires, which because it doth not we are discontented. A high piece of folly! The sun will not go the faster for setting our watch forward, nor the promise come the sooner for our antedating it. It is most true what one saith, 'Though God seldom comes at our day, because we seldom reckon right, yet he never fails his own day.' That of the apostle is observable. He exhorts the Thessalonian church there, 'that they would not be shaken in mind, or be troubled, as that the day of Christ were at hand,' II Thes. 2:2, 3. But what need of this exhortation to saints, that look for their greatest joy to come with the approach of that day? Can their hearts be troubled to hear the day of their redemption draws nigh, the day of refreshing is at hand? It

was not therefore, I conceive, the coming of that day which was so displeasing and affrighting, but the time in which some seducers would have persuaded them to expect it, as if it had been at the very doors, and presently would have surprised them in their generation, which had been very sad indeed, because then it should have come before many prophecies and promises had received their accomplishment, and by that means the truth of God would have gone off the stage with a slur, which must not, shall not be, as he tells them, 'For that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition,' II Thes. 2:3. And as that promise stays but till those intermediate truths, which have a shorter period, be fulfilled, and then comes without any possible stay or stop; so do all the rest but wait till their reckoning be out, and what God hath appointed to intervene be despatched, and they punctually shall have their delivery in their set time.

Thou art, may be, bleeding under a wounded spirit, a poor broken-hearted creature that liest steeping in thy tears for sin. The promise tells thee that God is nigh thee to revive thee, *thee* I say by name, Isa. 57:15. Yet thou comest from this prayer, and that sermon, but hast no sight of him, nor canst hear more news of his coming than what the promise gives thee. Look now that God suffers no prejudice by his stay in thy thoughts, but conclude that his time is not come, or else he had been ere this with thee; and take heed of measuring God's miles by thy own scale, for his nigh may be thy far. God could have told his people the time when he meant to come with the performance of every promise as easily as set it down in his own purpose, but he hath concealed it in most, as a happy advantage to our faith, whereby we may more fully express our confidence in waiting for that which we know not when we shall receive. Abraham's faith was great and strong to follow God when he concealed the place he meant to lead him to. For he went, 'he knew not whither,' Heb. 11:8. So it requires great faith to rest satisfied with the promise when the time of payment is hid. But if we consider who we trade with we can have no reason to be the least jealous, no not when he stays longest, that he will fail or delay us a moment longer than the set time of the promise. There are three [why] men

break their times of payment, and come not at their day. 1. Forgetfulness. 2. Unfaithfulness. 3. Impotency.

1. *Cause. Forgetfulness.* Many remember not what they promise. The day comes and it is quite out of their minds. Men seldom forget when they are to receive, but too oft when they are to pay, debts. An extraordinary occasion must be sent to rub up the butler's memory, or else he will never think of his prison promise. But God's promise is never out of his thoughts, 'he remembers his covenant,' Ps. 105:8; his people and their affairs are 'graven on the palms of his hands, and their walls are continually before him,' Isa. 49:16. Though the preferment of the Pharaoh's court made the butler forget his promise to Joseph, yet all the glory that Christ sees and enjoys in heaven hath not the power to blot the remembrance of his promise to his people who lie in chains of affliction here below. And God would have his saints take notice of this to comfort themselves with, while [*i.e.* until] he comes. 'I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end,' Jer. 29:11.

2. *Cause. Unfaithfulness.* A promise with some is no more than a collar on an ape's neck. You have them not a whit the faster by it; for they can slip off the obligation at their pleasure. May be they never intended performance, when they passed it, but made use of a promise only as a key, to lock up their intention of deceiving from your present knowledge. Others haply mean at present as they say, but soon grow sick of their engagement, upon sight of some disadvantage which their after-thoughts discover likely to befall them upon the performance, and therefore their wits are set a-work to coin some handsome evasion to delude their engagement, or at least delay the payment. This made Lysander say of some men, that they played with oaths and promises *sicut pueri cum astragalis*—as children do at nine pins. They will keep them if they can get by the performance; but if it be like to prove a losing game, they will rather run debt to their conscience by breaking them, than to their purse, or any other worldly interest, by their performance. But no fear of God in this matter.

(1.) His name is *truth* and faithfulness. Now can truth itself lie, or faithfulness deceive? 'In my Father's house,' saith Christ, 'are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go,...I will come again and receive you,' John 14:2, 3. See here the candour and nakedness of our Saviour's heart. As if he had said, 'This is no shift to be gone, that so I may by a fair tale leave you in hopes of that which shall never come to pass. No; did I know it otherwise than I speak, my heart is so full of love to you, that it would not have suffered me to put such a cheat upon you for a thousand worlds. You may trust me to go; for as surely as you see me go, shall your eyes see me come again to your everlasting joy.' The promises are none of them yea and nay, but 'yea and amen' in him.

(2.) He is *wisdom* as well as truth. As he is truth, he cannot wrong or deceive us in breaking his word; and being wisdom, it is impossible he should promise that which should prejudice himself. And therefore, he makes no blots in his purposes or promises, but what he doth in either is immutable. Repentance is indeed an act of wisdom in the creature, but it presupposeth folly, which is incompatible to God. In a word, men too oft are rash in promising; and therefore what they in haste promise they perform at leisure. They consider not before they vow, and therefore inquire afterward whether they had best stand to it. But the all-wise God needs not this after-game. As in the creation he looked back upon the several pieces of that goodly frame, and saw them so exact that he took not up his pencil the second time to mend anything of the first draft; so in his promises, they are made with such infinite judgment and wisdom, that what he hath writ he will stand to for ever. 'I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment,' Hosea 2:19. Therefore for ever, because in righteousness and in mercy.

3. *Cause. Impotency.* Men's promises, alas! depend upon many contingencies. The man haply is rich when he seals the bond, and poor before the day of payment comes about. A wreck at sea, a fire by land, or some other sad accident, intervenes, either quite impoverisheth him, or necessitates him to beg further time, with him in the gospel, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all,' Matt. 18:26. But the great God

cannot be put to such straits. 'The Strength of Israel will not lie,' 1 Sam. 15:29. As there is a lie of wickedness, when one promiseth what he will not perform; so there is a lie that proceeds from weakness, when a person or thing cannot perform what they promise. Thus indeed all men, yea, all creatures, will be found liars to all that lean on them, called therefore 'lying vanities.' 'Vanities,' as empty and insufficient; 'lying vanities,' because they promise what they have not to give. But God, he is propounded as a sure bottom for our faith to rest on in this respect. 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is strength, or everlasting strength,' Isa. 26:4. Such strength his is that needs not another's strength to uphold it. One man's ability to perform his promises leans on others' ability to pay theirs to him. If they *him*, he is forced to fail *them*. Thus we see, the breaking of one merchant proves the breaking of many others whose estates were in his hands. But God's power is independent. Let the whole creation break, yet God is the same as he was, as able to help as ever. 'Though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines.' And, 'yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength,' Hab. 3:17-19. O how happy are the saints! a people that can never be undone, no, not when the whole world turns bankrupt, because they have his promise whose power fails not when that doth. The Christian cannot come to God when he hath not by him what he wants. 'How great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee,' Ps. 31:19. It is laid up, as a father hath his child's portion, in bags, ready to be paid him when the time comes. The saint shall not stay a moment beyond the date of the promise. 'There is forgiveness with thee,' saith the psalmist. It stands ready for thee against thou comest to claim the promise.

*Second Assurance.* Hope assures the Christian, that though God stays long, yet, *when he does come, he will abundantly recompense his longest stay.* As the wicked get nothing by God's forbearing to execute his threatening, but the treasuring up more wrath for the day of wrath; so the saints lose nothing by not having the promise presently paid into them, but rather do, by their forbearing God a while, treasure up more joy against the joyful day, when the

promise shall be performed. 'To them who by patient continuance...seek for glory and honour,...eternal life,' Rom. 2:7. Mark, it is not enough to do well, but to 'continue' therein; nor that neither, except it be 'patient continuing in well-doing'—in the midst of God's seeming delays; and whoever he be that can do this, shall be rewarded at last for all his patience. Ploughing is hungry work, yet because it is in hope of reaping such an abundant increase, the husbandman faints not. O my soul, saith hope, though thou wantest thy dinner, hold but out a while, and thou shalt have dinner and supper served in together when night comes. The sick fits and qualms which the Christian hath in the absence of the promise are all forgot, and the trouble of them over, when once it comes and he is feasted with the joy it brings. 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life;' Prov. 13:12—that is, when it cometh in God's time after long waiting, then it causeth an overflowing joy. As there is a time which God hath set for the ripening the fruits of the earth, before which, if they be gathered, it is to our loss; so there is a time set by God for the good things of the promise, which we are to wait for, and not unseasonably pluck, like green apples, off the tree—as too many do, who, having no faith or hope to quiet their spirits while [until] God's time comes, do therefore snatch that by unwarrantable means, which would in time drop ripe into their bosoms.

And what get these short-spirited men by their haste? Alas! they find their enjoyments thin and lank, like corn reaped before it is fit for the sickle, wherewith he that bindeth the sheaves, filleth not his bosom. Therefore we find this duty of waiting pressed under this very metaphor. 'Be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord,' James 5:7. Stay God's time, till he comes according to his promise, and takes you off your suffering work, and be not hasty to shift yourselves out of trouble. And why so? 'Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' The husbandman who, the proverb saith, is, *dives in novum annum*—rich in hope of the next year's crop—though he gladly would have his corn in the barn, yet waits

for its ripening in the ordinary course of God's providence. When the former rain comes he is joyful, but yet desires the latter rain also, and stays for it, though long in coming. And do not we see, that a shower sometimes falls close to the time of harvest, that plumps the ear to the great increase of the crop, which some lose, that, through distrust of providence, put in their sickle too soon? I am sure mercies come fullest when most waited for. Christ did not so soon supply them with wine at the marriage of Cana, as his mother desired, but they had the more for staying a while. There is a double fullness, which the Christian may hope to find in those enjoyments that he hath with long patience waited for, above another that cannot stay God's leisure.

1. *A fulness of duration.* Enjoyments snatched out of God's hand, and not given by it, are but guests come, not to stay long; like David's child born in adultery, they commonly die in the cradle. They are like some fruit gathered green, which soon rots.

Is it riches that is thus got? Some are said to 'make haste to be rich,' Prov. 28:20. They cannot, by a conscionable diligence in their particular calling, and exercise of godliness in their general, wait upon God. No; the promise doth not gallop fast enough for them; on therefore they spur, and, by sordid practices, make haste to be rich. But God makes as much haste to melt their estate, as they do to gather. No salt will keep that meat long from corrupting which was overheated in the driving, nor any care and providence of man keep that estate from God's curse which is got by so hot and sinful a pursuit. 'Wealth gotten by vanity'—that is, vain, unwarrantable courses—'shall be diminished,' Prov. 13:11. Like the unsound fat which great drinkers and greedy eaters gain to themselves, it hath that in it that will hasten its ruin. 'The getting of treasure by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death,' Prov 21:6. The meaning is, such estates are tossed like a ball, from one to another, and are not to stay long in any hand, till it comes into the godly man's, whom God oft, by his providence, makes heir to such men's riches, as you may see, Job 27:11-23; Ecc. 2:26.

Again, is it comfort and inward joy? Some make too much haste for this. They are not like other Christians, who use to have a wet seed-

time, and are content to wait for joy till harvest, or at least till it be in some forwardness, and the seed of grace, which was sown in tears of humiliation, appears above ground in such solid evidences as do in some degree satisfy them concerning the reality and truth of the same. Then indeed the sincere Christian's spirit begins to cheer up, and his comfort holds, yea increaseth more and more, as the sun that, after a contest with some thick mist, breaks forth, and gets a full victory of those vapours which for a while darkened it. 'The light of the righteous rejoiceth,' Prov. 13:9—that is, over all his fears and doubts. But there are others so hasty that they are catching at comfort before they were ever led into acquaintance with godly sorrow. They are delivered without pain, and their faith flames forth into the joy of assurance, before any smoke of doubtings and fears were seen to arise in their hearts. But alas! it is as soon lost as got, like too forward a snibbing spring, that makes the husbandman weep at harvest; or a fair sunshine day in winter, that is the breeder of many foul ones after it. The stony ground is a clear instance of this, Mark 4, whose joy was a quickly down as up. A storm of persecution or temptation comes, and immediately he is offended.

In a word, take but one instance more, and that is in point of deliverance. Such hasty spirits that cannot wait for the promise to open their prison door, and God to give them a release in his time, but break prison, and by some unwarrantable practice wind themselves out of trouble; do we not see how miserably they befool themselves? For while they think, by the midwifery of their sinful policy, to hasten their deliverance, they kill it in the birth, which, had it come in God's time, might have stayed many a fair day with them. The Jews are a sad instance of this; who, though God gave them such full security for their deliverance from the Babylonian hand, would yet take their own course, hoping, it seems, to compass it sooner by policy than they could expect it to be effected by providence, and therefore to Egypt they will post in all haste, not doubting but they shall thence bring their deliverance. But alas! it proved far otherwise; for all they got was to have more links added to their chain of bondage, and their lordly masters to use greater rigour upon them, which God, by his prophet, bids them

thank their own hasty unbelieving spirits for. 'Thus saith the Lord God, the holy One of Israel, In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength, and ye would not,' Isa. 30:15. Indeed, if we look on such as have quietly waited by hope for God's coming to their help, we shall find they ever sped well. Joshua, who bore up against all discouragements from God and man, steadfastly believing, and patiently waiting, for the land God had promised, did he not live to walk over their graves in the wilderness that would have turned back to Egypt? and to be witness to their destruction also, who presumptuously went up the hill to fight the enemy and take the land—as they vainly hoped—before God's time was come? Deut. 1. Yea, did not he at last divide the land, and lay his bones in a bed of honour, after he had lived to see the promise of God happily performed to his people? So David, whose hope and patience was admirable in waiting for the kingdom after he had the promise of it; especially if we consider what fair opportunities he had to take cruel Saul out of the way, whose life alone did stand betwixt him and the throne. Neither did he want matter to fill up a declaration for the satisfaction and pacifying the minds of the people, if he had a mind to have gone this way to the crown; but he knew those plausible arguments for such a fact, which would have pleased the multitude, would not have pacified his own conscience, and this stayed his hand from any such ripping open the womb of the promise, to come by the crown with which it was big, but left it to go its full time, and he lost nothing by it.

2. There flows in a *fulness of benediction*, with an enjoyment reaped in God's full time, which is lost for want of patience to wait thereunto. Now this benediction is paid into the waiting soul's bosom two ways. (1.) He hath that enjoyment sweetened to him with God's love and favour for his comfort. (2.) He hath it sanctified to him in the happy fruit it bears for his good.

(1.) He hath it sweetened to him with God's love and favour for his comfort; which he cannot so well expect that carves for himself, and cannot stay for God in his own time to lay it on his trencher. There is guilt ever to be found in the company of impatience and distrust. And where guilt is contracted in the getting of an

enjoyment, there can be little sweetness tasted when it comes to be used. O guilt is an embittering thing! It keeps the soul in a continual fear of hearing ill news from heaven; and a soul in fear is not in case to relish the sweetness of a mercy. Such a one may happily have a little tumultuous joy, and warm himself awhile at this rash fire of his own kindling, till he comes to have some serious discourse with his own heart in cold blood, about the way and manner of getting the enjoyment and this is sure to send such a dampness to the heart of the poor creature as will not suffer that fire long to burn clear. O what a stab it is to the heart of an oppressor, to say of his great wealth, as that king of his crown, 'Here is a fair estate, but God knows how I came by it!' What a wound to the joy of a hypocrite! 'I have pretended to a great deal of comfort, but God knows how I came by it!' Whereas the Christian who receives any comfort, inward or outward, from God's hand, as a return for his patient waiting, hath none of these sad thoughts to scare him and break his drought when the cup is in his mouth. He knows where he had his outward estate and inward comfort. He can bring God to vouch them both, that they with his leave and liking. There is a great odds between the joy of the husbandman, at the happy inning of his corn in harvest, and the thief's joy, who hath stolen some sheaves out of another's field, and is making merry with his booty as soon as he is got home. Possibly you may hear a greater noise and outis<sup>cciii</sup> of joy in the thief's house than the honest husbandman's, yet no compare between them. One knock at the thief's door by an officer that comes to search his house for stolen goods, spoils the mirth of the whole house—who run, one this way and another that. O what fear and shame must then take hold on his guilty heart, that hears God coming to search for his stolen mercies and comforts!

(2.) The waiting soul hath enjoyments *sanctified to him for his good*; and this another wants with all he hath. And what is the blessing of mercy, but to have it do us good? Hasty spirits grow worse by enjoyments gathered out of season. This is a sore evil indeed, to have wealth for our hurt, and comfort for our hurt. It was the sin of Israel that 'they waited not for his counsel,' Ps. 106:13. God had taken them as his charge, and undertook to provide for them if they

would have stood to his allowance; but they could not stay his leisure, 'but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert,' ver. 14. They must have what pleaseth their palate, and when their own impatient hearts call, or not at all. And so they had: 'He gave them their request,' ver. 15. But they had better been without their feast, for they did not thrive by it, 'he sent leanness into their soul,' ver. 15. A secret curse came with their enjoyments, which soon appeared in those great sins they thereupon were left to commit—they envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord,' ver. 16—as also in the heavy judgments by which God did testify against them for the same, Num. 11:31. Whereas mercies that are received in God's way and time, prove meat of better juice and purer nourishment to the waiting soul. They do not break out into such botches and plague-sores as these. As the other are fuel for lust, so these food to the saints' graces, and make them more humble and holy. See this in Isa. 30:18, 19, compared with ver. 22, where they, as a fruit of their patient waiting on God for their outward deliverance, have with it that which is more worth than the deliverance itself, *i.e.* grace to improve and use it holily. It was a great mercy that Hannah had, after her many prayers and long waiting, 'a son;' but a greater, that she had a heart to give up her son again to God, that gave him to her. To have estate, health, or any other enjoyment upon waiting on God for the same, is mercy, but not to be compared with that blessing which seasons and sanctifies the heart to use them for God's glory. And this is the ordinary portion of the waiting soul, and that not only in outward comforts, but inward also. The joy and inward peace which the sincere soul hath thus, makes it more humble, holy, heavenly; whereas the comfort which the hypocrite comes so quickly by, either degenerates into pride and self-conceit, or empties itself into some other filthy sink—sometimes even of open profaneness itself—before it hath run far.

*Third Assurance.* Hope assures the soul, that *while God stays the performance of one promise, he shall have the absence thereof supplied with the presence of another.* And this is enough to quiet the heart of any that understands himself. God hath laid things in such a sweet method, that there is not one point of time wherein the

soul of a believer is left wholly destitute of comfort, but there is one promise or other that stands to minister unto his present wants. Sometimes, haply, he may want what he strongly desires, yet even then care is taken for his present subsistence; one promise bears the Christian company while another comes. And what cause hath the sick man to complain, though all his friends do not sit up with him together, if they take it by turns, and never leave him without a sufficient number to look to him?

We read of a 'tree of life,' Rev. 22:2, 'which bears twelve manner of fruits, and yieldeth her fruit every month,' so that it is never without some hanging on it which is fit for the eater. What can this tree be better conceived to be than Christ, who yields all manner of fruit in his promises, and comfort for all times, all conditions? The believer can never come but he shall find some promise ripe to be eaten, with which he may well stay his stomach till the other—whose time to be gathered is not yet come—hangs for further ripening. Here you see the Christian hath provision for all the year long. When Christ returned to heaven he gave his disciples this to comfort them, that he would come again, and carry them with him unto his father's house, where no he lives himself in glory, John 14:2, 3. This is sweet indeed. But, alas! what shall they do in the meantime to weather out those many storms which were to intervene between this promise and the time when it shall be performed? This also our Saviour considered, and tells them he does not mean to leave them comfortless, but gives them another promise to keep house with, in the meantime, *i.e.* a promise of his Spirit—who should be with them on earth, while [until] he took them to be with him in heaven, John 14:16. The Christian is never at such a loss wherein hope cannot relieve it. 'Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is, for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit,' Jer. 17:7, 8. These waters are the promises from which the believer draws continual matter of comfort, that as a tree planted by a river flourisheth, however the year goes, so doth he, whatever the temper of God's exterior



providence is. Possibly the Christian is in an afflicted state, and the promise for deliverance comes not, yet then hope can entertain him in the absence of that, at the cost of another promise—that though God doth not at present deliver him out of the affliction, yet he will support him under it, 1 Cor. 10:13. If yet the Christian cannot find this promise paid into such a height as to discharge him of all impatience, distrust, and other sinful distempers—which to his grief he finds too busy in him for all the promise—then hope hath another window to let out the smoke at, and that is by presenting the soul with those promises which assure the weak Christian that pardoning mercy shall cover those defects which assisting grace did not fully conquer. ‘I will spare them as a man spareth his

own son that serveth him,’ Mal. 3:1. So, Micah 7:18 ‘Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever.’ And certainly God would not have suffered so much impatience to have broken out in Job, but that he would have something left for pardoning mercy to do at the close of all, to which that holy man should see himself beholden, both for his deliverance, and that honourable testimony also which God himself gave of him before his uncharitable friends, who from his great afflictions, and some discomposure of spirit in them, did so unmercifully burden him with the heavy charge of being a hypocrite.

#### DIRECTION IX.—THIRD GENERAL PART.

[APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHRISTIAN HELMET, ALIKE TO THOSE WHO HAVE, AND TO THOSE WHO HAVE IT NOT.]

Having shown now what the helmet of salvation is, and several of its offices to the Christian, we proceed to bring out how its doctrine applies alike to those who have, and to those who have it not, and the several points of improvement which naturally flow from it. These may be classed as four. FIRST. A trial of what metal *our* helmet of hope is made. SECOND. An exhortation to those who, upon trial, find it genuine, in which two duties are pressed on them. THIRD. Arguments why we should strengthen our hope, with directions how we may do so. FOURTH. An exhortation to those who want this helmet of hope.

##### FIRST POINT OF IMPROVEMENT.

[*Trial of WHAT METAL OUR HELMET OF HOPE IS MADE.*]

For *trial*, whether we *have this helmet of hope on our heads or no*—this helmet, I say, commended to us in the text. As for such paltry ware, that most are contended with for cheapness’ sake, it, alas! deserves not the name of a true hope, no more than a paper cap

doth of a helmet. O, look to the metal and temper of your helmet in an especial manner, for at this most blows are made. He that seeks chiefly to defend his own head—the serpent I mean—will aim most to wound yours. None but fools and children are so credulous as to be blown up with great hopes upon any light occasion and slight ground. They who are wise, and have their wits about them, will be as wary as how they place their hopes, especially for salvation, as a prudent pilot, that hath a rich lading, would be where he moors his ship and casts his anchor. There is reason for our utmost care herein, because nothing exposeth men to more shame than to meet with disappointment in their hopes. ‘They were confounded because they had hoped; they came thither and were ashamed,’ Job 6:20; that is, to miss of what they hoped to have found in those brooks. But there is no shame like to that which a false hope for eternal salvation will put sinners to at last; some shall rise ‘to shame everlasting,’ Dan. 10. They shall awake out of their graves, and out of that fool’s paradise also, wherein their vain hopes had entertained them all their lives, and see, instead of a heaven they expected, hell to be in expectation of them, and gaping with full mouth

for them. If the servants of Eglon were so ashamed after their waiting awhile at their prince's door, from whom they expected all their preferment, to find him, and their hopes with him, dead on the floor, Judges 3:25; O, whose heart then can think what a mixture of shame and horror shall meet in their faces and hearts at the great day, who shall see all their hopes for heaven hop headless, and leave them in the hands of tormenting devils to all eternity! Hannibal's soldiers did not so confidently divide the goldsmiths' shops in Rome among themselves—which yet they never took—as many presumptuous sinners do promise themselves heaven's bliss and happiness, who must instead thereof sit down with shame in hell, except they can, before they die, show better ground for their hope than now they are able to do. O what will those fond dreamers do in the day of the Lord's anger, when they shall see the whole world in a light flame round about them, and hear God—whose piercing eyes will look them through and through—calling them forth before men and angels to the scrutiny! Will they stand to their hope, and vouch it to the face of Christ, which now they bless themselves so in? Surely their hearts will fail them for such an enterprise. None then will speak so ill of them as their own consciences shall do. God will in that day use their own tongues to accuse them, and set forth the folly of their ridiculous hope to the confusion of their faces before all the world. The prophet foretells a time when the false prophets 'shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive, but he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman,' &c., Zech. 13:4, 5.

Truly the most notorious false prophet that the world hath, and deceives most, is this vain hope which men take up for their salvation. This prophesies of peace, pardon, and heaven, to be the portion of such as [it] never once entered into God's heart to make heirs thereof. But the day is coming, and it hastens, wherein this false prophet shall be confounded. Then the hypocrite shall confess he never had any hope for salvation but what was the idol of his own fancy's making; and the formalist shall throw off the garment of his profession by which he deceived himself and others, and appear to himself and to all the world in his naked colours. It

behooves therefore everyone to be strict and curious in the search of his own heart, to find what his hope is built upon.

Now, hope of the right make, is a rational well-grounded hope. 'Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you,' 1 Peter 3:15. Alas! how can they give an answer to others, that have not any to give to their own consciences to this question, 'Why dost thou hope to be saved, O my soul?' There is no Christian, be he never so weak in grace, but hath some reason bottomed on the Scripture—for other I mean not—for the hope he professeth. Do you think, yea, can you be so absurd as to think, your own bold presumption, without any word of promise to build upon, can entitle your souls to the inheritance in God's kingdom? Should one come and say your house and land were his, and show you no writing under your hand by which you did ever grant him a right thereunto, but all he can say is, he dreamed the last night your house and land were his, and therefore now he demands it; would you not think the man mad, and had more to the bedlam than to your estate? And yet there are many hope to be saved, that can give no better reason than this comes to for the same, and such are all grossly ignorant and profane sinners. As it is enough for a saint to end the trouble which his fears put him into, to ask his soul why it is disquieted within him, would he but observe how little reason his heart can give for the same; so [would it be enough] to dismount the bold sinner from his prancing hopes, if he might be prevailed with to call himself to an account, and thus to accost his soul sometimes, and resolve not to stir without a satisfactory answer. 'In sober sadness tell me, O my soul! what reason findest thou in the whole Bible, for thee to hope for salvation, what livest in ignorance of God, or a trade of sin against God?' Certainly he should find his soul as mute and speechless as the man without the wedding garment was at Christ's question. This is the reason why men are such strangers to themselves, and dare not enter into any discourse upon this subject with their own hearts, because they know they should soon make an uproar in their consciences that would not be stilled in haste. They cocker their false hearts as much as David did his Adonijah, who

in all his life never displeased him so much as to ask him, 'Why dost thou so?' Nor they their souls to the day of their death by asking them, 'Soul, why hopest thou so?' Or if they have, it hath been as Pilate, who asked Christ what was truth, John 18:38, but had no mind to stay for an answer.

May be thou art an *ignorant*, soul, who knowest neither who Christ is, nor what in Christ hope is to fasten its hold upon; but only with a blind surmise thou hopest God will be better to thee than to damn thee at last. But why thou thus hopest, thou canst give no reason, nor I neither. If he will save thee as now thou art, he must make a new gospel for thy sake; for in this Bible it damns thee without hope or help. The gospel is 'hid to them that are lost,' II Cor. 4:3. But if knowledge will do it, thou haply canst show good store of that. This is the breast-work under which thou liest, and keepest off those shot which are made at thee from the word, for those lusts which thou livest and liest in as a beast in his dung, defiling thyself with them daily. And is this all thou hast to prove thy hopes for salvation for hopes true and solid? Indeed, many make no better use of their knowledge of the Scripture, than thieves do of the knowledge they have of the law of the land, who study it not that they mean to keep it, but to make them more cunning to evade the charge of it when called in question by it. So many acquaint themselves with the word—especially those passages in it that display the mercy of God to sinners at the greatest breadth—that with these they may stuff a pillow to lay their wretched heads on, when the cry of the abominations in which they live begins to break their rest. God deliver you, my dear friends, from such a hope as this. Surely you mean to provide a better answer to give unto Christ at the great day than this, why ye hope to be saved by him; do you not? Will thy knowledge, thinkest thou, be as strong a plea for salvation, as thy sins which thou wallowest in, against that knowledge, will be for thy damnation? If there be hope for such as thee, then come Judas and Jezebel, yea devils, and all ye infernal spirits, and strike in for this good company for a part with them, for some of you can plead more of this than any of them all.

But may be thou hast more yet to say for thyself than this comes to. Thou art not only a knowing person but a reformed also; the

pollutions in which once thou layest, now thou hast escaped; yea, thy reformation is embellished and set forth with a very gaudy profession of religion, both which have gained thee a very high opinion in the thoughts of all thy neighbours; so that if heaven might be carried by thy hands, thou couldst haply have a testimonial for thy unblamable and saint-like behaviour among them; yet, let me tell thee, if thou meanest to be faithful to thy own soul, thou must not rest in their charitable opinion of thee, nor judge of thy hopes for heaven by what comes under their cognizance, to wit, the behaviour of thy outward man—for further their eye and observation reacheth not—but art to look inward to thy own bosom, and inquire what spring thou canst find thereto have been the cause of this change and new motion that hath appeared in thy external conversation. This, and this alone, must decide the controversy, and bring thy thoughts to an issue, what to judge of thy hope, whether spurious or legitimate. † is not a new face that colours our outward behaviour, but a new principle that changeth the frame of the heart within, will evince thy hope to be good and genuine. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope,' I Peter 1:3. The new birth entitles to a new hope. If the soul be dead, the hope cannot be alive. And the soul may be dead, and yet put into a very handsome dress of external reformation and profession, as well as a dead body may be clad with rich clothes. A beggar's son got into the clothes of a rich man's child, may as well hope to be heir to the rich man's land, as thou, by an external reformation and profession, to be God's heir in glory. The child's hopes are from his own father, not from a stranger. Now, while thou art in a natural estate—though never so finished—old Adam is thy father; and what canst thou hope from him who proved worse than nought, and left his poor posterity nothing, except we should put a crazy mortal body, a sinful nature, and a fearful expectation of death temporal and eternal from the wrathful hand of a provoked God—which indeed he left all his children—into his inventory? O sirs, how can you give way that any sleep should fall upon your eyes, till you get into this relation to God! Hannah was a woman of a bitter spirit till she got a child from God; and

hast not thou more reason to be so, till thou canst get to be a child of God? Better a thousand times over that thou shouldst die childless than fatherless; my meaning is, that thou shouldst leave no child to inherit thy estate on earth, than to have no father to give thee an inheritance in heaven when thou art taken hence.

[DUTIES *which possession of the helmet of hope involves.*]

## SECOND POINT OF IMPROVEMENT.


[*Exhortation to* THOSE WHO HAVE  
THIS HELMET OF HOPE.]

For *exhortation* of you, believers, who upon trial are found to *have this helmet of hope*. Several duties are to be pressed upon you as such. FIRST. Be thankful for this unspeakable gift. SECOND. Live up to your hopes.

FIRST DUTY. Be *thankful for this unspeakable gift*. I will not believe thou hast it if thy heart be not abundantly let out in thankfulness for it. Blessed Peter cannot speak of this but in a doxology. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which hath begotten us again unto a lively hope,...to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away,' 1 Peter 1:3, 4<sup>civ</sup>. The usual proem to Paul's epistles is of this strain, Col. 1:5; Eph. 1:3. Hast thou hope in heaven? It is more than if thou hadst the whole world in hand. The greatest monarch the earth hath will be glad, in a dying hour, to change his crown for thy helmet. His crown will not procure him this helmet, but thy helmet will bring thee to a crown, when he shall have none to wear—a crown, not of gold, but of glory, which once on shall never be taken off, as his is sure to be. O remember, Christian, what but a while since thou wert—so far from having any hope of heaven, that thou wert under a fearful expectation of hell and damnation. And are those chains of guilt with which thy trembling conscience was weighed down unto despair, taken off, and thy head lift up to look for such high preferment in the celestial court of that God whose wrath thou hadst, by thy horrid treasons, most justly incensed against thee? Certainly, of all the men in the world, thou art deepest in debt to the mercy of God. If he will be thanked for a crust, he looks, sure, thou shouldst give him more for a crown. If food and raiment, though coarse and mean—suppose but roots and rags—be gratefully to be acknowledged; O with what ravishment of love and thankfulness are you to think and speak of those rarities and robes with which you hope to be fed and clad in this heavenly kingdom! especially if you cast your eye aside, and behold those that were once your fellow-prisoners—in what a sad and dismal condition they continue—while all this happiness has befallen you! It could not, sure, but affect his heart into admiration of his prince's mercy and undeserved favour to him, who is saved from the gibbet only by his gracious pardon, if, as he is riding in a coach towards his prince's court—there to live in wealth and honour—he should meet some of his fellow-traitors on sleds, as they are dragging full of shame and horror to execution for the same treason in which they had as deep a hand as any of them all. And dost thou not see, Christian, many of thy poor

neighbours, with whom haply thou hast had a partnership in sin, pinioned with impenitency and unbelief, driving apace to hell and destruction, while thou, by the free distinguishing mercy of God, art on thy way for heaven and glory? O down on thy knees, and cry out, 'Lord, why wilt thou show thyself to me, and not to these?' How easy had it been, and righteous for God, to have directed the pardon to them, and the warrant for damnation unto thee! When thou hast spent thy own breath and spirits in praising God, thou hadst need beg a collection of praises of all thy friends that have a heart to contribute to such charitable work, that they would help thee in paying this debt; and get all this, with what in heaven thou shalt disburse thyself to all eternity, in better coin than can be expected from thee here—where thy soul is embased with sinful mixtures—it must be accounted rather an acknowledgment of what thou owest to thy God, than any payment of the least part of the debt.

**SECOND DUTY.** *Live up to thy hopes, Christian.*

Let there be a decorum kept between thy principles and thy practices, thy hope of heaven and walk on earth. The eye should direct the foot. Thou lookest for salvation; walk the same way thy eye looks. This is so often pressed in the word, as shows both its necessity and difficulty. Some times we are stirred up to act 'as becometh saints,' Rom. 16:2; Eph. 5:3. Sometimes 'as becometh the gospel of Christ,' Php. 1:27. Sometimes 'as becometh those who profess godliness,' 1 Tim. 2:10. There is a —a decorum, and comely behaviour, which, if a Christian doth not observe in his walking he betrays his high calling and hopes unto scorn and contempt. To look high, and to live low, O how ridiculous it appears to all men! When a man is dressed on purpose to be laughed at and made a jeering-stock, they put on him something of the king and something of the beggar, that, by this patchery of mock-majesty with sordid baseness together, he may appear the greater fool to all the company. And certainly, if the devil might have the dressing of a man, so as to cast the greatest shame and ignominy upon him, yea, upon Christ and the profession of his gospel, he could not think of a readier way than to persuade a wretch to pretend to high and glorious hopes of heaven, and then to have nothing suitable to the high-flown hopes in his conversation, but all base and unworthy of such royal claims. If ye should see one going into the field with a helmet of brass on his head, but a wooden sword in one hand, and a paper shield on the other, and the rest of his armour like to these, you would expect he was not likely to hurt his enemies, except they should break their sides with laughing at him. Such a goodly spectacle is the brag professor, who lifts up his head on high with a bold expectation of salvation, but can show never a grace beside to suit with the great hope he hath taken up; he may make the devil sport, but never do him any great hurt, or himself good.

*Question.* But may be you will ask, How is the Christian to live up to his hopes?

*Answer.* I answer, in general, he is to be careful to do nothing in which he may not freely act his hope, and from the promise expect that God will, for Christ's sake, both approve the action, and reward his person for it. Ask thy soul this question seriously before thou engagest in any work, 'May I hope that God will bid me good speed? Can I look for his countenance in it, and his blessing on it?' It is very unworthy of a Christian to do anything sneakingly, as if he were afraid God or his conscience should be privy to his work. 'Whatsoever is not of hope is sin, because it cannot be of faith.' O how would this hedge in the Christian's heart from all by-paths! Possibly thou hast a grudge against thy neighbour. The fire is kindled in thy heart, though it flames not presently out into bitter words and angry behaviour; and thou art going to pray. Ask now thy soul, whether God will accept that sacrifice which is kindled with such strange fire? Yea, bid thy soul bethink herself how thy hopes of pardoning and saving mercy from God can agree with thy wrathful unforgiving spirit towards thy brother? Certainly, as the sun cannot well be seen through a disturbed air, so neither can the eye of hope well see her object—heaven's salvation—when the soul is tumultuous and roiled with anger and unchristian passion.

But, to instance in some particulars wherein you must comport with your hopes of salvation.

[INSTANCES wherein the Christian  
should live up to his hopes.]

*First Instance.* In your *company*. Man is a sociable creature—made for fellowship. And what company is fit for thee to consort with, but those of the same breeding and hopes with thyself? The saints are a distinct society from the world. 'Let ours also learn to maintain good works,' Titus 3:14. 'Ours,' *i.e.* of our fellowship. And it becomes them to seek their company among themselves. That of Peter and John is observable, 'being let go, they went to their own company,' Acts 4:23. When among the ungodly world they made account they were not in their own company, and therefore stayed no longer than needs must among them. There were enough surely in the land of Canaan with whom Abraham might have associated; but he knew they were not company for him to be linked to in any intimacy of acquaintance, and therefore it is said of him, that 'he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise,' Heb. 11:9. We find him indeed confederate with Mamre, the Amorite, and Eshcol, and Aner, his brethren, Gen. 14:13, which presupposeth more than ordinary acquaintance. But these, in all probability, were proselytes, and had, by Abraham's godly persuasions, renounced their idolatry, to worship with him the true God. And we may the rather be induced to think so, because we find them so deeply engaged with Abraham in battle with those idolatrous neighbour princes, which, had they themselves been idolaters, it is like they would not have done for a stranger, and him of a strange religion also. We find how dearly some of the saints have paid for their acquaintance with the wicked, as Jehoshaphat for his intimacy with Ahab, and many others. And if, knowing this, we shall yet associate ourselves with such, we cannot in reason look to pay less than they have done; yea, well, if we come off so cheap, because we have their follies recorded to make us wiser.

O consider, Christian, whither thou art going in thy hopes! Is it not to heaven? and do not men seek for such company as go their way? And are the wicked of thy way? When heaven's way and hell's meet in one road, then, and not till then, can that be. And if thy companion will not walk in heaven-way, what wilt thou do that walkest with him? It is to be feared thou must comply too much in his way. In a word, Christian, thy hope points to heaven; and is it not one thing thou hopest for, when thou comest there, to be delivered from all company with the wicked? and what thou then hopest for, doth thou not now pray for? Sure enough thou dost, if a true saint. Whatever is the object of a saint's hope is the subject of his prayer. As oft as thou sayest, 'Thy kingdom come,' thou prayest thus much. And will hoping and praying to be delivered from them, stand with throwing thyself upon them, and intimate familiarity with them?

*Second Instance.* Then thou comportest with thy hopes of salvation, *when thou labourest to be as holy in thy conversation as thou art high in thy expectation.* This the apostle urgeth from the condescency of the thing: 'What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God,' II Peter 3:11, 12. Certainly it becomes such to be holy even to admiration, who look for such a blessed day! We hope then to be like the angels in glory, and therefore should, if possible, live now like angels in holiness. Every believing soul is Christ's spouse. The day of conversion is the day of espousals, wherein she is contracted and betrothed by faith to Christ; and as such, lives in hope for the marriage-day, when he shall come and fetch her home unto his Father's house—as Isaac did Rebecca into his mother's tent—there to cohabit with him and live in his sweet embraces of love, world without end. Now, would the bride have her bridegroom find her, when he comes, in her fluttery and vile raiment? No, sure. 'Can a bride forget her attire?' Jer. 2:32. Was it ever known that a bride forgot to have her wedding-clothes made against the marriage-day? or to put them on when she looks for her bridegroom's coming? Holiness is the 'raiment of needle-work,' in which, Christian, thou art to be 'brought unto thy king and husband,' Ps. 45:14. Wherefore is the wedding-day put off so long, but because this garment is so long a making? When this is once wrought, and thou ready dressed, then that joyful day comes: 'The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready,' Rev. 19:7.

Thou hast not, Christian, a weightier argument to knock down all temptations to sin, nor a more honourable way to get the victory of them, than by setting thy hope to grapple with them. I confess it is well when this enemy is worsted, what hand soever he falls by; though it be the fear of hell that clubs it down in the lives of men, it is better than not at all. Yet I must tell you, that as the Israelites' state was poor and servile, when they were fain to borrow the Philistines' grindstone 'to sharpen every man his axe and mattock,' I Sam. 13:20, so it speaks the Christian to be in no very good state as to his spiritual affairs when he is fain to use the wicked man's argument to keep him from sinning, and nothing will set an edge upon his spirit to cut through temptation, but what the uncircumcised world themselves use. Thou, Christian, art of a nobler spirit, and more refined temper than these, I trow. And as we have a finer stone to sharpen a razor with that we use for a butcher's knife, so, certainly, a more spiritual and ingenuous argument would become thee better, to make thee keen and sharp against sin, than what prevails with the worst of men sometimes to forbear at least acting their wickedness. Go thou, Christian, to thy hope, and while the slavish sinner scares and terrifies himself from his lust with fire and brimstone, do thou shame thyself out of all acquaintance with it from the great and glorious things thou lookest for in heaven. Is it a sin of sensual pleasure that assaults thy castle? Say then to thy soul, 'Shall I play the beast on earth, that hope to be such a glorious creature in heaven?' Shall that head be found now in a Delilah's lap, that ere long I hope to be laid in Abraham's bosom? Can I now yield to defile that body with lust and vomit, which is the garment my soul hopes to wear in heaven? O no! Avaunt, Satan! I will have nothing to do with thee, or anything that will make me unmeet for that blessed place and holy state I wait for.



*Third Instance.* Let thy hope of heaven moderate thy affections to earth. 'Be sober, and hope,' saith the apostle, I Peter 1:13. You that look for so much in another world, may very well be content with a little in this. Nothing more unbecomes a heavenly hope than an earthly heart. You would think it an unseemly thing for some rich man, that hath a vast estate, among the poor gleaners at harvest-time, as busy to pick up the ears of corn that are left in the field, as the most miserable beggar in the company. O how all the world would cry shame of such a sordid-spirited man! Well, Christian, be not angry if I tell thee that thou dost a more shameful thing to thyself by far; if thou, that pretendest to hope for heaven, beest as eager in the pursuit of this world's trash as the poor carnal wretch is who expects no portion but what God hath left him to pick up in the field of this world. Certainly thy hope is either false, or at best very little. The higher that the summer sun mounts above the horizon, the more force it bears both to clear and also heat the air with his beams. And if thy hope of salvation were advanced to any ordinary pitch and height in thy soul, it would scatter these inordinate desires after this world with which now thou art choked up, and put thee into a greater heat of affection after heaven, than now thou feelest to things below.

I remember Augustine, relating what sweet discourse passed once between his mother and himself concerning the joys of heaven, breaks forth into this apostrophe, 'Lord, thou knowest *quàm viluit nobis in illo die hic mundus*—how vile and contemptible this sorry world was in our eye in that day when our hearts were warmed with some sweet discourse of that blessed place.' And I doubt not but every gracious person finds the same by himself; the nearer to heaven he gets in his hopes, the further he goes from earth in his desires. When he stands upon these battlements of heaven, he can look down upon this dunghill world as a *nigrum nihil*, a little dust-heap next to nothing. It is Scultetus' observation, that though there are many blemishes by which the eminent saints and servants of God recorded in Scripture are set forth as instances of human frailty, yet not one godly man in all the Scripture is to be found, whose story is blotted with the charge of covetousness. If that hold true, which, as yet, I am not able to disprove, we may wonder how it comes about that it should, now-a-days, be called the professors' sin, and become a common charge laid by the profane upon those that pretend to heaven more than themselves. O woe to those wretched men who, by their scandalous practices in this kind, put the coal into wicked men's hands, with which they now black the names of all the godly, as if to be covetous were a necessary consequent of profession.

*Fourth Instance.* Let thy hope of heaven master thy fear of death. Why shouldst thou be afraid to die, who hopest to live by dying? Is the apprentice afraid of the day when his time comes out?—he that runs a race, of coming too soon to his goal?—the pilot troubled when he sees his harbour?—or the betrothed virgin grieved when the wedding-day approacheth? Death is all this to thee. When that comes, thy indenture expires, and thy jubilee is come. Thy race is run, and the crown won—sure to drop on thy head when thy soul goes out of thy body. Thy voyage, how troublesome soever it was in the sailing, is now happily finished, and death doth but this friendly office for thee, to uncover and open the ark of thy body, that it may safely land thy soul on the shore of eternity at thy heavenly Father's door—yea, in his sweet embraces, never to be put to sea more. In a word, thy husband is come for thee, and knocks with death's hand at thy door, to come forth unto him, that he may perform his promise, which, in the day of thy betrothing, he made to thee; and thou lovest him but little, if thou beest not willing to be at the trouble of a remove hence, for to enjoy his blissful presence, in his Father's royal palace of heaven, where such preparation is made for thy entertainment, that thou canst not know here, though an angel were sent on purpose to inform thee.

O what tongue can express that felicity which infinite mercy bespeaks, infinite wisdom deviseth, infinite merit purchaseth, and infinite power makes ready! I have read that the Turks say, 'They do not think we Christians believe heaven to be such a glorious place as we profess and talk of; for if we did, we would not be so afraid to go thither, as we see many that profess themselves Christians to be.' It cannot be denied, but all inordinate fears of death betray great unbelief and little hope. We do not look upon death under a right notion, and so we start at it; which, were we by faith but able to see through, and assure ourselves it comes to do us a good turn, we should feel as comfortably on the thoughts of it, as now we are scared at the apparition of it. The horse eats that hay in the rack, which he is afraid of when a little lies at a distance on the road; because there he knows it, but on the way he doth not. Christian, understand aright what message death brings to thee, and the fear of it will be over. It snatcheth thee indeed from this world's enjoyments, but it leads thee to the felicities of another incomparably better. And who, at a feast, will chide the servant that takes away the first course, of which enough is eaten, to make room for the second to be set on, that consists of far greater delicacies?

*Fifth Instance.* Then thou comportest with thy hope *when thou livest in the joy of thy hope*. A sad uncheerful heart does not become a lively hope. Let him follow his master with a heavy countenance, that looks to get nothing by his service. Thou art out of this fear, and therefore wrongest both thyself and thy God too by thy disconsolate spirit. 'Whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end,' Heb. 3:6. Christ takes no more delight to dwell in a sad uncheerful heart, than we in a dark melancholy house. Open thy shuts therefore, and let in the light which sheds its beams upon thee from the promise, or else thy sweet Saviour will be gone. We do not use to entertain our friends in a dark room, or sit by those that visit us, mopish and melancholic, lest they should think we are weary of their company. Christ brings such good news with him, as may bespeak better welcome with thee than a dejected countenance and a disconsolate spirit. I tell thee, Christian, could such a message be carried to the damned as might give them any hope—though never so little—of salvation, it would make hell itself a lightsome place, and tune those miserable souls into a rejoicing temper in the midst of their present torments. Blush then, and be ashamed, O ye drooping saints! that a few thin clouds of some short afflictions, coming over your heads, should so wrap you up in the darkness of your spirits, as that the hope of heaven, whither you look at last to come, should not be able, in a moment, to dispel and turn your sorrow into a ravishment of joy and comfort.

*Sixth Instance.* Thou livest up to thy hopes *when, with thy rejoicing of hope, thou preservest an awful fear of God*. 'The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy,' Ps. 147:11. We too often see that children forget to pay that respect and reverence which is due to their parents, when once the estate is made sure into them. And truly, though the doctrine of assurance cannot be charged with any such bitter fruit to grow naturally from it, as the Remonstrants and Papists would have us believe; yet we are too prone to abuse it; yea, the best of saints may, after they have the love of God with eternal life passed over to them under the privy-seal of hope's assurance, be led so far into temptation, as to fall foully, and carry themselves very undutifully. Witness David and Solomon, whose saddest miscarriages were after God had obliged them by opening his very heart to them in such manifestations of his love to them, as few are to be found that had the like. Both father and son are checked by God for this, and a blot left upon their history, on purpose to show what a sad accent this gave to their sin—that they fell after such discoveries of divine love made to them—and also to leave us instances not barely of human frailty, but of grace's frailty in this life (and that in the most eminent saints, such as were penmen of holy writ), that when our hope grows into greatest assurance, and this assurance spreads itself into highest rejoicing from the certainty of our expected glory, we should yet nourish a holy fear of God in our hearts, lest we grow crank<sup>ccv</sup> and forget God in the abundance of our peace. This holy fear will be to our joy as the continual dropping of water on the iron work in the fuller's wheel—which keeps it from firing; or, as the pericardium with which the God of nature hath moated about the heart in our bodies, that by the water of it, the heart, which is perpetually in motion, might be kept from being inflamed into a distempered heat.

The devil is pleased if he can at any time get a saint to sin, but he glorieth most when he can lay them in the dirt in their holiday clothes, as I may so say, and make them defile themselves when they have their garments of salvation on, I mean those which God hath in some more than ordinary discovery of himself clothed them withal. If at such a time he can be too hard for them, then he hath, he thinks, a fair occasion given him to go, and insultingly show God what pickle his child is in, and hold up the Christian's assurance and comfort mockingly—as they their brother's coat to their father—besmeared with the blood and filth of some beastly sin he hath thrown him into, and ask God, 'Is this the assurance thou hast given him of heaven? and this the garment of salvation which thou didst put on him? See where he hath laid it, and what a case he hath made it in.' O what gracious soul trembles not at the thought of putting such blasphemy into the mouth of the devil to reproach the living God by! That, Christian, is the beloved child, and shall be most made of by his heavenly Father, who sits not down to loiter in the sunshine of divine love, but gathers up his feet the nimbler in the way of duty, because his God is so kind to make his walk more cheerful and comfortable than others find it, and who loseth not his reverential fear of God in God's familiarity with him. Moses is a rare instance for this. Did ever the great God treat a mortal man, a saint in flesh, with the like familiarity and condescension, as he did that holy man, with whom he spake mouth to mouth, and before whom he caused all his goodness to pass? Ex. 34:6. And how bears he this transcending act of grace? Doth he grow bold, and forget his distance between God and him, by this low stoop of the divine Majesty to converse with him in such a humble manner, if I may so say? No; his heart was never in all his life more filled with the reverence of God than now. He trembled, indeed, and quaked more, it is very likely, on Mount Sinai; but his filial fear was as conspicuous now as then. It is true, this extraordinary manifestation of those soul-ravishing attributes of God's love and goodness—especially his pardoning mercy to him that knew himself a sinner, and at that time made much more sensible thereof by the terror which the dreadful promulgation of the law had left on his spirit—could not but exceedingly

heighten his joy, and overrun his soul with a sweet love to so gracious a God. Yet, was not Moses' awful fear of God drowned or lost in the high tide of these sweeter affections; for it follows, 'and Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped,' ver. 8. This favourite of heaven, mark how he shows his fear of God most, when God expresseth his love to him most.


### THIRD POINT OF IMPROVEMENT.

[*Arguments why we should STRENGTHEN OUR HOPE, with directions how.*]

Labour, O ye saints! to *strengthen your hope*. There is, as a weak faith, so a wavering unsteadfast hope. This you are by the diligent use of all means to establish and consolidate. Now, then, hope is firm and solid when the Christian doth not fluctuate *formidine oppositi*—with the fear of being opposed, but, by this anchor-hold that hope hath on the promise, is kept from those dejections and tumultuous fears with which they that have no hope are swallowed up, and they whose hope is but weak are sadly discomposed and shaken. *Solidum est quod sui solius est plenum*—that is a solid body which is compact and free from heterogeneous mixtures. The more pure gold is from dross, and whatever is of a different nature to itself, the more solid it is. So hope, the more it is refined from groundless presumption on the one hand, or slavish fear and distrust on the other, the more solid and strong it is. This in Scripture is called 'the assurance of hope.' Now to provoke you to a holy zeal in your endeavour after this, consider, FIRST. It is thy duty so to do. SECOND. If thou do not thou wilt show thou little esteemest Christ and his salvation. THIRD. Thou knowest not what stress thy hope may be put to before thou diest.

[*ARGUMENTS why we should strengthen our hope.*]

FIRST ARGUMENT. Consider it is *thy duty so to do*. Indeed by the Papist's doctrine, no man is bound to labour for such an assurance. But whether we should believe God or them, judge ye. What saith the Spirit of God, 'We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.' Observe,

*First. The thing he exhorts to endeavour for,*  
  
 —'to the full assurance of hope.' They whose hope is weak sail with but a scant side-wind. The apostle would have them go before the wind, and be carried with a full gale to heaven, which then is done when the soul, like a sail spread to the wind, is so filled with the truth and goodness of the promise, that it swells into an assured hope of what is promised, and rejoiceth in a certain expectation of what it shall have when it comes to the shore of eternity, though it be now tossed and weather-beaten with a thousand temptations and trials in its passage thither.


*Second. Observe whom he presseth this duty upon;* not some few choice Christians, as an enterprise laid out for them above the rest of their fellow-soldiers, but *every person that will prove himself a Christian*. 'We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence,' &c. In our civil trade, and particular worldly calling, it were sinful for every poor man to propound such a vast estate to himself in his own desires as he sees some few—the wealthiest merchants in a city—have got by their trade, so as no less shall content him. But in the spiritual trade of a Christian it is very warrantable for every Christian to covet to be as rich in grace as the best. Paul himself will not think himself wronged if thou desirest to be as holy man as himself was, and labourest after as strong a faith and steadfast a hope as he had; yea, thou oughtest not to content thyself with what thou hast, if there were but one degree of grace more to be had than what at present thou hast obtained. And,

*Third. Observe what he imputes the weakness of the saints' grace to;* not an impossibility of attaining to more, but *their sloth and laziness*. And therefore he opposeth this to that blessed frame of heart he so much wisheth them, 'That ye be not slothful,' Heb. 6:12. Indeed it is the diligent hand makes rich; as in this world's goods, so in this heavenly treasure also.

SECOND ARGUMENT. Labour to strengthen thy hope of salvation, or *thou wilt show thou little esteemest Christ and his salvation*. As we prize any good, so we labour more or less to assure ourselves of it. If a prince should lose a pin from his sleeve, or a penny out of his purse, and one should bring him news they are found; the things are so inconsiderable that he would not care whether it were true or not. But if his kingdom lay at stake in the field, and intelligence comes that his army hath got the day and beat the enemy, O how he would long to have his hope, that is now raised a little, confirmed more strongly by another post! Is heaven worth so little that you can be satisfied with a few probabilities and uncertain maybes you shall come thither? Thou basely despisest that blessed place if thou beest no more solicitous to know the truth of thy title to it. When Micaiah seemed to give Ahab—now advancing his army against Ramoth-gilead—some hope of a victory, by bidding him 'go up and prosper,' the thing being passionately desired by the king, he fears the worst—as indeed he had reason, for the prophet's speech was ironical—and therefore cannot rest till he know more of this matter. 'And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?' 1 Kings 22:16.

Maybe thou hast some loose wavering hopes of heaven floating in thy soul. If now, thou didst think thy eternal woe lay in the truth or falsehood of that hope, certainly thou wouldst search thy heart by the word, and adjure thy conscience after an impartial review to tell thee the naked truth, what thy state is, and whether thou mayest in God's name, and with the leave of his word, hope it shall be thy portion or not; and this thou wouldst do, not hypocritically, as that wretched king did—who adjured Micaiah to tell him the truth, and then would not believe him though he did it faithfully—but with great plainness of heart; it being about a business of no less importance than what shall become of thee to eternity. Peter, when surprised with the tidings of Christ's resurrection, though the report did not find such credit with him as it might, yet, by his speedy running to, and looking into, the sepulchre, he showed both how dearly he loved his Lord, as also how joyful a man he should be, if the news held true that he was alive. Thus, Christian, though the promise of eternal life hath not hitherto produced such an assurance of hope that thou art the person that shalt undoubtedly enjoy it, yet show what appreciating thoughts thou hast of that blissful state, by endeavouring to strengthen thy hope and put thee out of doubt thereof.

THIRD ARGUMENT. Consider this also in the last place, *that thou knowest not what stress thy hope may be put to before thou diest*. The wise mariner doth victual his ship for the longest day. He reckons on foul weather and cross winds which may retard his voyage, and make it more troublesome, though some find it a shorter cut and fairer passage, and therefore he stores himself accordingly, knowing well it is easier carrying provision to sea than getting it there. *Non facilè inveniuntur in adversitate præsidia, quænon fuerint in pace quæsita*—protection is not readily found in adversity, which has not been sought out in time of peace—a good speech of Austin. God himself tells us we have 'need of patience;' he means great store of patience, 'that after we have done the will of God, we may receive the promise,' Heb. 10:36. And if of patience, then of hope; because patience bears all on hope's back. Now, because we know not the certain degree of hope that will serve our turn—God having purposely concealed the weight of affliction and temptation he intends to lay on us—therefore we should never cease our endeavour to strengthen it. There are hard duties to be performed, and strong trials to be endured, and these require a hope proportionable. We are to 'hold fast...the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end,' Heb. 3:6. Now, will the Christian of weak hope do this? He, alas! is like a leaky ship with a rich lading; the fear of sinking before she gets the port takes away the owner's joy of the treasure she carries. Bid such a one rejoice in his inheritance that is laid up in heaven for him, and he will tell you he questions whether ever he shall come there. Patient waiting for mercy prorogued and deferred is another hard duty, 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord,' Lam. 3:26. Now weak hope is short-breathed, and cannot stay long with any quietness. *Omne invalidum est querulum*—weak persons are commonly hardest to please; soon peevish and froward if they have not what they would, and that when they desire it also.

When David's faith and hope were under a distemper, then he falls out with all. The prophet himself that brought him the news of a kingdom cannot escape his censure, and all because the promise stayed longer before it was delivered than he expected —'I said in my haste, All men are liars,' Ps. 116:11 —whereas the promise went not a day beyond its due time, but he missed of its true reckoning through his inordinate desire. But take David in his healthful temper—when his faith and hope are strong—and he is not so hasty then to call for a mercy out of God's hands; but thinks his estate in God's hands as safe as if it were paid into his own. 'Praise waiteth for thee, O God,' or, 'praise is silent for thee,' so the Hebrew,  (*dumiyah thehillah*), will bear it, Ps. 65:1. As if the holy man had said, 'Lord, I do quietly wait for a time to praise thee. My soul is not in an uproar because thou stayest. I am not murmuring, but rather stringing my harp, and tuning my instrument with much patience and confidence, that I may be ready to strike up when the joyful news of my deliverance first comes.' You have much ado to make the child quiet till dinner, though he sees preparations for a great feast; but one that is grown up will be soon pacified when he is kept a little longer than ordinary for his meal upon such an occasion. O Christian, it is our childishness and weakness of grace—especially of our hope—that makes us so soon out of patience to wait God's leisure. Strengthen hope, and patience will grow with it.

In a word, Christian, thou hast great trials and strong temptations to conquer before you enter heaven gates and be clothed with your garments of salvation there. Now defend thy hope, and that will defend thee in these; strengthen that, and that will carry thee through them. The head, every member is officious to preserve it. The hands are lift up to keep off the blow, the feet run to carry the head from danger, the mouth will receive any unsavoury pill to draw fumes and humours from the head. Salvation is to the soul what the head is to the body—the principal thing it should labour to secure; and hope is to our salvation what the helmet is to the head. Now if he be unwise that ventures his head under a weak helmet in the midst of bullets at the time of battle, then much more unwise he that hazards his salvation with a weak hope. Know, O Christian, the issue of the battle with thy enemy depends on thy hope; if that fail all is lost. Thy hope is in conflicts with temptations and sufferings, as a prince is amidst his army, who puts life into them all while he looks on and encourageth them to the battle, but if a report of the king's being slain comes to their ears, their courage fails and hearts faint. Therefore Ahab would be held up in his chariot to conceal his danger from the people, the knowledge of which would have cast a damp on their courage.

Thy hope is the mark Satan's arrows are leveled at. If possible keep that from wounding. Or if at any time his dart reacheth it, and thy spirit begins to bleed of the wound which he hath given thee by questioning 'Whether such great sins can be pardoned as thou hast committed? such old festered sores as thy lusts have been can be ever cured? or afflictions that are so heavy and have continued so long can possibly be either endured or removed?' Now labour, as for thy life, to hold up thy hope though wounded in the chariot of the promise, and bow not by despairing to let the devil trample on thy soul. So soon as thy hope gives up the ghost will this cursed fiend stamp thee under his foul feet, and take his full revenge of thee, and that without any power of thy soul to strike a stroke for thy defence. This will so dispirit thee that thou wilt be ready to throw up all endeavour and attendance on the means of salvation; yea, desperately say, 'To what purpose is it to think of praying, hearing, and meditating, when there is no hope?' What! should we send for the physician when our friend is dead? What good will the chafing and rubbing the body do when the head is severed from it? The army broke up, and every one was sent to his city, as soon as it was known that Ahab was dead. And so wilt thou cast off all thought of making any head against sin and Satan when thy hope is gone, but fall either into Judas' horror of conscience, or with Cain, turn atheist, and bury the thoughts of thy desperate condition in a heap of worldly projects.

I come now to give a few words of counsel, how a Christian may best strengthen his hope. Take them in these six particulars following. 1. If thou meanest thy hope of salvation should rise to any strength and solidness, study the word of God diligently. 2. Keep thy conscience pure. 3. Resort to God daily, and beg a stronger hope of him. 4. Labour to increase your love. 5. Be much in the exercise of your hope. 6. File up thy experiences of past mercies, and thy hope will grow stronger for the future.

[SIX DIRECTIONS *how we may strengthen our hope.*]

*First Direction.* If thou meanest thy hope of salvation should rise to any strength and solidness, *study the word of God diligently.* The Christian is bred by the word, and he must be fed by it also, or else his grace will die. That is the growing child that lies libbing oftenest at the breast. Now as God hath provided food in his word to nourish every grace, so in the composition of the Scriptures he had a particular respect to the welfare and growth of the saint's hope, as one principal end of their writing. 'That we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope,' Rom. 15:4. The devil knows this so well, that his great labour is spent to deprive the Christian of the help which the word is stored with; and indeed therein he is not mistaken, for so long as this river is unblocked up which makes glad the City of God, with the succours which are brought in to them on the stream of its precious promises, he can never besiege them round or put them to any great straits. Some, therefore, he deprives of their relief by mere sloth and laziness. They make a few fruitless complaints of their doubts and fears, like sluggards crying out of their wants and poverty as they lie in bed, but are loath to rise and take any pains to be resolved of them by searching of the word for their satisfaction; and these sell their comfort of all others the cheapest. Who will pity him, though he should starve to death, that hath bread before him, but loath to put his hand out of his bosom to carry it to his mouth! Others he abuseth by false applications of the word to their souls, partly through their weak understandings, and troubled spirits also, which discolour the truths of God and misrepresent them to their judgments, whereby they come to be beaten with their own staff—even those promises which a skilful hand would knock down Satan's temptations withal. The devil is a great student in divinity, and makes no other use of his Scripture-knowledge than may serve his turn by sophistry to do the Christian a mischief, either by drawing him to sin, or into despair for sinning; like some wrangling barrister, who gets what skill he can in the law merely to make him the more able to put honest men to trouble by his vexatious suit. Well, if Satan be so conversant in the word to weaken thy hope, and deprive thee of thy inheritance, what reason hast thou then to furnish thyself with a holy skill to maintain thy



right and defend thy hope? Now, in thy study of the word, propound these *two ends*, and closely pursue them till thou hast obtained them.

1. *End.* Labour to clear up thy understanding from the word, *what are the conditions required by God of every soul that hath his grant and warrant to hope assuredly for life and salvation in the other world.* Some conditions there are required to be found in all such is without all doubt, or else it were free for all, be they what they will, and live how they list, actually to lay claim to a right in heaven and salvation. If God had set no bounds at Sinai, and said nothing who should come up the mount, and who not, it had been no more presumption in any of the company to have gone up than in Moses; and if God requires no conditions in the person that is to hope, then heaven is a common for one as well as other to crowd into; then the beastly sinner may touch God's holy mount as well as the saint, and fear no stoning for his bold adventure. But this sure is too fulsome doctrine for any judicious conscience to digest. Well, having satisfied thyself that if ever thou hast true hope thou must also have the conditions, inquire what they are. Now the word holds forth two sorts of conditions according to the two different covenants.

(1.) There is a covenant *of nature*, or law-covenant, which God made with innocent Adam; and the condition of this was *perfect obedience of the person that claimed happiness by it.* This is not the condition now required; and he that stands groping in at this door in hope to enter into life by it, shall not only find it nailed up and no entrance that way to be had, but he also deprives himself of any benefit of the true door which stands open, and by which all pass that get thither. 'Whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace,' Gal. 5:4. *You must* therefore inquire what the other covenant is; and that is,

(2.) A covenant of *grace*, as that other was of nature; of reconciliation to make God and man friends, as that was a covenant to preserve those friends who had never fallen out.

Now the condition of this covenant is, *repentance and faith.* See for this Luke 24:47; John 3:36; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 20:21; Gal. 5:5. Labour therefore to give a firm assent to the truth of these promises, and hold it as an indisputable and inviolable principle, that 'whoever sincerely repents of his sins, and with a 'faith unfeigned' receiveth Christ to be his Lord and Saviour, this is the person that hath the word and oath of a God that cannot possibly lie, for the pardon of his sins and the salvation of his soul.' What service a strong assent to this will do thee towards exerting thy hope thou wilt by and by see. It is the very basis thereof. The weight of the Christian's whole building bears so much on it that the Spirit of God, when he speaks in Scripture of evangelical truths and promises, on which poor sinners must build their hopes for salvation, doth it with the greatest averment of any other truths, and usually adds some circumstance or other that may put us out of all doubt concerning the certainty and unalterableness of them. 'Surely he hath borne our griefs,' Isa. 53:4. There is no question to be made of it; but it was our potion he drank, our debt he paid. What end could he have besides this in so great sufferings? Was it to give us a pattern of patience how we should suffer? This is true, but not all; for some of our fellow-saints have been admirable instances of this. 'He carried our sorrows,' and 'was wounded for our transgressions.' This, this was the great business worthy of the Son of God's undertaking, which none of our fellow-saints could do for us. So, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,' 1 Tim. 1:15. As if he had said, 'Fear no cheat or imposture here; it is as true as truth itself; for such is he that said it.' If you believe not this you are worse than a devil. He cannot shut this truth out of his conscience, though the unwelcomest that ever came to his knowledge. 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,' 1 John 1:9. What can the poor penitent fear when that attribute is become his friend that first made God angry with him. Yea, so fast a friend as to stand bound for the performance of the promise, which even now was so deeply engaged to execute the threatening on him? 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath,' Heb. 6:17. What security

could we have asked more of a deceitful man, than the faithful God of his own accord gives? The Romans did not give their magistrates oaths—supposing the dignity and honour of their persons and place were bond strong enough to make them true and righteous. Surely then God's word would have deserved credit, though it had not an oath to be its surety, yet God condescends to this, that he may sink the truth of what he saith deeper into our minds, and leave the print fairer and fuller in our assents to the same when set on with the weight of asseverations<sup>ccvi</sup> and oaths.

2. *End.* Having found what is the condition of the covenant, *rest not satisfied till thou findest this condition to be wrought in thy own soul, and art able to say thou art this repenting and believing sinner.* A strong hope results from the clear evidence it hath for both these. We read in Scripture of a threefold assurance. (1.) An assurance of understanding, Col. 2:2. (2.) An assurance of faith, Heb. 10:22. (3.) An assurance of hope, Heb. 6:11. And it is a good note which an acute doctor of our own hath upon them, 'That these three make up one practical syllogism; wherein knowledge forms the proposition, faith makes the assumption, and hope draws the conclusion' (D. A. Tac. Sa. p. 126). 'I do,' saith the Christian, 'assuredly know from the word, that the repenting believing sinner shall be saved; my conscience also tells me that I do unfeignedly repent and believe; therefore I do hope firmly that I shall, however unworthy otherwise, be saved.' Now we know there can be no more in the conclusion than is in the premises; so that, as the force is, which the Christian puts forth in his assent to the truth of the promise, and the evidence which he hath, that the condition of the promise—viz. faith and repentance—is wrought in his soul, so will his hope be, weak or strong. Indeed it can be no otherwise. If his assent to the truth of the promise be weak, or his evidence for the truth of his faith and repentance be dark and uncertain, his hope that is born—as I may so say—of these, must needs partake of its parent's infirmities, and be itself weak and wavering, as they are from that which it results.

*Second Direction.* Wouldst thou have thy hope strong? then, *keep thy conscience pure.* Thou canst not defile this, but thou wilt weaken that, 'Living godly in this present world,' and 'looking for that blessed hope' laid up for us in the other, are both conjoined, Titus 2:12, 13. A soul wholly void of godliness needs be as destitute of all true hope, and the godly person that is loose and careless in his holy walking, will soon find his hope languishing. All sin is aguish meat; it disposeth the soul that tampers with it to trembling fears and shakings of heart. But such sins as are deliberately committed and plotted, they are to the Christian's hope as poison to the spirits of his body, which presently drinks them up. They, in a manner, exanimate the Christian. They make the thoughts of God terrible to the soul; which, when he is in a holy frame, are his greatest joy and solace. 'I remembered God, and was troubled,' Ps. 77:3. They make him afraid to look on God in a duty, much more to look for God in the day of judgment. Can the servant be willing his master should come home when he is in his riot and excess? Mr. Calvin, when some wished him to forbear some of his labours, especially his night studies, asked those his friends, 'whether they would have his Lord find him idle when He came?' O, God forbid! Christian, that death should find thee wanton and negligent in thy walking; that he should surprise thee lying in the puddle of some sin unrepented of! This would be a sad meeting! O how loath wouldst thou then be to die, and go to the great audit where thou must give up thy accounts for eternity! Will thy hope then be in case to carry thee up with joy to that solemn work? Can a bird fly when one of her wings is broke? Faith and a good conscience are hope's two wings. If, therefore, thou hast wounded thy conscience by any sin, renew thy repentance, that so thou mayest act faith for the pardon of it, and, acting faith, mayest redeem thy hope, when the mortgage that is now upon it shall be taken off. If a Jew had pawned his bed-clothes, God provided mercifully, it should be restored before night: 'For,' saith he, 'that is his covering, wherein shall he sleep?' Ex. 22:27. Truly, hope is the saint's covering, wherein he wraps himself when he lays his body down to sleep in the grave. 'My flesh,' saith David, 'shall rest in hope,' Ps. 16:9. O Christian! bestir thyself to redeem thy hope before this sun of thy temporal

life go down upon thee, or else thou art sure to lie down in sorrow. A sad going to the bed of the grave he hath, that hath no hope of a resurrection to life.

*Third Direction. Resort to God daily, and beg a stronger hope of him.* That is the way the apostle took to help the saints at Rome to more of this precious grace. 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost,' Rom. 15:13. God, you see, is the God of hope; and not only of the first seed and habit, but of the whole increment and abounding of it in us also. He doth not give a saint the first grace of conversion, and then leave the improvement of it wholly to his skill and care; as sometimes a child hath a stock at first to set up, and never hath more help from his father, but, by his own good husbandry, advanceth his little beginnings into a great estate at last; but rather as the corn in the field, that needs the influences of heaven to flower and ripen for harvest, as much as to quicken in the clods when first thrown in. And therefore, be sure thou humbly acknowledged God by a constant waiting on him for growth. 'The young lions,' are said to, 'seek their meat from God,' Ps. 104:21. That is, God hath taught them, when hungry, to express their wants by crying and lifting up their voice, which, did they know God to be their Maker, they would direct to him for supply; as we see the little babe that at first only expresseth its wants by crying, doth, so soon as it knows the mother, directs his moan to her. Thou knowest, Christian, that thou art at thy heavenly Father's finding. He knows indeed what thou wantest, but he stays his supplies till thou criest, and this will make him draw forth his breast presently. Doth God take care for the beasts in the field? Surely then much more will he for thee his child in his house, and for thy soul above all. Thou mayest possibly pray for more riches, and be denied; but a prayer for more grace is sure to speed.

*Fourth Direction.* If you would strengthen your hope, *labour to increase your love.* There is a secret, yet powerful, influence that love hath on hope. Moses, we will easily grant, greatly befriended the Israelite, when he slew the Egyptian that fought with him. Love kills slavish fear—one of the worst enemies hope hath in the Christian's heart—and thereby strengthens hope's hand. He that plucks up the weeds helps the corn to grow, and he that purges out the disease makes way for nature's strengthening. It is slavish fear oppresses the Christian's spirit that he cannot act hope strongly. Now, 'love casteth out fear,' I John 4:18. The free-woman will cast out the bond-woman. Slavish fear is one of Hagar's breed—an affection that keeps all in bondage that hath it. This love cannot brook. 'Shall I,' saith the loving soul, 'fear he will hurt me, or be hard to me, that loves me, and I him so dearly? Away, unworthy thoughts, here is no room for such company as you are in my bosom.' 'Love thinketh no evil,' I Cor. 13:5. That is, it neither wisheth evil to, nor suspects evil of, another. The more thou lovest Christ, the less thou wilt be jealous of him; and the less jealous thou art of him, the more strongly thou wilt hope in him, and comfortably wait for him. Hence, these two graces are so often mated in Scripture. 'The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ,' II Thes. 3:5. Love him, and you will wait for him. So, 'keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,' Jude 21.

*Fifth Direction. Be much in the exercise of your hope.* Repeated acts strengthen habits. Thus the little waddling child comes to go strongly by going often. You have no more money in your chest at the year's end than when you laid it there; nay, it is well if rust or thieves have not made it less. But you have more by trading with it than your first stock amounted unto. 'Thou oughtest to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury,' said Christ to the 'slothful servant,' Matt. 25:27. Now the promises are hope's object to act upon. A man can as well live without air, as faith and hope without a promise; yea, without frequent sucking in the refreshment of the promises. And, therefore, be much in meditation of them; set some time apart for the purpose. You that love your healths, do not content yourselves with the air that comes to you as you sit at work in your house or shop, but you will walk out into the fields sometimes, to take the air more fresh and full. And if thou beest a wise Christian, thou wilt not satisfy thyself with the short converse thou hast by the by with the promises, as now and then they come into thy mind in thy calling, and when thou art about other employments, but wilt walk aside on purpose to enjoy a more fixed and solitary meditation of them. This were of admirable use; especially if the Christian hath skill to sort the promises, and lay aside the provision made in them suitable to his case in particular.

Sometimes the Christian is at a stand when he remembers his past sins, and his hope is quite dashed out of countenance while they stare on his conscience with their grim looks. Now it were excellent for the Christian to pick out a promise where he may see this objection answered and hope triumphing over it. This was David's very case, Ps. 130. He grants himself to be in a most deplored condition, if God should reckon with him strictly, and give him *quid pro quo*—wages suitable to his work. 'If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?' ver. 3. But then, he puts his soul out of all fear of God's taking this course with poor penitent souls, by laying down this comfortable conclusion as an indubitable truth. 'But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' ver. 4, that is, 'there is forgiveness in thy nature; thou carriest a pardoning heart in thy bosom; yea, there is forgiveness in thy promise, thy merciful heart doth not only incline thee to thoughts of forgiving, but thy faithful promise binds thee to draw forth the same unto all that humbly and seasonably lay claim thereunto. Now, this foundation laid, see what superstructure this holy man raiseth, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope,' ver. 5. As if he had said, 'Lord, I take thee at thy word, and am resolved by thy grace to wait at this door of thy promise, never to stir thence till I have my promised dole—forgiveness of my sins—sent out unto me.' And this is so sweet a morsel, that he is loath to eat it alone, and therefore he sets down the dish, even to the lower end of the table, that every godly person may taste with him of it—'Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities,' ver. 7, 8. As if he had said, 'That which is a ground of hope to me, notwithstanding the clamour of my sins, affords as solid and firm a bottom to any true Israelite or sincere soul in the world, did he but rightly understand himself, and the mind of God in his promise. Yea, I have as strong a faith for such as my own soul, and durst pawn the eternity of its happiness upon this principle—that God shall redeem every sincere Israelite from all his iniquities.' This, this is the way to knock down our sins indeed. And Satan, when he comes to reproach us with them, and, by their batteries, to dismount our hope, sometimes a

qualm comes over the Christian's heart merely from the greatness of the things hoped for. 'What!' saith the poor soul, 'seems it a small thing for me to hope, that of an enemy I should become a son and heir to the great God! What! a rebel? and not only hope to be pardoned, but prove a favourite, yea such a one, as to have robes of glory making for me in heaven, where I shall stand among those that minister about the throne of God in his heavenly court, and that before I have done him any more service here on earth? O, it is too great good news to prove true.' Thus the poor soul stands amazed—as the disciples, when the first tidings of the Lord's resurrection surprised them—and is ready to think its hope but an idle tale with which Satan abuseth it, *ut præsумendo speret et sperando pereat*—that he may presume to hope, and perish with his presumption.

Now, Christian, that thou mayest be able to stride over this stumbling-block, be sure to observe those prints of God's greatness and infinitude that are stamped upon the promise. Sometimes you have them expressed, on purpose to free our thoughts, and ease our hearts of this scruple. When God promised what great things he would do for Abraham, to make them more credible, and easily believed, he adds, 'I am the Almighty God,' Gen. 17:1; and so, Isa. 55:7, 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.' But how can this possibly be done, that in the turn of a hand, as it were, such a great favour can be obtained, which among men could hardly be done in a lifetime spent suing for it? O that is easily answered. He tells you he is not a sorry man, but a God, and hath a way by himself in pardoning wrongs, which none can follow him in; for it is as far above our ways as the heavens are above the earth. This, Christian, observe, and it will be a key to unlock all promises, and let you in unto the untold treasures that are in them; yea, [will] make the greatest promise in the Bible easy to be believed. Whenever you read any promise, remember whose bond it is—the word of no other than God. And when you think of God, be sure you do not narrow him up in the little compass of you finite apprehensions, but conceive of him always as an infinite being, whose center is everywhere, and circumference is nowhere. When you have raised your thoughts to the highest, then know you are as far yea infinitely farther, from reaching his glory and immensity, than a man is from touching the body of the sun with his hand when got upon a hill or mountain. This is to ascribe greatness to God,' as we are commanded, Deut. 32:3. And it will admirably facilitate the work of believing.

Suppose a poor cripple should be sent for by a prince to court, with a promise to adopt him for his son and make him heir to his crown, this might well seem incredible to the poor man, when he considers what a leap it is from his beggar's cottage to the state of a prince. No doubt if the promise had been to prefer him to a place in a hospital, or some ordinary pension for his maintenance, it would be more easily credited by him, as more proportional to his low condition; yet, the greatness of the prince, and the delight such take to be like God himself, by showing a kind of creating power to raise some as it were from nothing unto the highest honours a subject is capable of—thereby to oblige them as their creatures to their service—this, I say, might help such a one think this strange accident not altogether impossible. Thus here. Should a poor soul spend all his thoughts on his own unmeetness and unworthiness to have heaven and eternal life conferred on him, it were not possible he should ever think so well of himself as that he should be one of those glorious creatures that were to enjoy it. But, when the greatness of God is believed, and the infinite pleasure he takes to demonstrate that greatness this way—by making miserable creatures happy, rather than by perpetuating their miseries in an eternal state of damnation—and what cost he hath been at to clear a way for his mercy to freely act in, and, in a word, what a glorious name this will gain him in the thoughts he thus exalts; these things—which are all to be found in the word of promise—well weighed, and acknowledged, cannot but open the heart, though shut with a thousand bolts, to entertain the promise and believe all is truth that God there saith, without any more questioning the same. A taste I have given in one or two particulars, you see, how the promises may be suited to answer the particular objections raised against our hope. It were easy here to multiply instances, and to pattern any other case with promises for the purpose; but this will most effectually be done by you who know your own scruples better than another can. And be such true friends to your own souls, as to take a little pains therein. The labour of gathering a few simples in the field, and making them up into a medicine by the direction of the physician, is very well paid for, if the poor man finds it doth him good and restores him to health.

*Sixth Direction. File up thy experiences of past mercies, and thy hope will grow stronger for the future.* Experience worketh hope, Rom. 5:4. He is the best Christian that keeps the history of God's gracious dealings with him most carefully, so that he may read in it his past experiences, when at any time his thoughts trouble him and his spiritual rest is broken with distracting fears for the future. This is he that will pass the night of affliction and temptation with comfort and hope; while others that have taken no care to pen down—in their memories at least—the remarkable instances of God's love and favour to them in the course of their lives, will find the want of this sweet companion in their sorrowful hours, and be put to sad plunges; yea, well, if they be not driven to think their case desperate, and past all hope. Sometimes a little writing is found in a man's study that helps to save his estate; for want of which he had gone to prison and there ended his days. And some one experience remembered keeps the soul from despair—a prison which the devil longs to have the Christian in. 'This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope,' Lam. 3:21. David was famous for his hope, and not less eminent for his care to observe preserve, the experiences he had of God's goodness. He was able to recount the dealings of God to him. They were so often the subject of his meditation and matter of his discourse, that he had made them familiar to him. When his hope is at a loss, he doth but rub his memory up a little and he recovers himself presently, and chides himself for his weakness. 'I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High,' Ps. 77:10. The hound, when he hath lost the scent, hunts backward and so recovers it, and pursues his game with louder cry than ever. Thus, Christian, when thy hope is at a loss for the life to come, and thou questionest thy salvation in another world, then look backward and see what God hath already done for thee in this world.

Some promises have their day of payment here, and others we must stay to receive in heaven. Now the payment which God makes of some promises here, is an earnest given to our faith, that the other also shall be faithfully discharged when their date expires; as every judgment inflicted here on the wicked is sent as a penny in hand of that wrath the full sum whereof God will make up in hell. Go therefore, Christian, and look over thy receipts. God hath promised 'sin shall not have dominion over you;' no, not in this life, Rom. 6:14. It is the present state of a saint in this life that is intended there. Canst thou find this promise made good to thee? is the power of sin broken and the sceptre wrung out of this king's hand, whom once thou didst willingly obey as ever subject his prince? yea, canst thou find he hath but begun to fall by thy unthroning him in thy heart and affections? Dost thou now look on sin not as thou wert wont, for thy prince, but as a usurper, whose tyranny, by the grace of God, thou art resolved to shake off, both as intolerable to thee and dishonourable to God, whom thou now acknowledgest to be thy rightful Lord, and to whose holy laws thy heart most freely promiseth obedience? This, poor soul, may assure thee that thou shalt have a full dominion over sin in heaven ere long, which hath begun already to lose his power over thee on earth. It is observable how David rears up his hope to expect heaven's perfect state of holiness from his begun sanctification on earth. First, he declares his holy resolution for God, and then his high expectation from God. 'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness,' Ps. 17:15. Hast thou found God's supporting hand in all thy temptations and troubles, whereby thou art kept from sinking under them? A David would feed his hope for eternal salvation with this, 'thou hast holden me by my right hand,' Ps. 73:23. Now observe hope's inference, 'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory,' ver. 24.

And as experiences carefully kept and wisely improved, would conduce much to strengthening the Christian's hope on its chief object—salvation; so also would they lift up its head above all those distracting fears which arise in the Christian's heart, and put him to much trouble from those cross and afflicting providences that befall him in this life. Certainly David would have been more scared with the big looks and brag deportment of that proud Goliath, had not the remembrance of the bear and the lion which he slew brought relief to him and kept them down. But he had slain this uncircumcised Philistine in a figure when he tore in pieces those unclean beasts. And therefore when he marches to him, this is the shield which he lifts up to cover himself with, 'The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine,' 1 Sam. 17:37. If experiences were no ground for hope in future straits—temporary now I mean—then they would not have the force of an argument in prayer. But saints use their experiences to do them service in this case, and make account they urge God very close and home when they humbly tell him what he hath already done for them, and expect he should therefore go on in his fatherly care over them. 'Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns,' Ps. 22:21. And no doubt a gracious soul may pray in faith from his past experience, and expect a satisfactory answer to that prayer wherein former mercies are his plea for what he wants at present. God himself intends his people more comfort from every mercy he gives them, than the mercy itself singly and abstractly considered amounts to. Suppose, Christian, thou hast been sick, and God hath, at thy humble prayer, plucked thee out of the very jaws of death, when thou wert even going down his throat almost; the comfort of this particular mercy is the least God means thee therein; for he would have thee make it a help to thy faith, and a shore [support] to thy hope, when shaken by any future strait whatever. 'Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness,' Ps. 74:14. God in that mercy at the Red Sea, we see, is thinking what Israel should have to live on for forty years together, and looked that they should not only feast themselves at present with the joy of this

stupendous mercy; but powder it up in their memories, that their faith might not want a meal in that hungry wilderness all the while they were to be in it. Experiences are like a cold dish reserved at a feast. Sometimes the saint sits down with nothing else on his table but the promise and his experience; and he that cannot make a soul-refreshing meal with these two dishes deserves to fast. Be sure, Christian, thou observest this in every mercy—what is the matter of present thankfulness, and what is ground of future hope. Anchor is called ‘a door of hope,’ Hosea 2:15. God, when he gives one mercy, opens a door for him to give, and us to expect more mercy through it. God compares his promise to ‘the rain,’ which maketh the earth ‘bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,’ Isa. 55:10. Why shouldst thou, O Christian, content thyself with half the benefit of a mercy? When God performs his promise, and delivers thee out of this trouble and that strait, thou art exceedingly comforted, may be, with the mercy, and thy heart possibly enlarged at present into thankfulness for the same. It is well. Here is ‘bread for the eater’—something at present feeds thee. But where is the ‘seed for the sower?’ The husbandman doth not spend all his corn that he reaps, but saves some for seed, which may bring him another crop. So, Christian, thou shouldst feast thyself with the joy of thy mercy, but save the remembrance of it as hope-seed, to strengthen thee to wait on God for another mercy and further help in a needful time.

[AN OBJECTION ANSWERED,  
*with some practical reflections.*]

But, you will possibly say, how can a saint’s past experience be so helpful to his hope for the future, when God, we see, often crosseth the saint’s experiences? He delivers them out of one sickness, and takes them away, may be, with the next; he saves them in one battle without a scratch or hurt, and in another a while after they are killed or wounded; how then can a saint ground and bottom his hope from a past deliverance to expect deliverance in the like strait again?

Answer 1. There is the *same power still in God that was then*. What he did once for thee he can with as much ease do again; and this is one way thy experiences may help thee. Thou hast seen God make bare his arm, so that except thou thinkest that he since hath lost the strength or use of it, and is become at last a God with a lame hand, hope hath an object to act upon, and such one as will lift thy head above water. Indeed, the soul never drowns in despair till it hath lost its hold on the power of God. When it questions whether God will deliver, this is a sad leak, I confess, and will let in a thousand fears into thy soul; yet so long as the Christian can use this pump—I mean, act faith on the power of God, and believe that God can deliver when he pleases—thou gh it will not clear the ship of his soul of all its fears, yet it will keep it from quite sinking, because it will preserve him in a seeking posture. ‘Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean,’ Mark 1:40. And for thee to say God cannot deliver, who hast been an eyewitness to what he hath done, were not only to betray thy great unbelief, but to forfeit thy reason as a man also. But,



Answer 2. To give a more close answer to the question, the saint, from his former experiences, even of temporal salvations, *may, yea ought, not only believe that God can, but also that he will, save him in all future straits and dangers of this nature*; only, he cannot conclude that he will do it in the same way as in former deliverances. And none I hope will say, if he hath deliverance, that his experiences are crossed because God doth use another method in the conveyance of it to him. A debt may be fully satisfied, as with money, so with that which is money worth, except the bond restrains the payment otherwise. Now there is no clause to be found in any promise for temporal mercies, that binds God to give them in specie or in kind. Spiritual mercies—such I mean as are saving and essential to the saint's happiness—these indeed are promised to be given in kind, because there is nothing equivalent that can be paid in lieu of them; but temporal mercies are of such an inferior nature, that a compensation and recompense may be easily given in their stead; yea, God never denies these to a saint, but for his gain and abundant advantage. Who will say the poor saint is a loser whose purse God denieth to fill with gold and silver, but filleth his heart with contentation? or the sick saint, when God saves him not by restoring to former health, but by translating to heaven? And so much may suffice for answer to the objection propounded. I shall wind up this head with two or three reflections to be used by the Christian for his better *improving past experiences* when he is at a plunge.

(1.) *Reflection.* Look back, Christian, to thy past experiences, and *inquire whether thou canst not find that thy God hath done greater matters for thee than this which thou now hast so many disquieting fears and despairing thoughts about.* I suppose thy present strait great; but wert thou never in a greater, and yet God did at last set thy feet in a large place? Thou art now in a sad and mournful posture; but hath not he brightened a darker cloud than this thou art now under, and let thee out of it into a state of light and joy? Surely thy staggering hope may prevent a fall by catching hold of this experience. Art thou not ashamed to give thyself for lost, and think of nothing but drowning, in a less storm than that out of which God hath formerly brought thee safe to land? See David relieving his hope by recognizing such an experiment as this, 'Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling,' Ps. 56:13. Hast thou given me the greater, and wilt thou stand with me for the less? Haply thy present fear, Christian, is apostasy. Thou shalt one day fall by the hand of thy sins; this runs in thy thoughts, and thou canst not be persuaded otherwise. Now it is a fit time to recall the day of God's converting grace. Darest thou deny such a work to have passed upon thee? If not, why then shouldst thou despair of perseverance? That was day wherein he saved thy soul. 'This day,' saith Christ to Zacchaeus, 'is salvation come to this house,' Luke 19:9. And did God save thy soul by converting grace, and will he not keep thy feet from falling by his sustaining grace? Was it not both more mercy and power to take thee out of the power of sin and Satan, than it will cost him to preserve thee from falling into their hands again? Surely the Israelites would not so often have feared provision in the wilderness, had they remembered with what a high hand God did bring them out of Egypt. But, may be it is some outward affliction that distresseth thee. Is it greater than the church's was in cruel bondage and captivity? yet she had something to recall that put a new life into her hope. 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him,' Lam. 3:24. See, she makes a spiritual mercy—because incomparably greater of the two—a ground of hope for temporal salvation, which is less. And hast not thou, Christian, chosen him for thy portion? Dost thou not look for a heaven to enjoy

him in for ever? And can any dungeon of outward affliction be so dark that this hope will not enlighten? Recall thy experiences of his love to thy soul, and thou canst not be out of hope for thy body and outward condition. He that hath laid up a portion in heaven for thee, will lay out surely all the expenses thou needest in thy way thither.

(2.) *Reflection.* Remember *how oft God hath confuted thy fears and proved thy unbelief a false prophet.* Hath he not knocked at thy door with inward comfort and outward deliverances, when thou hadst put out the candle of hope, given over looking for him, and been ready to lay thyself down on the bed of despair? Thus he came to Hezekiah, after he had peremptorily concluded his case desperate, Isa. 38:10, 11. Thus to the disciples in their unbelieving dumps, 'We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel,' Luke 24:21. They speak as if now they were in doubt whether they should own their former faith or no. Hath it not been formerly thus with thee? wert thou never at so sad a pass—the storm of thy fears so great—that the anchor of hope even came home, and left thee to feed with misgiving and despairing thoughts, as if now thy everlasting night were come, and no morning tale more expected by thee? yet even then thy God proved them all liars, by an unlooked for surprise of mercy with which he stole sweetly upon thee? If so, press and urge this experience home upon thyself, to encourage thy hope in all future temptations. What, O my soul! thou wouldst say, wilt thou again be seared with these false alarms?—again lend an ear to thy distrustful desponding thoughts, which so oft thou hast found liars, rather than believe the report of the promise, which never put thy hope to shame as these have done? The saints are oft feeding their hopes on the carcass of their slain fears. The time which God chose, and the instrument he used, to give the captive Jews their jail-delivery and liberty to return home, were so incredible to them—who now looked rather to be ground in pieces by those two millstones, the Babylonians within, and the Persians without the city—that when it came to pass, like Peter whom the angel had carried out of prison, Acts 12:1-17, it was some time before they could come to themselves, and resolve whether it was a real truth or but a pleasing dream, Ps. 126:1.

Now, see what effect this strange disappointment of their fears had upon their hope for afterward. It sends them to the throne of grace for the accomplishment of what of what was so marvellously begun. 'The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord,' ver. 3, 4. They have got a hand-hold by this experiment of his power and mercy; and they will not now let him go till they have more. Yea, their hope is raised to such a pitch of confidence, that they draw a general conclusion from this particular experience for the comfort of themselves or others in any future distress. 'They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him,' ver. 5, 6.

(3.) *Reflection.* Remember *what sinful distempers have broke out in thy afflictions and temptations, and how God hath, notwithstanding these, carried on a work of deliverance for thee.* So that thou mayest say, in respect of these enemies in thy bosom, what David spake triumphantly in regard of his enemies without, that ‘God hath prepared a table before me in the presence of thy enemies,’ yea, of his enemies. While thy corruptions have been stirring and acting against him, his mercy hath been active for thy deliverance. O what a cordial-draught this would be to thy fainting hope! That which often sinks the Christian’s heart in any distress, inward or outward, and even weighs down his head of hope that it cannot look up to God for help and succour at such a time, is the sense of those sinful infirmities which then discover themselves in him. ‘How,’ saith the poor soul, ‘can I look that God should raise me out of this sickness, wherein I have bewrayed so much impatience and frowardness? Or out of that temptation in which I have so little exercised faith, and discovered so much unbelief? Surely I must behave myself better before any good news be sent from heaven to me.’ It is well, poor Christian, thou art sensible of thy sins as to be thy own accuser, and prevent Satan’s doing it for thee; yet be not oppressed into discouragement by them. Remember how God hath answered the like objections formerly, and saved thee with a ‘notwithstanding.’ If these could have hardened his bowels against thee, hadst thou been alive, yea, out of hell this day? Didst thou ever receive a mercy of which God might not have made stoppage upon this very account that makes thee now fear he will not help thee? Or, if thou hast not an experience of thy own at hand—which were strange—then borrow one of other saints. David is an instance beyond exception. This very circumstance with which his deliverance was, as I may say, enamelled, did above all affect his heart: ‘I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?’ Ps. 116:11, 12. He remembered his sinful and distempered carriage; and this he mentions, as to take shame for the shame, so to wind up his heart to the highest peg of thankfulness. He knows not how to praise God enough for that mercy which found him giving the lie to God’s messenger—even Samuel himself—that was

sent to tell him it was a coming. And he doth not only make this circumstance an incentive to praise for what is past, but lays it down for a ground of hope for the future. ‘I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee,’ Ps. 31:22. As if he had said, ‘When I prayed with so little faith, that I as it were unprayed my own prayer, by concluding my case in a manner desperate; yet God pardoned my hasty spirit, and gave me that mercy which I had hardly any faith to expect.’ And what use doth he make of this experience, but to raise every saint’s hope in a time of need? ‘Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord,’ ver. 24.

#### FOURTH POINT OF IMPROVEMENT.

[EXHORTATION *to them that want this helmet of hope.*]

Be you exhorted that are yet without this helmet, to provide yourselves with it. Certainly if you be but in your right wits, it is the first thing you will go about, and that with sober sadness—especially may but three considerations take place in your thoughts. FIRST. How deplored a thing it is to be in a hopeless state. SECOND. It is possible that thou who art now without hope, mayest by a timely and vigorous use of the means obtain a hope of salvation. THIRD. Consider the horrid cruelty of this act—to pull down eternal destruction on thy own head.

[THREE CONSIDERATIONS *to make all provide themselves with this helmet.*]

FIRST CONSIDERATION. *How deplored a thing it is to be in a hopeless state.* The apostle makes him to be 'without God' that is 'without hope'—'having no hope, and being without God in the world,' Eph. 2:12. God, to the soul, is what the soul is to the body. If that be so vile and noisome a thing, when it hath lost the soul that keeps it sweet; what is thy soul when nothing of God is in it? 'The heart of the wicked is little worth,' saith Solomon. And why? but because it hath not God to put a value on it. If God, who is light, be not in thy understanding, thou art blind; and what is an eye whose sight is out fit for but to help thee break thy neck? If God be not in thy conscience to pacify and comfort it, thou must needs be full of horror or void of sense; a raging devil or a stupid atheist. If God be not in thy heart and affections to purify them, thou art but a shoal of fish, a sink of sin. If God be not in thee, the devil is in thee; for man's heart is a house that cannot stand empty. In a word, thou canst not well be without this hope neither in life nor death. Not in life—what comfort canst thou take in all the enjoyments thou hast in this life without the hope of a better? A sad legacy it is which shuts the rebellious child from all claim to the inheritance. Thou hast an estate, it may be, but it is all you must look for. And is it not a dagger at the heart of thy joy to think thy portion is paid thee here, which will be spent by that time the saint comes to receive his? Much less tolerable is it to be without this hope in a dying hour. Who can without horror think of leaving this world, though full of sorrows, that hopes for no ease in the other? The condemned malefactor, as ill as he likes his smokey hole in the prison, had rather be there, than accept of deliverance at the hangman's hand; he had rather live still in his stinking dungeon than exchange it for a gibbet. And greater reason hath the hopeless soul—if he understands himself—to wish he may spend his eternity on earth, though in the poorest hole or cave in it—and that under the most exquisite torment of stone or gout—than to be eased of that pain with hell's torment. Hence is the sad confusion in the thoughts of guilty wretches when their souls are summoned out of their bodies. This makes the very pangs of death stronger than they would be, if these dear friends had but a hopeful parting. If the shriek and mournful outcry of some friends in the room of a dying man may so disturb him as to make

his passage more terrible, how much more then must the horror of the sinner's own conscience under the apprehensions of that hell whither it is going, amaze and affright him? There is a great difference between a wife's parting with her husband, when called from her to live at court under the shine of his prince's favour, whose return after a while she expects with an accumulation of wealth and honour; and another whose husband is taken out of her arms to be dragged to prison and torment.

Is this thy case, miserable man, and art thou cutting thy short life out into chips, and spending thy little time upon trifles, when the salvation of thy soul is yet to be wrought out? Art thou tricking and trimming thy slimy carcass, while thy soul is dropping into hell? What is this but to be painting the when the house is on fire? For a man to be curious about trimming his face, when he is not sure his head shall stand a day on his shoulders! It was an unseasonable time for Belshazzar to be feasting and quaffing when his kingdom lay at stake and an enemy at the gates. It would have become a wise prince to have been fighting on the wall than feasting in his palace, and fattening himself for his own slaughter, which soon befell him, Dan. 5:30. And it would become thee better to call upon thy God, poor sinner, and lie in tears for thy sins at his foot, if yet haply thy pardon may be obtained, than by wallowing in thy sensual pleasures, to stupify thy conscience, and lay it asleep, by which thou canst only gain a little ease from the troublesome thoughts of thy approaching misery.

SECOND CONSIDERATION. Consider it is possible—I do not mean in the way thou art in, for so it is as impossible that thou shouldst get to heaven, as it is that God should be found a liar—but it is possible *that thou who art now without hope, mayest by a timely and vigorous use of the means obtain a hope of salvation*; and certainly a possible hope carries in it a force of strong argument to endeavour for an actual hope. There is never a devil in hell so bad but if he had a thousand worlds at his dispose—and every one better than this we dote on—would exchange them all for such a may be, yea count it a cheap pennyworth too. It was but a possibility that brought that heathen king of Nineveh from his throne to lie grovelling at God's foot in sackcloth and ashes, and that king will

rise up in judgment against thee if thou dost not more. For that was a possibility more remote than thine is. It was spelled out, not from any express promise that dropped from the preacher to encourage them to humble themselves and turn to the Lord—for we read of nothing but desolation denounced—but from that natural theology which was imprinted on their minds. This taught them to hope that he who is the chief good would not be implacable. But you have many express promises from God's faithful lip, that if you in his tie and way seek unto him, as sure as God is now in heaven, you shall live there with him in glory. 'Your heart shall live that seek God,' Ps. 69:32. Yea there are millions of blessed ones now in heaven experimenting the truth of this word, who once had no more right to heaven than yourselves now have; and that blissful place is not yet crowded so full but he can and will make room for you if indeed you have a mind to go thither. There is one prayer which Christ made on earth that will keep heaven-gate open for all that believe on him unto the end of the world. 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word,' John 17:20. This is good news indeed. Methinks it would make your souls leap within your breasts, while you sit under the invitations of the gospel, as the babe once did in Elizabeth's womb, upon the virgin Mary's salutation. Say not then, sinners, that ministers put you upon impossibilities, and bid you climb a hill inaccessible, or assault a city that is unconquerable. No; it is the devil, and thy own unbelieving heart—who together conspire thy ruin—that tell thee so. And as long as you listen to these counsellors you are like to do well, are you not? Well, whatever they say, know, sinner, that if at last thou missest heaven—which God forbid—the Lord can wash his hands over your head and clear himself of your blood; thy damnation will be laid at thine own door. It will then appear there was no cheat in the promise, no sophistry in the offer of the gospel. What God did tender he was willing to give, but thou didst voluntarily put eternal life from thee, and thy heart, whatever thy lying lips uttered to the contrary, did not like the terms. 'But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me,' Ps. 81:11. So that when the jury shall go on thy murdered soul, to inquire how thou camest to thy miserable end,

thou wilt be found guilty of thine own damnation: *nemo amittit Deum nisi qui dimittit eum*—none loseth God but he that is willing to part with him.

THIRD CONSIDERATION. Consider the *horrid cruelty of this act*, for thee, by thy incorrigible and impenitent heart, *to pull down eternal destruction on thy own head*. O what a sad epitaph is this to be found on a man's grave-stone! Here lies one that cut his own throat, that unnaturally made away himself! this the man, that the woman, who would not be reclaimed! They saw hell before them, and yet would leap into it, notwithstanding the entreaties of Christ by his Spirit and ministers to the contrary! And the oftener thou hast attempted to do it, and God hath been staying thy hand by his gracious solicitations, the greater will be thy shame and confusion before God, men, and angels, at the last day. God hath set a brand upon those acts of cruelty which a man commits upon himself above all other. It would speak a man of a harsh currish nature, that could see a horse in his stable or hog in his sty starve, when he hath meat to lay before him; more cruel to hear his servant roar and cry for bread and deny it; yet more horrid if this were done to a child or wife; but of all—because nature cries loudest for self-preservation—the greatest violence that can possibly be done to the law of nature is, to forget the duty we owe to our own life. O what is it then for a sinner to starve his soul by rejecting Christ 'the bread of life,' and to let out his soul's blood at this wide sluice! This is matchless cruelty! Indeed, that which makes the self-murder of the body so great a crime is, because it doth so eminently—I will not say unavoidably—hazard the destruction of the soul. O how unworthy then art thou to have so noble a guest as thy soul dwell in thy bosom, who preparest no better lodgings than hell for it in another world!—that soul whose nature makes it being capable of being preferred to the blissful presence of God in heaven's glory, if thou hadst not bolted the door against thyself by thy impenitency. But alas! this which is the worst murder is the most common. They are but a few molesters that we now and then hear of who lay violent hands upon their bodies, at the report of which the whole country trembles; but you can hardly go into any house one day of the week, in which you shall not find some attempting to make away their souls; yea, that carry the very knife

and halts in their bosoms—their beloved sins I mean—with which they stab and strangle them; even those that are full of natural affections to their bodies, so as to be willing to spend all that they are worth, with her in the gospel, on physicians when the life of it is in danger; yet are so cruel to their dying damning souls, that they turn Christ their physician out of doors, who comes to cure them on free cost.

In a word, those that discover abundance of wisdom and discretion in ordering their worldly affairs, you would wonder how rational they are, what an account they will give why they do this, and why that; when it comes to the business of heaven and the salvation of their souls, they are not like the same men. So that, were you to judge them only by their actings herein, you could not believe them to be men. And is it not sad, that the soul, which furnisheth you with reason for the despatch of your worldly business, should have no benefit itself from the very reason it lends you to do all your business with. This, as one well saith, is as if the master of the house, who provides food for all his servants, should be himself kept by them from eating, and so remain the only starved creature in the house. And is not this the sad judgment and plague of God, that is visibly seen upon many, and those that go for wise men too, *stilo mundi* —after the manner of the world? Are not their souls, which give them understanding, to provide for back and belly, house and family, themselves starving in the meantime? being kept by the power of some lust from making use of their understanding and reason so far as to put them upon any serious and vigorous endeavour for the salvation of them. How then can souls that are so treated prosper?



## DIRECTION TENTH.

### THE SEVERAL PIECES OF THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD. SIXTH PIECE—THE CHRISTIAN'S SWORD.

*'And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God'* (Eph. 6:17).

Here we have the sixth and last piece in the Christian's panoply brought to our hand—A SWORD; and that of the right make—*'the sword of the Spirit.'* The sword was ever esteemed a most necessary part of the soldier's furniture, and therefore hath obtained a more general use in all ages, and among all nations, than any other weapon. Most nations have some particular weapons or arms proper to themselves; but few or none come into the field without a sword. A pilot without his chart, a scholar without his book, and a soldier without his sword, are alike ridiculous. But, above all these, is it absurd to think of being a Christian, without knowledge of the word of God and some skill to use this weapon. The usual name in Scripture for war is 'the sword.' 'I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth,' Jer. 25:29; that is, I will send war. And this because the sword is the weapon of most universal use in war, and also that whereby the greatest execution is done in the battle. Now such a weapon is the word of God in the Christian's hand. By the edge of this his enemies fall, and all his great exploits are done. 'They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony,' Rev. 12:11. There are *two observables* we may take notice of, before we fall to the closer discussion of the words. The first from the kind or sort of arms here presented for the Christian's use. The other from the place or order it stands in.

#### TWO OBSERVABLES DRAWN FROM THE WORDS.

FIRST OBSERVABLE. Mark the *kind or sort of arms here appointed for the Christian's use*. It is a weapon that is both defensive and offensive. Such is the sword. All the rest in the apostle's armoury are set out by defensive arms, girdle, breastplate, shield, and helmet—such as are of use to defend and save the soldier from his enemy's stroke. But the sword doth both defend him and serves to wound his enemy also. Of like use is the word of God to the Christian.

*First.* It is for *defence*. Easily might the soldier be disarmed of all his other furniture, how glistening and glorious soever, had he not a sword in his hand to lift up against his enemies' assaults. And with as little ado would the Christian be stripped of all his graces, had he not this sword to defend them and himself too from Satan's fury. 'Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction,' Ps. 119:92. This is like the flaming sword with which God kept Adam out of paradise. The saint is oft compared to Christ's garden and orchard. With the sword of the word he keeps this his orchard from robbing. There would not long hang any of their sweet fruit—either graces or comforts—upon their souls, were not this great robber Satan kept off with the point of this sword. O, this word of God is a terror to him; he cannot for his life overcome the dread of it. Let Christ but say, 'It is written,' and the foul fiend runs away with more confusion and terror than Caligula at a crack of thunder. And that which was of such force coming from Christ's blessed lips to drive him away, the saints have always found the most successful instrument to defend them against his fiercest and most impetuous temptations. Ask David what was the weapon with which he warded off the blows this enemy made at him, and he will tell you it was the word of God. 'Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer,' Ps. 17:4. That is, by the help of thy word I have been enabled to preserve



myself from those wicked works and outrageous practices, to which others, for want of this weapon to defend them, have been harried.

*Second.* It is for *offence*. The sword, as it defends the soldier, so it offends his enemy. Thus the word of God is, as a keeping, so a killing sword. It doth not only keep and restrain him from yielding to the force of temptations without, but also by he kills and mortifies his lusts within, and this makes the victory complete. A man may escape his enemy one day, and be overcome by him at another time. We read of some that for a while escaped the pollutions of the world, yet because their lusts were never put to the sword, and mortified in them by the power of the word applied to their hearts, were at last themselves overcome and slain by this secret enemy that lay skulking within their bosoms, II Peter 2:20, compared with ver. 22. Absalom, notwithstanding his being hanged by the hair of his head, might have lived to have taken revenge afterwards on them by whom he was then beaten, had not Joab come in timely and sped him, by sending his darts with a message of death to his heart. We have daily sad experiences of many that wriggle themselves out of their troubles of conscience—by which for a time they are restrained, and their sins, as it were, held by the hair—to rush afterwards into more abominable courses than they did before; and all for want of skill to use, or courage and faithfulness to thrust this sword by faith into the heart of their lusts.

SECOND OBSERVABLE. Observe the *order and place wherein this piece of armour stands*. The apostle first gives the Christian all the former pieces, and when these are put on, he then girds this sword about him. The Spirit of God, in holy writ, I confess, is not always curious to observe method; yet, methinks, it should not be unpardonable if I venture to give a hint of a double significancy in this very place and order that it stands in.

*First.* It may be brought in after all the rest, to let us know *how necessary the graces of God's Spirit are to our right using of the word*. Nothing more abused than the word. And why? but because men come to it with unsound and unsanctified hearts. The heretic quotes it to prove his false doctrine, and dares be so impudent as to cite it to appear for him. But how is it possible they should father their monstrous births on the pure chaste word of God? Surely it is because they come to the word and converse with it, but bring not the girdle of sincerity with them, and being ungirt, they are unblest. God leaves them justly to miss of truth, because they are not sincere in their inquiry after it. The brat is got upon their own hearts by the father of lies, and they come to the word only to stand as witness to it. Another reads the word and is worse after it, more hardened in his lusts than he was before. He sees some there canonized for saints by the Spirit of God, the history of whose lives is notwithstanding blotted with some foul falls, possibly into those very sins in which he lies wallowing, and therefore is bold to put himself into the saints' calendar. And why so impudent to do this? Truly because he comes to the word with an unholy heart, and wants the breastplate of righteousness to defend him from the dint of so dangerous a temptation. Another, for want of faith to give existence to the truth of the threatening in his conscience, runs boldly upon the point of this sword, and dares the God of heaven to strike him with it. Thus we find those wretches mentioned by the prophet playing with this edge-tool: 'Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now,' Jer. 17:15. As if they had said mockingly, 'Thou scarest us with strange bugbears—judgments that in the name of God thou threatenest are coming on us. When will they come? we would fain see them. Is God's sword rusty that he is so long getting it out of the scabbard?' And the despairing soul, for want of a helmet of hope, deals little better with the promise than the presumptuous sinner with the threatening. Instead of lifting it up to defend himself against the fears of his guilty conscience, he falls upon the point of it, and destroys his own soul with that weapon which is given him to slay his enemy with. Well, therefore, may the apostle first put on the other pieces, and then deliver this sword to them to use for their good. A sword in a madman's hand, and the word of God in some wicked man's mouth, are used much alike—to hurt only themselves and their best friends with.

*Second.* It may be commended after all the rest, to let us know [that] the Christian, when advanced to the highest attainments of grace possible in this life, *is not above the use of the word*; nay, cannot be safe without it. When girded with sincerity—his plate of righteousness on his breast, the shield of faith in his hand, and the helmet of hope covering his head, that his salvation is out of

doubt to him at present; yet even then he must take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. This is not a book to be read by the lowest form in Christ's school only, but beseeeming the highest scholar that seems most fit for a remove to heaven's academy. It is not only of use to make a Christian by conversion, but to make him perfect also, II Tim. 3:15. It is like the architect's rule and line—as necessary to lay the top-stone of the building at the end of his life as the foundation at his conversion. They therefore are like to prove foolish builders that throw away their line before the house be finished.

I come now to take up the weapon laid before us in the text, *and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* In which words these three parts. FIRST. The weapon itself; that is, *'the word of God.'* SECONDLY. The metaphor in which it is sheathed—*'the sword,'* with he person whose it is—*'the sword of the Spirit.'* THIRDLY. An exhortation to make use of this weapon, and directions how—*'and the sword,'* &c. That is, take this with all the other before-named pieces. So that to whom he directs the former pieces, to these he gives the sword of the word to use. Now those you shall find are persons of all ranks and relations; husbands and wives, parents and children masters and servants. He would have none be without this sword any more than without the girdle, helmet, and the rest, &c., though this I know will not please the Papists, who would have this sword of the word, like that of Goliath, laid up out of their reach, and that in the priest's keeping also.

#### DIRECTION X.—FIRST GENERAL PART.

[WHAT IS HERE MEANT BY THE WORD OF GOD.]

*'The Word of God'* (Eph. 6:17).

I begin with the weapon itself—*'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.'* I shall first hold forth the sword naked, and then put it again into its sheath, to handle it under the metaphor of a sword. There is a twofold word of God. FIRST. A substantial or subsisting word, and that is the eternal Son of God. SECOND. There is a declarative word of God, differing according to the sundry times and diverse manners in which he hath been pleased to reveal his will to man.

*[Twofold reference of the expression 'the word of God.']*

FIRST. There is a substantial or subsisting word, and that is the eternal Son of God. 'The Word was with God, and the Word was God,' John 1:1. 'And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God,' Rev. 19:13. This is spoken of a person, and he is no other than Christ the Son of God. But he is not the word of God in the text. The Spirit is rather Christ's sword, than Christ the sword of the Spirit; in the 15<sup>th</sup> verse of the forenamed chapter, 'Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations.'

SECOND. There is a declarative word of God, and this is manifold, according to the divers ways and manners whereby the Lord hath been pleased to declare his mind to the sons of men. At first, while the earth was thin sown with


people, and the age of man so voluminous as to contain many centuries of years, God delivered his mind by dreams and visions, with such like immediate revelations unto faithful witnesses, who might instruct others of their present generation therein, and transmit the knowledge of the same to after ages. They lived so long that three holy men were able, from the death of Adam, to preserve the purity of religion by certain tradition, till within a few years of the Israelites' going down to Egypt. For, as a reverend and learned pen calculates the chronology, Methuselah lived above two hundred years with Adam, and from him might receive the will of God revealed to him. Shem lived almost a hundred years with Methuselah, and Shem was alive to the fiftieth year of Isaac's age, who died but a few years before Israel's going into Egypt. Thus long did God forbear to commit his will to writing, because it, passing

through so few, and those trusty hands, it might safely be preserved.

But when the age of man's life was so contracted, that from eight and nine hundred years—the then ordinary duration of it—it shrank into but so many tens, as it was in Moses time, Ps. 90; and when the people of God grew from a few persons to a multitude in Egypt—and those corrupted with idolatry —God now intending at their deliverance thence, to form them into a polity and commonwealth, thought it fit, for the preventing of corruption in his worship, and degeneracy in their lives, that they should have a written law to be as a public standard to direct them in both. And accordingly he wrote the ten commandments with his own finger on tables of stone; and commanded Moses to write the other words he had heard from him on the mount, Ex. 34:27; yet so, that he still continued to signify his will by extraordinary revelations to his church, and also to enlarge this first edition of his written word, according to the necessity of the times; reserving the canon of the sacred writ to be finished by Christ the great doctor [teacher] of the church, who completed the same, and by the apostles, his public notaries, consigned it to the use of his church to the end of the world. Yea, a curse from Christ's mouth cleaves to him that shall add to or take from the same, Rev. 22:18, 19. So that now all those ways whereby God directly made known his mind to this people, are resolved into this one of the Scriptures, which we are to receive as the undoubted word of God, containing in a perfect rule of faith and life, and to expect no other revelation of his mind to us. Such is the meaning of Heb. 1:1: 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.' Therefore called the 'last days,' because that we are to look for no other revelation of God's will. And therefore for ever let us abhor that blasphemy of Joachim, Abbas, Wigelians, and others that have fallen into the same frenzy with them, who dream of a threefold doctrine flowing from the three Persons of the sacred Trinity — the law from the Father, the gospel from the Son, which we have in the New Testament, and a third from the Spirit, which they call *evangelium eternum* —the everlasting gospel. Whereas, the Spirit of God himself, by whom the Scriptures were indited, calls the doctrine in them 'the

everlasting gospel,' Rev. 14:6. Thus much to show what is here meant by the word of God. From whence the doctrine follows.

[THE DIVINITY of the Scriptures, and the  
SUFFICIENCY of their own testimony  
in proof of the same.]








DOCTRINE. *That the holy Scriptures are the undoubted word of God.* By the Scripture I mean the Old and New Testaments contained in the Bible; both {of} which are that one foundation whereupon our faith is built: 'Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,' Eph. 2:20. That is the doctrine which God by them hath delivered unto his church, for they were under the unerring guidance of the Spirit: 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God,' II Tim. 3:16, —breathed by God; it came as truly and immediately from the very mind and heart of God, as our breath doth from within our bodies. Yea, both matter and words were indited by God; for the things which they spake were 'not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth,' I Cor. 2:13. God did not give them a theme to dilate and enlarge upon with their own parts and abilities; but confined them to what he indited. They were but his amanuenses to write his infallible dictate; or as so many scribes, to transcribe what the Spirit of God laid before them. This is given as the reason why no scripture is to be sensed by our private fancy or conceit. We are to take the meaning of it from itself, as we find one place clears another; because it came not from the private spirit of any man at first, 'but holy men of God spake as they were moved,' or carried, 'by the Holy Ghost,' II Peter 1:20 and ver. 21 compared. Now *ejusdem est condere et interpretari*—the power that makes the law, that must expound it.

*Question.* But it may be some will say, Do you bring Scripture to bear witness for itself? The question is, whether the Scripture be the word of God? and you tell us the Scripture saith so, and is that enough?

*Answer.* This would carry weight, if it were the word of some sorry creature that stood upon the trial; but a greater than man is here. *Humana dita argumentis ac testibus egent; Dei autem sermo ipse sibi testis est, quia necesse est quicquid incorrupta veritas loquitur incorruptum sit veritas*

*testimonium*: so Salvan (De Gub. Dei, lib. iii)—men need arguments and witnesses to prove and vouch what they say to be true; but the word of God is a sufficient witness to itself, because what truth itself, which is pure, saith, can be no other than a sincere and true testimony. Christ, who thought it derogatory to the dignity of his person to borrow credit from man's testimony, did yet refer himself to the report that the Scripture made of him; and was willing to stand or fall in the opinion of his very enemies, as the testimony thereof should be found concerning him, John 5:34, compared with ver. 39. And therefore their testimony may well pass for themselves. He that cannot see this sun by its own light, may in vain think to go find it with candle and lantern of human testimony and argument. Not that these are wanting, or useless. The testimony of the church is highly to be revered, because to it are these oracles of God delivered, to be kept as a sacred *depositum* and charge. Yea, it is called 'the pillar and ground of truth,' 1 Tim. 3:15, and 'the candlestick, Rev. 1:12, from whence the light of the Scriptures shines forth into the world. But who will say, that the proclamation of a prince hath its authenticity from the pillar it hangs on in the market cross? or that the candle hath its light from the candlestick it stands on? The office of the church is ministerial—to publish and make known the word of God; but not magisterial and absolute—to make it Scripture, or unmake it, as she is pleased to allow or deny her stamp. This were to send God to man for his hand and seal, and to do by the Scriptures, as Tertullian saith in his *Apology* the heathens did with their gods, who were to pass the senate, and gain their good-will, before they might be esteemed deities by the people. And does not the church of Rome thus by the Scriptures? sending us to the pope for leave to believe the Scripture to be Scripture? The blasphemous speech of Hermanus is notoriously known, who said, that the Scriptures did *tantum valere, quantum Æsopi fabulæ, nisi accedat ecclesiæ testimonium*—that they are of no greater force than the fables of Aesop, unless the testimony of the church be added. O how like is Rome to Rome! Superstitious Rome to pagan Rome! But we need not travel so far to be determined in this case. The Scripture itself will save us the pains of this wearisome journey to so little purpose, being more able to satisfy us of its own

divine extraction, than the pope, sitting in his porphyry chair with all his cardinals about him. Neither is there any necessity to ask for a messenger to ascend on high, who may from heaven bring down their letters testimonial unto us; seeing they bear heaven's superscription so fairly writ upon their own forehead, as denies them to proceed from any but God himself. May a particular man be known from a thousand others by his face, voice, or handwriting? Certainly then it cannot seem strange that the God of heaven should be discerned from his sorry creature, by his voice and writing in the sacred Scriptures. Do we not see that he hath interwoven his glorious name so in the works of creation, that they speak his power and Godhead, and call him Maker in their thoughts, who never read the Bible, or heard of such a book?—so that they could not steal the notion thence, but had it from the dictate of their own consciences, exhorting the acknowledgment of a deity. And much more will an enlightened conscience and sanctified heart be commanded by the overpowering evidence that shines forth in the Scriptures to fall down and cry, It is the voice of God, and not any creature that speaks in them. Indeed the grand truths and chief notions found in the Scriptures, are so connatural to the principles of grace, which the same Holy Spirit, who is the inditer of them, hath planted in the hearts of all the saints, that their souls ever spring and leap at the reading and hearing of them, as the babe did in Elizabeth's womb at the salutation of the virgin Mary. The lamb doth not more certainly know her dam in the midst of a whole flock (at whose bleating she passeth by them all to come to be suckled by her), than the sheep of Christ know his voice in the saving truths of the Scriptures—the sincere milk whereof they desire, and are taught of God to taste and discern from all other. Indeed, till a soul be thus enlightened and wrought upon by the Spirit of God, he may have his mouth stopped by such arguments for the divinity of them, as he cannot answer; but he will never be persuaded to rest on them, and cordially embrace them as the word of God. As we see in the scribes and Pharisees, who oft were nonplussed and struck down speechless by the dint of Christ's words, yet, as those wretches sent to attack the person of Christ, rose up from the earth—where the majesty of Christ's deity,

looking out upon them, had thrown them grovelling—to lay violent hands on him; so those obdurate Pharisees and scribes, after all their convictions, returned to oppose the doctrine he preached, and that most of them unto death. Yea, that part of the Scripture they seemed to cry up so highly, the law of Moses, and made the ground of their quarrel against Christ, our Saviour is bold to tell them, that as great admirers as they were thereof, they did not so much as believe it to be the word of God. How could they indeed have a true divine faith on it who wanted the Spirit of God that alone works it? ‘Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me,’ John 5:46. Erasmus tells his friend in a letter, that he met with many things charged on Luther by the monks for heresies, which Augustine passed among them for sound truths. But certainly they did not really believe them to be truths in Augustine which they condemned in Luther. Neither did the Pharisees in truth believe what Moses wrote, because they opposed Christ, who did but verify what Moses before from God’s mouth had spoke. But because, when the Spirit of God comes to raise the heart to a belief of the word of God, he doth it by putting his own weight and force to those arguments which are couched in the word, and so doth *sigillare animum caractere illorum*—leave the print or character of them sealed upon the soul; therefore I shall draw out an argument or two among many that are to be found in the Scripture itself, proving the parentage thereof to be divine. I know it is a beaten path I am now walking in, and I shall speak    —otherwise, than   —other things; the same things for substance which you may meet in many others, only a little otherwise shaped on my private forge. For my own part, I think it more wisdom to borrow a sword of proved metal at another’s hands, than to go with a weak leaden one of my own into the field, and so come home well beaten for my folly and pride.

The two general heads from which I deduce my demonstrations, are these: FIRST. The matter of the Scriptures. SECOND. The supernatural effects produced by them.

#### FIRST GENERAL HEAD.

#### [Proof of the divinity of the Scriptures FROM THEIR SUBJECT-MATTER.]

The very *matter contained in the holy Scriptures demonstrates their heavenly descent*; it being such as cannot be the birth or product of a creature. Let us search the Scriptures a little, and consider the several parts thereof, and see whether they do not all bear the image of God upon them. Consider, FIRST. The historical part of Scripture. SECOND. The prophetical. THIRD. The doctrinal. FOURTH. The preceptive, with its appendices of promises and threatenings to enforce the same. And see if a print of a Deity be not stamped upon them all.

#### [THE HISTORICAL Scriptures bear the impress of Deity.]

FIRST PART. The *historical part* of the Scriptures. In this let us consider, *First*. The antiquity of the matter related. *Second*. The simplicity and sincerity of the penmen relating what concerns themselves.

*First*. The *antiquity* of the matter related. There are some pieces that could not possibly drop from a creature’s pen. Where should or could he have his reading and learning to enable him to write the history of the creation? The heathen, it is confessed, by the inquiry of natural reason, have made a discovery thus far, that the world had a beginning, and could not be from eternity, and that it could be the workmanship of none but God; but what is this to the compiling of a distinct history, how God went to work in the production thereof? what order every creature was made in? and how long God was finishing the same? He that is furnished for such an enterprise, must be one that was pre-existent to the whole world, and an eye-witness to every day’s work, which man, that was made the last day, cannot pretend unto. And yet there is history more ancient than this in the Scripture, where we find what was done at the council-table of heaven, before the world began, and what passed there in favour of man, whom afterwards he would make. Who could search these court-rolls, I wonder, and bring us intelligence of the everlasting decrees then resolved on, and promises made by the Father to the Son of eternal life in time to be conferred on his elect? Titus 1:2.


*Second. The simplicity and sincerity of holy penmen, in relating what most concerns themselves, and those that were near and dear to them.* We may possibly find among human authors, some that carry their pen with an even hand in writing the history of others, the making known whose faults casts no dishonourable reflection upon him that records them. Thus, Suetonius spared not to tell the world how wicked great emperors were, who therefore is said 'to have taken the same liberty in writing their lives that they took in leading them.' But where is the man that hath not a hair upon his pen, when he comes to write of the blemishes of his own house or person? Alas! here we find that their pen will cast no ink. They can rather make a blot in their history than leave a blot on their own name; they have, like Alexander's painter, a finger to lay upon these scars; or, if they mention them, you shall observe they learn their pen on a sudden to write smaller than it was wont. But in the history of the Scripture, none of this self-love is to be found, the penmen whereof are as free to expose their own shame and nakedness to the world's view as any others. Thus Moses brands his own tribe for their bloody murder on Shechem, Gen. 34. An enemy could not have set the brand heavier on their name than himself doth it; his own brother is not favoured by him, but his idolatry set upon the file, Ex. 32. The proud behaviour of his dear sister, and the plague of God which befell her, escapes not his pen, Num. 12. No, not the incest of his own parents, Ex. 6:20. So that we must say of him, concerning the impartiality of his pen in writing, what himself saith of Levi in the execution of justice, that he 'said unto his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren,' Deut. 33:9. In a word, to despatch this particular, he is no more tender of his personal honour than he is of his house and family, but doth record the infirmities and miscarriages of his own life: as his backwardness to enter upon that difficult charge, Ex. 3, 4—wherein he discovered so much unbelief and pusillanimity of spirit, notwithstanding his clear and immediate call thereunto by God himself; hid neglect of a divine ordinance in not circumcising his child, and what the sin had like to cost him; his frowardness and impatience in murmuring at the troubles that accompanied his place wherein God had set him, Num. 11:11-13;

and his unbelief after so many miraculous seals from heaven set to the promise of God, for which he had his leading staff taken from him, and the honour of conducting Israel into Canaan denied him—a sore and heavy expression of God's displeasure against him, Num. 20:12. Certainly we must confess, had not his pen been guided by a spirit more than human, he could never have so perfectly conquered all carnal affections, so as not the least to favour himself in reporting things thus prejudicial to his honour in the world.

And the same spirit is found to breathe in the evangelists' history of the gospel—they being as little dainty of their own names as Moses was; as may be observed in their freedom to declare their own blemishes and their fellow apostles'. So far were they from wronging the church with a lame mutilated story of Christ's life and death, to save their own credits, that they interweave the weaknesses of one another all along their relations. Hence we read of the sinful passion and revenge working the sons of Zebedee; Peter acting the devil's part to tempt his Master at another time; the ignorance of all the twelve in some main principles of Christianity for awhile; their ambition who should be greatest, and their wrangling about it; their unbelief and cowardice, one denying his Lord, and the rest fleeing their colours, when they should have interposed their own bodies betwixt their Master and the danger, as resolved wither to die for him, or at least with him, and not save their lives with so dishonourable a flight;—these, and such like passages, declare them to be acted in their writings by a spirit higher than their own, and that by no other than by God himself, for whom they so willingly debase themselves in the eyes of the world, and lay their names in the dust, that the glory of his name might be exalted in this their free acknowledgment.

[THE PROPHETICAL *Scriptures* bear  
the impress of Deity.]

SECOND PART. The *prophetic part of the Scriptures*; which contains some wonderful predictions of things to come, as could drop from no pen but one guided by a divine hand; all of which have had their punctual performance in the just periods foretold. Indeed from whom

could these come but God? 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God,' Deut. 29:29. And predictions surely may pass very well for secrets; they are *arcana ejus imperii*—secrets of his government; such secrets, that God offers to take him—whoever he is—and set him with himself in his own throne, that is able to foretell things to come. 'Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods,' Isa. 41:23. This must be confessed to be a flower of the crown, and an incommunicable property and prerogative of the only true God, who stands upon the hill of eternity, and from thence hath the full prospect of all things, and to whose infinite understanding they are all present; for his will being the cause of all events, he must needs know them, because he knoweth that. The devil, indeed, is very ambitious to be thought able to do this, and to gain the reputation hereof, hath had his mock-prophets and prophecies in all ages, with which he hath abused the ignorant credulous world. But alas! his predictions are no more true prophecies, than his miracles are true miracles. He puts a cheat upon the understandings of silly souls in the one, as he doth on their senses in the other. For his predictions are either dark and dubious, cunningly packed and laid, that, like a picture in *plicis*—folds, they carried two faces under one hood; and in these folds the subtle serpent wrapped himself, on purpose to save his credit, which way soever the event fell out. And this got Apollo the name of Loxias, of  *obliquus; propter obliqua et tortuosa responsa ejus*—because he mocked them that consulted his oracle with such ambiguous answers, that sent them as wise home as they came to him. Indeed, the devil found it necessary thus to do. Had he not with this patch of policy eked out the scantiness of his own understanding, the nakedness thereof would have been seen by every vulgar eye, to his shame and to the contempt of his oracles. Or, if his predictions were more plainly delivered, they were,

*First.* Of such things as he spelled out by the help of *nature's alphabet*, and came to the knowledge of by diving into the secrets of *natural causes*, before they discovered themselves unto the observation of man's duller understanding; and this made them cried up for wonderful predictions, and supernatural, by those who could not see this clue in Satan's hand that

guided him. If a man should meet you in the street, and tell you such a friend of yours will die within a few months, whom you left well, to your thinking, but a few minutes before, and the event should seal to the truth of what he said, you might possibly begin to think this a wonderful prophecy. But, when you afterwards know that he who told you this was a physician rarely accomplished, and had upon much study and strict observation of your friend's bodily state, found a dangerous disease growing insensibly upon him, you would alter your opinion, and not think him a prophet, but admire him for a skilful physician. Thus, did we but consider the vastness of Satan's natural parts—though limited, because created—and the improvement he hath made of them, by the study and experience of so many thousand years, we shall not count his predictions for prophecies, but rather as comments and explications of the short and dark text of natural causes, and acknowledge him a learned naturalist, but not deserving the name of a true prophet.

*Second.* If he hath not his hint from natural causes, then he gathers his inferences from *moral and political causes*, which, compared together by so deep a pate as his, give him great help and advantage to infer many times what in very great probability, and all likelihood of reason, will come to pass. Thus what the devil told Saul would become of him, his army, and kingdom, was nothing but what he might rationally conclude from those premises which lay before him, in his being rejected of God, and another anointed by God's own command to be king in his stead, together with the just height, and full measure, to which Saul's sins might now be thought to have arrived—by his going to a witch for counsel—and a puissant army of the Philistines preparing against him, whose wonted courage now so failed him, that he went rather like a malefactor pinioned and bound with the terrors of his accusing conscience, to meet an executioner that should give the fatal stroke to him, than like a valiant captain, to adorn and enrich himself with the spoils of his enemies. All these laid together make it appear the devil, without a gift of prophecy, might tell him his doom.

*Third.* God may, and doth, sometimes *reveal future events to Satan*, as when god intends him to be his instrument to execute some of his

purposes, *he may, and doth, acquaint him with the same some time before.* And you will not say the hangman is a prophet, that can tell such a man shall, on such a day, be beheaded or hanged, when hath a warrant from the king that appoints him to do that office. Thus Satan could have told Job beforehand what sad afflictions would certainly befall him in his estate, servants, children, and his own body; because God had granted him a commission to be the instrument that should bring all these upon him. But neither Satan nor any creatures else are able of themselves to foretell such events as neither arise from natural causes, nor may be rationally concluded to follow from moral and political probabilities; but are locked up in the cabinet of the divine will, how they shall fall out. And such are the prophecies which we find in the holy Scriptures, by which they plainly prove their heavenly extraction. They must needs come from God that tell us what God only knew, and depended on his will to be disposed of. Who but God could tell Abraham where his posterity should be, and what should particularly befall them, four hundred years after his death? —for so long before was he acquainted with their deliverance out of Egypt, Gen. 15, which accordingly came to pass punctually on the very day foretold, Ex. 12:41. How admirable are the prophecies of Christ the Messiah, in which his person, birth, life, and death, even to the minute, and circumstances of them, are as exactly and particularly set down, many ages before his coming upon the stage, as by the evangelists themselves, who were upon the place with him, and saw all that was done with their own eyes. And though some things foretold of him may be thought, because small and inconsiderable in themselves, not to deserve a mention in so high and sacred a prophecy—as our Saviour’s riding on an ass, Zech. 9:9; the thirty pieces given for him, and the purchase of the potter’s field afterwards with them, Zech. 11:12, 13; and the preserving his bones whole, when they that had suffered with him had theirs broken—these, I say, and such like, though they may seem inconsiderable passages in themselves, yet upon due weighing the end for which they are mentioned, we shall find that our weak faiths could not well have spared their help to strengthen it in the belief of the prophecy. Indeed, a great weight of the argument to prove

the truth and divinity of the prophecy, moves upon these little hinges; because, the less these are in themselves, the more admirably piercing and strong must that eye be that could see such small things at so great a distance. None but an infinite understanding could do this! And now I hope none will dare ask ‘But how may we be sure that such prophecies were extant so long before their fulfilling, and not foisted in after these things were done?’—seeing they were upon public record in the church of the Jews, and not denied by those that denied Christ himself. And truly this one consideration cast into the scale after all the former, doth give an overweight to the argument we are now upon—I mean, that these prophecies were so long, and that so openly, read and known. And consequently [it were] impossible that Satan should be ignorant of them, and not take the alarm from them to do his utmost to impede their accomplishment, seeing his whole kingdom lay at stake, so as either he must hinder them, or they would ruin it; and that notwithstanding all this, together with his restless endeavour against them, they should be all so fairly delivered in their full time; yea, many of them by the midwifery of those very persons that would, if possible, have destroyed them in the womb, as we see, Acts 4:27. Here breaks out the wisdom and power of a God, with such a strong beam of light and evidence, that none of the Scriptures’ enemies can wishly look against it.

[THE DOCTRINAL *part of Scripture*  
*bears the impress of Deity.*]

THIRD PART. The *doctrinal part of the Scriptures*; by which, in this place, I mean only those grounds and principles of faith that are laid down in Scripture, and proposed to be believed and embraced of all that desire eternal life. There is a divine glory that is to be seen on the very face of them, being so sublime, that no creature can be the inventor of them. To instance but in a few for all. First, God himself, who is the prime object of our faith. Who but God could tell us who and what his nature is? That there is a God, we confess is a notion that natural reason hath found the way to search out. Yea, his Godhead and power are a lesson taught in the school of nature, and to be read in the book of the creatures. But how long men who have no



higher teaching are learning the true knowledge of God, and how little progress they make therein, we see in the poor heathen, among whom the wisest philosophers have been such dunces, groping about this one principle one age after another, and yet not able to find the door; as the apostle tells us when he saith that 'the world by wisdom knew not God,' 1 Cor. 1. But, as for the trinity of persons in the Godhead, this is such a height as the heart of man never could take aim at, so much as to dream or start a thought of it; so that, if God had not revealed it, the world of necessity must have for ever continued in the ignorance thereof. And the same must be said of all gospel truths, Jesus Christ, God-man, justification by faith in his blood, and the whole method of grace and salvation through him. They are all such notions as never came into the heart of the wisest sophists in the world to conceive of; and therefore it is no wonder that a little child, under the preaching of the gospel, believes these mysteries which Plato and Aristotle were ignorant of, because they are not attained by our parts and industry, but communicated by divine and supernatural revelation. Yea, now they *are* revealed, how does our reason gaze at them as notions that are foreign, and mere strangers to its own natural conceptions, yea, too big to be grasped and comprehended with its short span, which makes it so malapert—where grace is not master to keep it in subjection—as to object against the possibility of their being true, because itself cannot measure them? As if the owl should say the sun had no light, because her weak eyes cannot bear to look on it. These are truths to be believed on the credit of him that relates them, and not to be entertained or rejected as they correspond to, or differ from, the mould of our reason. He that will handle these with his reason, and not his faith, is like to be served as the smith—it is Chrysostom's comparison—that takes up the red-hot iron with his hand, and not with his tongs, what can he expect but to burn his fingers with them?

[THE PRECEPTIVE *part of Scripture bears the impress of Deity.*]

FOURTH PART. The fourth and last part in our division is the *preceptive part of the Scriptures*, or that which contains commands and precepts.

And this will be found to carry the superscription of its divinity on its forehead, and that with as legible and fair characters as any of the former, if we do but consider, *First*. The vast extent of Scripture commands; and *Second*. Their spotless purity.

*First. The vast extent of Scripture commands.* This is such as never any human laws, though of the greatest monarch that ever swayed a scepter, could pretend unto. Where is the prince, among the sons of men, that ever went about to give laws to all mankind, and did not rather, in his royal edicts and laws, respect that particular people, and those nations, whose lot fell within the circle of their empire? Of all the empires the world ever had, the Roman was without compare the greatest; and yet when the Roman eagle's wings were best grown, they could not overspread more than the third part of this lower world. And how vain and ridiculous had it been for the emperor to have attempted to make a law for those nations which neither knew him, nor he them? But in the Scripture we find such laws as concern all mankind, wherever they live, and which have been promulgated, where the Bible was never seen. Their sound has gone into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Many of the laws in sacred writ, they are but a second, and that fairer, edition of what was found written in the consciences of men and women before the Scripture came forth. So that, if those laws that are cut with so indelible a character in the consciences of all the sons of Adam, be of God, then the Scripture must be confessed to proceed from God also.

Yet further. As the Scripture takes all mankind to task, and lays its bonds on all, high and low, rich and poor; so its laws bind the whole man. The heart with its most inward thoughts is laid in these chains, as well as the outward man. Indeed, the heart is the principle subject, whose loyalty is most provided for in the precepts of Scripture. Those commands that contain our duty to God, require that all be done with the heart and soul. If we pray, it must be 'in the spirit,' John 4:23, or else we had as good do nothing, for we transgress the law of prayer. If it be a law that respects our carriage to man, still the heart is chiefly intended: 'Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart,' Lev. 19:17; 'Curse not the king, no not in thy thought,' Ecc. 10:20. And

accordingly the promises and threatenings, which attend the commands of Scripture—as the arteries do the veins in man's body—to inspire and enforce them, are suitable to the spiritual nature of those commands; the rewards of the one, and punishments of the other, being such as respect the spiritual performance or neglect of them. 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God,' Matt. 5:8. Not blessed are they whose hands are clean, though their hearts are foul and filthy. So, 'But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing,' Mal. 1:14. The deceiver there is the hypocrite, that gives God the skin of the sacrifice, the shape of the duty for the substance, the lean of an outside obedience instead of the fat of the inward man, viz. the obedience of the heart. And as the principle object that these are levelled to and against, is the obedience or disobedience of the heart; so the subject or vessel into which the one emptieth its blessings, and the other its curses, is chiefly the soul and spirit: 'They shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever,' Ps. 22:26. 'I comfort you...and your heart shall rejoice,' Isa. 66:13, 14. 'Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse O God!' Lam. 3:65.

Now I would fain know the man that ever went about to form such laws as should bind the hearts of men, or prepare such rewards as should reach the souls and consciences of men. Truly, if any mortal man—be he the greatest of the world's monarchs—should make a law that his subjects should love him with all their hearts and souls, and not dare, upon peril of his greatest indignation, to bid a traitorous thought against his royal person welcome in their souls, but presently confess it to him, or else he would be avenged on him; he would deserve to be more laughed at for his pride and folly, than Xerxes for casting his fetters into the Hellespont to chain the surly waves with them into his obedience, or Caligula, that threatened the air, if it durst rain when he was at his pastimes, who yet, poor sneak, durst not himself so much as look into the air when it thundered. Certainly a bedlam would be fitter for such a madman than a king's throne and palace, that should so far forfeit his reason, as to think that the thoughts and hearts of men were within his territories and jurisdiction. Who need fear such a law, when

none but the offender himself can bring in evidence of the fact? There have been indeed some that, intending to take away the life of their prince by a bloody murderous knife, have been attached by their own conscience, and forced by it to blab and confess their own wicked thoughts, before any other could be their accuser, so sacred are the persons of God's anointed ones; but not from the power of man or his law making them do so, but the dread of God arresting their conscience for violating his law, which indeed not only binds up subjects' hands from killing, but hearts also from cursing, kings in our very thought. This, this the law which rules in the consciences of the worst of men; a bit that God rides the fiercest sinners with, and so curbs them, that they can never shake it out of their mouths. Enough to prove the divinity thereof.

*Second.* The *spotless purity* of Scripture commands do no less evince their divine extraction. God is 'the holy One,' Isa. 43. He alone is perfectly holy: 'The heavens are not clean in his sight,' Job 15:15. He can charge the angels themselves—who may be the heavens in the forementioned place—'with folly,' Job 4:18, because, though they never sinned, yet they are sinable. It is possible they might sin, as some of their order have done, if not kept from it by confirming grace. And as God is the only holy person, so the Scripture is the only holy book. All besides this have their errata, which are corrected by this, 'The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever,' Ps. 19:9. That is, the word of the Lord is 'clean'—called 'the fear of the Lord,' because it teacheth it; as God is called the fear of Isaac, because the object of his fear. The word is clean, and mark, it 'endureth for ever;' that is, it ever continues, and shall be found so. There are dregs and sediment that will appear in the holiest writings of the best men, when they have stood awhile under the observation of a critical eye; but the Scripture hath been exposed to the view and censure of all sorts of men, yet could never have the least impurity charged justly upon it. It is so clean and pure, that it makes filthy souls clean: 'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth,' John 17:17. That which is itself filthy may make our clothes and bodies clean, but that which makes our souls pure and clean must be itself without all defilement. And such is the Scripture. Nothing there that gratifies the flesh or affords fuel to any lust. No,

it puts every sin to the sword, and strikes through the loins of all sinners great or small: 'To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace,' Rom. 8:6. So that, as Athenagoras well said, 'No man can be wicked that is a Christian, unless he be a hypocrite.' For the Scripture which he profeseth to be his rule of faith and life, will not allow him to embrace any doctrine that is false, or practice that is filthy and unholy. This is that which Christianity can alone glory in. The heathen were led into many abominations by their religion and gods whom they worshipped. No wonder they were so beastly and sensual in their lives, when they served drunken and filthy gods; and the very mysteries of their religion were so horribly unclean that they durst not let them be commonly known, as having a scent too strong and stinking to be endured by any that had not their senses quite stopped, and their foolish minds, by the judgment of God upon them, wholly darkened. But the Christian can charge none of his sins upon his God—who tempteth none to evil, but hateth perfectly both the work and also worker of iniquity; nor upon his Bible, which damns every sin to the pit of hell, and all that liveth therein: 'Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile,' Rom. 2:9, 10. O who could be author of this blessed book but the blessed God? If any creature made it, he was either a wicked creature or one that was holy.

1. No *wicked* creature could do it, neither angel nor man. Surely they would never have taken so much pains to pull down their own kingdom of darkness—the great plot which runs through the Bible from one end of it to the other. And if it were the birth of their brain, no doubt, as every one loves his own child, so would they have shown more love to it than yet they have done. The implacable wrath which the devil and his party of wicked ones in the world have shown in all ages to the Scripture, declare sufficiently that it never came from them. No, no, it cannot stand with the interest of unclean spirits or wicked men to advance holiness in the world. The devil, though bold enough, durst never be so impudent as to lay claim to this holy, heavenly piece. But, if he should, the glorious

beauty of holiness which shines on the face of it, would forbid any man in his wits to believe that black fiend to be the father of it. *Naturalissimum est opis omnis viventis generare sibi simile*—it is natural for every creature to beget his like. And what likeness there is betwixt light and darkness, it is easy to judge.

2. Neither can any *holy* creature be the author of it, be he angel or man. Can we think that any having the least spark of love to God, or fear of his majesty dwelling their breast, durst counterfeit his dreadful name by setting it to their work, and abuse the world with such a blasphemy and prodigious lie, as to say, 'Thus saith the Lord,' and prefix his name all along, when, not God but themselves are the authors? Could this impudence and audacious wickedness proceed from any holy angel or man? Doubtless it could not. Nay further, durst any holy creature put such a cheat upon the world, and then denounce the wrath and vengeance of God against those who shall speak in God's name, but were never sent of him, as the Scripture mentions? Certainly, that earth which swallowed up Korah and his ungodly rout, for pretending to an authority from God as good as the priests', to offer incense, would not have spared Moses himself if he had spoke that in God's name which he had not from him, but which was the invention of his own private brain. Thus we see that no creature, good or bad, angel or man, can be the author of Scripture. So that none remains but God to own it; which he hath done with miracles enough to convince a very atheist of their divinity.

## SECOND GENERAL HEAD.

[*Proof of the divinity of the Scriptures*  
FROM THEIR SUPERNATURAL EFFECTS.]

The second argument I shall choose to demonstrate the divine extraction of the Scriptures, shall be taken from *the supernatural effects they produce*. Nothing can be the cause of an effect higher or greater than itself. If therefore we can find such effects to be the product of the Scriptures, as are above the sphere of any creature's activity, it will then be evident that the Scripture itself is supernatural, not the word of a mere creature, but of God

himself. What the psalmist saith of thunder, that loud voice of nature from the clouds, we may apply to the voice of God speaking from heaven in the Scripture, 'It is a mighty voice and full of majesty; it breaketh cedars'—kings and kingdoms; 'it divideth the flames of fire.' The holy martyrs have with one bucket of this spiritual water quenched the scorching flames of that furious element into which their persecuting enemies have thrown them. 'It shaketh the wilderness' of the wild wicked world, making the stout hearts of the proudest sinners to tremble like the leaves of the trees with the wind; and bringeth the pangs of the new-birth upon them whose hearts before never quailed for the most prodigious crimes. 'It discovereth the forests,' and hunts sinners out of their thickets and refuges of lies, whither they run to hide themselves from the hue and cry of divine vengeance. But, to speak more particularly and distinctly, there are four powerful and strange effects, which the word puts forth upon the hearts of men; all which will evince its divine original. FIRST. It hath a heart-searching power, whereby it ransacks and rifles the consciences of men. SECOND. It exercises a power on the conscience to convince and terrify it. THIRD. It has power to comfort and raise a dejected spirit. FOURTH. It hath the power of conversion, which none but God can effect.

[THE HEART-SEARCHING POWER *of the word*  
*attests to its divine origin.*]

FIRST EFFECT. The word of God hath a *heart-searching power, whereby it ransacks and rifles the consciences of men.* It looks into the most secret transactions of the heart and tells us what we do in our bed-chamber—as Elisha did by the king of Syria, II Kings 6:12. It cometh where no prince's warrant can empower his officer to search, I mean the heart. We read that Christ came to his disciples 'when the doors were shut, and stood in the midst of them,' John 20:19. Thus the word—when all doors are shut, that men have no intelligence what passeth within the breasts of men—comes in upon the sinner without asking him leave, and stands in the midst of his most secret plots and counsels, there presenting itself to his view, and saith to him as Elisha to Gehazi, 'Went not my eye with thee when thou didst this and that?' How often

doth the sinner find his heart discovered and laid out of all its folds by the word preached, as if the minister had stood at his window, and seen him what he did within doors, or some had come and told tales of him to the preacher? Such I have known, that would not believe to the contrary, but that the minister had been informed of their pranks, and so leveled his discourse particularly at their breasts, when he hath been as ignorant of their doings as of theirs that live in America, and only shot his reproofs like him that smote Ahab, who drew his bow at a venture, without taking aim at the person of any. From whence can this property come but [from] God, who claims it as his own incommunicable attribute, 'I the Lord search the heart?' Jer. 17:10. God is in the word, and therefore it findeth the way to get between the joints of the harness, though sent at random out of man's bow. If any creature could have free ingress into this retiring room of the heart, the devil, being a spirit, and of such a piercing, prying eye, were the most likely to be he; yet even he is locked out of this room, though indeed he can peep into the next.

Now if God can only search the heart, then the word which doth the same can come from no other but God himself. Who indeed can make a key to this lock of the heart, but he that knoweth all the wards of it? Suppose you did lock up a sum of money in a cabinet, and none but one in all the world besides yourself besides yourself were privy to the secret place where you lay this key. If you then should find the key taken away, and the cabinet opened and rifled, you would soon conclude whose doing it was. Why thus, when you find your heart disclosed, and the secret thoughts therein laid open unto you in the word, you may easily conclude that God is in it. The key that doth this is of his making who is the only one besides yourselves that is privy to the counsels of your hearts, that seeth all the secret traverses of your inward man. Who but he can send a spy so directly to your hiding-place, where you have laid up your treasures of darkness out of the world's sight? There are two secrets that the word discloseth:—

*First.* What a man's *own heart knoweth, and no creature besides.* Thus Christ told the woman of Samaria what her neighbours could not charge her with; from which she concluded him to be a prophet—a man of God. And may we

not conclude the Scripture to be the word of God, that doth the same?

*Second.* Those things which a man's *own heart is not privy to*. God is said to be 'greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things,' I John 3:20. He knows more by us than we by ourselves. And doth not the word dive to the bottom of the heart, and fetch up that filth thence, which the eye of the conscience never had the sight of before, nor ever could without the help of the word? 'I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet,' Rom. 7:7. And if the word findeth that out which escapeth the scrutiny of man's own heart, doth it not prove a Deity to be in it? So argueth the apostle, I Cor. 14:25, speaking of the power the word preached hath to lay open the heart: 'Thus are the secrets,' saith he, 'of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.'

[THE CONSCIENCE-TOUCHING POWER *of the word*  
*attests its divine origin.*]

SECOND EFFECT. The second effect the Scripture hath upon the spirits of men, by which its divine pedigree may be proved, is *the power it exerciseth on the conscience to convince and terrify it*. Conscience is a castle that no batteries but what God raiseth against it can shake. No power can command it to stoop but that which heaven and earth obey. He that disarms the strong man must be stronger than he. He that masters the conscience must be greater than it, and so God only is, I John 3:20<sup>ccvii</sup>. Now the word being able to shake and shatter this power of the soul, which disdaineth to stoop to any but God, must needs be from him. And that the word exerts such a power upon the conscience who will doubt? Do we not see it daily chastising the proudest sinners, even to make them cry and whine under its convictions, like a child under the rod? Yea, doth it not slay them outright, that they fall down dispirited at one thunder-clap of the law let off by God upon them? 'When sin revived, I died,' saith Paul. He who before was a jolly man—as well provided in his own opinion for his spiritual estate, as Job was for his outward, when he had his flocks and herds, sons and daughters, health and prosperity, all as yet untouched by the hand of God—upon him, it stripped his conscience as naked as Job afterward was in his outward condition. The man's eyes are opened now to see how naked and void of all holiness he is. Yea his fair skin of pharisaical strictness, with the beauty of which he was formerly so far in love as if he had been another Absalom, without mole or wart, he now judgeth to be but odious deformity, and himself a most loathsome creature, by reason of those plague-sores and ulcers that he sees running on him. Yea, such power the word hath upon him, that it laid him trembling over the bottomless pit, in a despair of himself and his own righteousness.

Hath any creature an arm like this of the word? or can any book penned by the wit of man command the heart to tremble at the rehearsal thereof, as this can do? Even a Felix on the bench, when a poor prisoner preacheth this word at the bar to him, is put into a shaking fit. Who but a God could make those monsters of men, that had paddled in the blood of Christ,

and who had scorned his doctrine so as to count the professors of it fools and idiots, yet come affrighted in their own thoughts, at a secret prick given them in Peter's sermon, and cry out in the open assembly, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?' Doth not this carry as visible a print of Deity, as when Moses clave the rock with a little rod in his hand?

*Question.* But haply you will say, If there be such a conscience-shaking power in the word, *how comes it to pass, that many notorious sinners sit so peaceably and sleep so soundly under it?* They read it at home, and hear it preached powerfully in the public, yet are so far from feeling any such earthquake in their consciences, that they remain senseless and stupid; yea, can laugh at the preacher for his pains, and shake off all the threatenings denounced, when sermon is done, as easily as the spaniel doth the water when he comes out of the river.

*Answer First.* I answer, *many sinners who seem so jocund in your eyes, have not such merry lives as you think for.* A book may be fairly bound and gilded, yet have but sad stories writ within it. Sinners will not tell us all the secret rebukes that conscience from the word gives them. If you will judge of Herod by the jollity of his feast, you may think he wanted no joy; but at another time we see that John's ghost walked in his conscience. And so doth the word haunt many a one, who to us appear to lay nothing to heart. In the midst of their laughter their heart is sad. You see the lightning in their face, but hear not the thunder that rumbles in their conscience.

*Answer Second.* It is enough, that the word doth leave such an impression upon the conscience of any 'though not of all' to prove its divinity. One affirmative testimony speaketh louder for the proof of a thing, than many negatives do to the contrary. The word is not a physical instrument, but a moral, and works not by a virtue inherent in it, but [by a] power impressed on it by the Spirit of God that first indited it. And this power he putteth forth according to his own good pleasure; so that the same word sets one man a trembling, and leaves another 'in the same seat may be' as little moved by it as the pillar he leaneth on. Thus as two at a mill, so at a sermon, one is taken, and the other left; one is humbled, and another hardened; not from any impotency in the word, but [from the] freeness of God's dispensing it.

His message it shall do to him it is sent, and none else. It is as a man strikes with a sword, back or edge, a strong or weak blow, that makes it cut or not, gives a slight wound or deep. The word pierceth the conscience according to the force and divine power that is impressed on it. The three children walked in the fire, and were not singed, others were consumed as soon as they came within the scent of it. Shall we say, 'That fire is not hot,' because one was burned and the other not? Some, their consciences do not so much as smell of the word, though the flames of the threatening fly about their ears, others are set all on fire with the terrors of it.

*Answer Third.* The senseless stupidity of some under the stroke of the word, is not to be imputed to its impotency, but to the just judgement of God, wherewith he plagueth them for sinning against the convictions thereof. For commonly they are of that sort, whose consciences are so impenetrable 'the withering curse of God having lighted upon them' that there is no wonder their judgments are darkened and their consciences seared. It was as great a manifestation of Christ's power 'and his disciples judged it so' when with two or three words the fig-tree was blasted, as if he had caused it to spring and sprout when withered and dry. The power of God is as great in hardening Pharaoh's heart as in melting Josiah's.

[THE COMFORTING POWER *of the word*  
*attests its divine origin.*]

THIRD EFFECT. The word of God *hath a power to comfort and raise a dejected spirit.* Conscience is God's prison in the creature's own bosom, from whence none can have his release, except by his warrant that made the mittimus, and committed him thither. Indeed he is a weak prince that hath no prison to commit offenders into but what another can break open. This, where God lays sinners in chains, is not such. 'A wounded spirit,' saith Solomon, 'who can bear?' Yea, and who can cure? If any creature could, surely then the devils were as able as any to do it. But we see they have not to this day found the way to shake off those fetters which God keepeth them in; but lie roaring under the unspeakable torment of God's wrath. And they who cannot cure their own wounds, are like to be but poor physicians to help others. Indeed

they acknowledge it beyond their skill and power: 'Wherefore then dost thou ask of me,' said the devil to Saul, 'seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?' 1 Sam. 28:16. The distress of an afflicted conscience ariseth from the dismal sense of divine wrath for sin. Now none can remove this but he that can infallibly assure the soul of God's pardoning mercy; and this lies so deep in God's heart, that God alone 'who only knoweth his own thoughts' can be the messenger to bring the news; and therefore the word which doth this can come from none but him. And, that is able not only to do this, but also to fill the soul with 'joy unspeakable and full of glory,' is a truth so undoubted, that we need not ascend up to heaven for further confirmation. That Spirit which first indited the word, hath sealed it to the hearts of innumerable believers.


Indeed all the saints acknowledge their comfort and peace to be drawn out of these wells of salvation. 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul,' Ps. 94:19. Nay, he doth not only tell us his own experience, whence he had his joy, but also to have had theirs from the same tap. 'Fools, because of their transgressions, are afflicted' Ps 107:17. And what then can ease them? Will all the rarities that can be got by sea or land make a diversion to their thoughts, and ease them of their pain? No; for 'their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death,' ver. 18. What cordial then have they left to use, or way to take for their relief? Truly none, but to betake themselves to prayers and tears, 'Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses,' ver. 19. And with what key doth God open their prison door? It follows, 'He sent his word, and healed them,' ver. 20. If you shall say all this is meant of outward trouble; yet surely you must grant in holds more strong concerning that which is inward. What but a word from God's mouth can heal a distressed spirit, when the body pineth and languisheth till God speaketh a healing word unto it?

Great and mighty things are spoken of thee, and done by thee, O holy Word! Thou outviest the world's joy, and makest the soul that hath but tasted thy 'strong consolations' presently to disrelish all sensual delights, as flashy and frothy. So pure and powerful is the light of that

joy which thou kindlest in the saint's bosom, that it quencheth all sinful carnal joy with its beams, as the sun doth the fire on the hearth. Thou conquerest the horror of death, that it is not feared. Thou vanquishest the pains thereof, that they are not felt. Thou treadest on scorpions and serpents, and they have no power to sting or hurt those that believe in thee. Devils know thee, and flee before thee, quitting, at sight of thee, their holds, and leave those consciences which they had so long under their power and tyranny, for thee to enter with thy sweet consolations. Thou quenchest the flames of hell itself, and makest the soul that even now was thrown bound by despair into the fiery furnace of God's wrath, to walk comfortably and unsinged amidst the thoughts thereof. Thou bringest heaven down to earth, and givest the believing soul a prospect of that heavenly Jerusalem which is so far off, as if he were walking in the blessed streets thereof; yea, thou entertainest him with the same delicacies which glorified saints—though more fully—feed on; so that sometimes he forgetteth he is in the body, even when pains and torments are upon him. This have the saints experienced, and more than my pen or their own tongue can express; so that we may say to him that yet questions whence the Scriptures came, as the blind man cured by Christ did to the Pharisees, 'this is a marvellous thing,' saith he, 'that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes,' John 9:30. So here, this is marvellous, yea ridiculous, to say we know not whence the Scripture is, when it can do all this. Since the world began was it not heard, that the word of a mere creature could remove mountains of despairs, and fill the souls of poor sinners with such joy and peace, in spite of hell and the creature's own unbelief, under the weight of which, as a heavy gravestone, he lay buried and sealed.

[THE CONVERTING POWER *of the word*  
*attests its divine origin.*]

FOURTH EFFECT. The word of God hath *the power of conversion, which none but God—who is the 'God of all grace'—can produce.* When John's disciples came to Christ to be resolved who he was, whether the Messiah or not, Christ neither tells them he was, or was not he; but sends them to take their answer from the

marvellous works he did. 'Go,' saith he, 'and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them,' —are gospel-ized, Matt. 11:4, 5—that is, they are transformed into the very nature of the gospel, and acted by the spirit which breathes in the gospel. By all these instances Christ's drift was to give an ocular demonstration of their faith, that he, who did such miracles, could be no other than he whom they sought. And that which brings up the rear, is the converting power of the word—not set last because the least among them, but rather because it is the greatest wonder of them all, and comprehends in it all the other. When souls are converted, 'the blind receive their sight.' You were 'darkness,' but now 'light in the Lord.' 'The lame walk,' in that the affections—the soul's feet—are set at liberty, and receive strength to run the ways of God with delight. Lepers are cleansed, in that filthy lusts are cured, and foul souls are sanctified. And so of the rest. Now, though the former miracles cease, yet this, which is the greatest, still accompanying the word, affords such a demonstration of its divinity, as reason itself cannot oppose. Is it not beyond his skill and strength of the mightiest angel to make the least pile of grass in the field? Much more the new creature in the heart, the noblest of God's works.

That therefore which doth thus new-mould the heart, and make the creature as unlike to his former self as the lamb is to the wolf, and the ox to the lion—the one meek and harmless, the other fierce and ravenous—that must needs be from God. And such changes are the daily product of 'the word.' How many have you known—once under the power of their lusts, throwing like madmen their firebrands about, possessed with so many devils as sins, and hurried hither and thither by these furies—yet at the hearing of one gospel sermon, have you not seen them quite metamorphosed, and, with him in the gospel, out of whom the devil was cast, sitting at Jesus' feet in their right mind, bitterly bewailing their former course, and hating their once beloved lusts, more than ever they were fond of them? I hope some of you that read these lines can say thus much concerning

yourselves, as the apostle doth of himself and others of his brethren: 'We ourselves were also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures,' &c. 'But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, he saved us, by the washing of regeneration,' &c., Titus 3:3, 4. And can you, who are the very epistle of Christ, writ not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, in the fleshly tables of your hearts, stand yet in doubt whether that word came from God, which is thus able to bring you home to God? How long might a man sit at the foot of a philosopher, before he should find such a commanding power go forth with his lectures of morality, [as] to take away his old heart, full of lusts as the sea is of creeping things innumerable, and put a new and holy one in the room of it? Some indeed in their school have been a little refined from the dregs of sensuality, as Polemo, who went a drunkard to hear Plato, and returned a temperate man from his lecture; and no wonder, if we consider what violence such broad and beastly sins offer to the very light of a natural conscience—that lesser light appointed by God to rule the night of the heathen world. But take the best philosopher of them all, and you shall find sins that are of a little finer spinning—such as spiritual wickednesses and heart-sins are—that are acted behind the curtain in the retiring room of the inner man. These were so far from being the spoils of their victorious arms, that they could never come to the sight of them. But 'the word' treads on these 'high places' of spiritual wickednesses, and leaves not any stronghold of them untaken. It pursues sin and Satan to their bogs and fastnesses; it digs the sinner's lusts like vermin out of their holes and burrows, where they earth themselves. The heart itself is no safe sanctuary for sin to sit in. The word will take it thence—as Joab from the horns of the altar—to slay it. Those corruptions that escaped the sword of the moralist and honest heathen, even these fall by the edge of the word.

I cannot give a better instance of the converting power of the word, than by presenting you with the miraculous victories obtained by it over the hearts of men, when the apostles were sent out first to preach, the grace of Christ, and, as it were, to begin the combination of the gospel ministry. Wherever they



came, they found the world up in arms against them, and the black prince of it, the devil, at the head of their troops, to make their utmost resistance against them; yet what unheard-of victories were got by them? Was it not strange that without drawing any other sword than 'the everlasting gospel,' they should turn the world upside down, as their enemies themselves confessed?—slighting the devil's works, casting down his holds wherever they came, and overcoming those barbarous heathens whom the devil had held in his peaceable possession so many thousand years! To [make them] renounce their idolatries in which they had been bred and trained up all their days; receive a new Lord, and him a crucified Jesus; and this at the report of a few silly men, loaden with the vilest reproaches that the wit of man could invent, or malice make together, to besmear their persons, and render their doctrine they preached odious to the world, this, I say, is such an unheard-of conquest, as could not be obtained by any less than the arm of the Almighty —especially if we cast in two or three circumstances to give a further accent to the heightening of this consideration. As,

*First Circumstance. The meanness of the persons employed to preach this doctrine.* They were mean in their condition and rank, being of the floor and lowest of the people, and many of them as mean in their intellectual accomplishments as external port and garb in the world, having no help from human learning to raise their parts, and set a varnish upon their discourses. Men very unfit for such an enterprise, God knows, had the stress and success of their works depend on their own furniture. This put their very enemies to a stand, whence they had their wisdom, knowing well how low their parentage and unsuitable their breeding were to give them any advantage toward such a high undertaking, Acts 4:13. Surely these poor men could contribute no more, by anything that was their own, to that wonderful success which followed their labours, than the blowing of the rams' horns could to the laying of Jericho's walls flat with the ground, or the sounding of Jehoshaphat's musical instruments to the routing of so formidable an army of his enemies; so that we must attribute it to the breath of God, by which they sounded the trumpet of the gospel, and his sweet Spirit charming the hearts

of his hearers, that such mighty works were done by them.

*Second Circumstance.* If we consider the *nature of the doctrine they held forth and commended to the world*, which was not only strange and new—enough to make the hearers shy of it—but so contrary to the humour of man's corrupt nature, that it hath not one thought in the sinner's heart to befriend it. No wonder indeed, that Mahomet's spiced cup went down so glib, it being so luscious and pleasing to man's carnal palate. We are soon wooed to espouse that for truth which gratifies the flesh, and easily persuaded to deliver up ourselves into the hands of such opinions as offer fair quarter to our lusts, yea, promise them satisfaction. Indeed, we cannot much wonder to see Christianity itself generally and readily embraced, when it is presented in Rome's whorish dress, with its purity adulterated, and its power emasculated. But, take the doctrine of the gospel in its own native excellency, before its falls into these hucksters' hands, and it is such as a carnal heart cannot like, because it lays the axe to the root of every sin, and bids defiance to all that take part with it. It will suffer no religion to set her threshold by its. This may make us step aside—as Moses once to behold the bush—to see this great wonder—a doctrine believed and embraced that is pure nonsense to carnal reason, teaching us to be saved by another's righteousness, wise with another's wisdom, to trust in him as a God that was himself a child, to rely on him to deliver us from the power of sin and Satan that fell himself under the wrath of men. O how great a gulf of objections which reason brings against this doctrine, must be shot before a man come to close with it! And yet this doctrine to find such welcome, that never any prince at the beat of his drum had his subjects flock more in throngs to list themselves in his muster-roll, than the apostles had multitudes of believers offering themselves to come under baptism—the military oath given by them to their converts. Add but one more.

*Third Circumstance.* Consider *how little worldly encouragement this word they preached gave to its disciples*; and you will say, 'God was in it of a truth.' Had it been the way to thrive in the world to turn Christian, or had it won the favour of kings and princes to have been their disciple, and taught them how to climb the hill of honour,

we could not have wondered to have seen so many to worship the rising sun. But, alas! the gospel which they preached comes not with these bribes in its hand. No golden apples thrown in the way to entice them on. Christ bids his disciples stoop not to take up crowns for their heads, but a cross for their backs; 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,' Luke 9:23. They must not dream of getting the world's treasure, which they have not, but prepare to part with what they have. To be sure, when the apostles preached it, the way it led to was not to princes' palaces with their preferments, but have aimed at their own honour, and pleased themselves with the renown that they should win by their sufferings, and that their names should be writ and read in the leaves of fame when they were

dead and gone, some Roman spirit, haply, might have been found to have endured as much. Or, if it had taught them that they should have ascended in their fiery chariot of martyrdom, to receive heaven's glory as the purchase of their patience and prowess, this might have hardened some popish shaveling against the fear of those bloody deaths they met with. But the doctrine they preached allows neither, but teaches them when they have done their best, and suffered the worst that their enemies' wrath can inflict for the cause of God, then to renounce the honour of all, and write themselves unprofitable servants. All these considerations twisted together, make a strong cord to draw any that have staggered in this particular to a firm belief of the divine parentage of the Scriptures.

## DIRECTION X.—SECOND GENERAL PART.




[WHY THE WORD OF GOD IS CALLED THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT.]

*'The sword of the Spirit' (Eph. 6:17).*

Having despatched the first part, which presented us with the weapon itself, commended to the Christian's use—*i.e.* 'the word of God'—the second part of the text now comes under our consideration, and that is the notion under which this weapon is commended, or *the metaphor in which it is sheathed*—'*the sword of the Spirit.*' And here a double inquiry would be made. FIRST. Why the word of God is compared to a '*sword.*' SECOND. Why this sword is attributed to the Spirit, and bears his name, '*the sword of the Spirit.*'

[TWO INQUIRIES *as to the expression,*  
*'the sword of the Spirit.'*]

FIRST INQUIRY. Why is the word of God compared to a '*sword?*' For this inquiry let this suffice. The sword, being both of general and constant use among soldiers, and also that weapon with which they not only defend themselves, but do the greatest execution upon their enemies, it most fitly sets forth the necessity and excellent use of the word of God, by which the Christian both defends himself, and offends, yea cuts down before him all his enemies.

SECOND INQUIRY. Why is the sword attributed to 'the Spirit?' Some take the abstract here to be put for the concrete,  for  sword of the Spirit for the spiritual sword, as if it were no more but 'take the spiritual sword, which is the word of God,' according to that of the apostle, 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty'—that is, spiritual, II Cor. 10:4. Indeed, Satan bring a spirit, must be fought with spiritual arms. And such is the word, a spiritual sword. But this, though true, reacheth not the full sense of the place, where  is taken *personaliter*—personally, for the person of the Holy Spirit. And in these three respects the written word is the sword of the Spirit.

*First.* He is the *Author* of it. A weapon it is which his hand alone formed and fashioned; it came not out of any creature's forge, 'holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,' II Peter 1:21.

*Second.* The Spirit is the only true *interpreter* of the word. Hence that known passage of Bernard: *quo spiritu factæ sunt Scripturæ, eo spiritu legi desiderant, ipso etiam intelligendæ sunt*—the

Scriptures must be read, and can be understood, by that Spirit alone by whom they were made. He that made the lock can alone help us to a key that will fit its wards and open its fence. 'No prophecy of the scripture is of private interpretation,' II Peter 1:20. And why not? It follows—because it came not from any private spirit at first. 'For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man,' &c., ver. 21. And who knows the mind of the Spirit so well as himself?

*Third.* It is only the Spirit of God can give the word its *efficacy and power in the soul*. It is his office, as I said, *sigillare animum caractere rerum creditarum*—to seal the soul with the impress of things believed. Except he lays his weight on the truths we read and hear, to apply them close, and as it were cut the very image in our minds and hearts, they leave no more impression than a seal set upon a stone or rock would do;—still the mind fluctuates, and the heart is unsatisfied, notwithstanding our own and others' utmost endeavours to the contrary. It was not the disciples' rowing, but Christ's coming, that could lay the storm or bring them to shore. Not all our study and inquiry can fix the mind, or pacify the heart in the belief of the word, till the Spirit of God comes. 'Do you now believe?' saith Christ to his disciples, John 16:31. How oft, alas! had the same things sounded in their ears, and knocked at their door for entertainment, but never could be received, till now that the Spirit put in his finger to lift up the latch! B. Davenant on Colossians tells us a story out of Gerson, concerning a holy man whom himself knew to be sadly beaten and buffeted with frequent doubts and scruples, even so as to call into question an article of faith, but afterward was brought into so clear a light and full evidence of its truth, that he doubted no

more of it than of his own being alive. And this certainty, saith Gerson, did not arise *ex nova aliquâ ratione et demonstratione, sed ex humilia-tione, et captivitate intellectûs, atque admirabili quadam Dei illuminatione à montibus æternis*—did not come from any new argument he had found out to demonstrate the truth of it, but from the Spirit of God humbling and captivating his proud understanding, and admirably irradiating the same. The words thus opened present us with this important doctrinal conclusion.

[THE WRITTEN WORD *is the sword by which the Christians overcome.*]

DOCTRINE. *That the written word, or if you will, the Scripture, is the sword by which the Spirit of God enables his saints to overcome all their enemies.* The Spirit will do nothing for them without the word, and they can do nothing to purpose without him. The word is the sword, and the Spirit of Christ the arm which wields it in for the saints. All the great conquests which Christ and his saints achieve in the world are got with this sword. When Christ comes forth against his enemies, this sword is girded on his thigh, 'Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty,' Ps. 45:3. His victory over them too is ascribed to it, ver. 4, 'And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth,'—that is, the word of truth. We find, Rev. 1:6, Christ holding 'seven stars in his right hand,' intimating the choice care he hath over his people, particularly the ministers, who are more shot at than any other. And how doth he protect them, but by this 'sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth?' This is the great privilege which the poorest believer in the church hath by the covenant of grace—such a one as Adam had not in the first covenant. He, when fallen, had a flaming sword to keep him out of paradise, but had no such sword, when innocent, to keep him from sinning, and so from being turned out of that happy place and state. No, he was left to stand upon his own defence, and by his own vigilancy to be a lifeguard to himself. But now the word of God stands between the saints and all danger. This will the better appear if we single out the chief enemies with whom the saint's war is waged, and show how they all fall before the word, and receive their fatal blow from this one sword, as Abimelech slew the threescore sons of

Jerubbaal 'upon one stone,' Judges 9:5. *First.* The bloody persecutor who breathes slaughter against the saints, and pursues them with fire and faggot. *Second.* The seducer and heretic. *Third.* Our own lusts. *Fourth.* An army of afflictions, both outward and inward.

[PERSECUTORS *are overcome by 'the word of God.'*]

*First Enemy.* The bloody persecutor, who breathes slaughter against the saints, and pursues them with fire and faggot. Such a race of giants there ever was, and will be as long as the devil hath any kindred alive in the world, who, when it lies in their power, to maintain their father's kingdom of darkness, will not fear to trample under their feet those stars of heaven whose light acquaints the world with their horrid impieties, and so hazards the weakening of the devil's interest in the minds of men. Hence those bloody wars raised, cruel fires of martyrdom kindled, and massacres practised on the saints—with many devilishly witty inventions of torments, that these innocent souls might linger in their pains, and stay the longer in the jaws of death, thereby to 'feel themselves to die,' as one of them barbarously and inhumanly said! Well, what ladders doth God use to scale these mountains of pride? Where are the weapons with which the people of God resist and overcome these monsters of men that thus defy the Lord and his hosts? Wouldst thou know where? Truly, they are to be seen in the tower of David, builded for an armoury—the word of God, I mean. Here hang the shields and bucklers, the swords and darts, by which the worthies of God have in all ages defended themselves stoutly against the rage of persecutors, and also triumphed gloriously over their greatest force and power. Out of this 'brook' they take those 'smooth stones' by which they prostrate these Goliaths. This sort of the church's enemies are overcome *two ways*:—either by their conversion or destruction. Now, the word of God is the sword that effects both. It hath two edges, Heb. 4:12, and so cuts both sides.

1. *Way.* The sword of the Spirit hath application to *the elect, who, for a time, through ignorance and prejudice, are joined with the saints' enemies*, as busy sticklers and bloody persecutors as the worst of the pack. The word of God is a sacrificing knife, to rip open their

hearts, and let out the hot putrefied blood of their sins, which made them so mad against the church of God, yea, and to prepare them also, by converting grace, as an offering acceptable unto God, as the apostle excellently sheweth, Rom. 15:16. Thus the murderers of our blessed Lord, we find them by one sermon of Peter so strongly wrought upon that they presently vomit up his blood, as sick of it as ever they were for it, and, at one prick that the point of this sword gave them, crying for quarter at God's hands, yea throwing down their persecuting arms, and most freely entering their names into his muster-roll, whose life but a few days before they had so cruelly taken away, about three thousand of them at one clip being baptized in his name, Acts 2:41. Yea, Paul himself, whom I may call, as Erasmus doth Augustine, before his conversion, 'the great whale,' that did so much mischief to the church of Christ, what hook did he use to strike him with but the word? Never had Christ a more furious enemy in the world than this man. His heart was so inflamed with a rage against the saints, that the fiery steam thereof came out of his lips, as from the mouth of a hot furnace, breathing slaughter against them wherever he went, Acts 9:1. Now what force of arms, besides the word preached, did Christ send to take in the castle of this bloody man's heart? *First.* Christ himself took him immediately to task, preaching such a thundering sermon from his heavenly pulpit, as dismounted this proud rider, and sent him bound in the fetters of his own troubled soul, prisoner even to that place where *he* thought to have clapped up others, and then left his Spirit to carry on the work of his conversion, by applying and keeping the plaster of the word close to his heart. How powerfully this wrought on him he himself tells us, 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died,' Rom. 7:9. That is, when the law came by the convictions of the Spirit to rake in his soul, and pierce his conscience, then sin revived those lusts which like a sleepy lion slumbered in him. Now, however, in his awakened conscience they roared so dreadfully that he was as it were struck dead with the terror of them as a poor damned creature; and would have undoubtedly gone away in that swoon of horror and despair, had not the joyful news of gospel grace been by the same word and Spirit applied seasonably, to bring him to the life of

hope and comfort again. Thus was this boisterous furious enemy of the saints chained and tamed by the terrors of the law, changed and renewed by the gentleness and mercy of the gospel, and he became no more like himself than a ravening wolf is to the innocent lamb, more ready to lay down his own life now for the defence of the gospel, than before conversion to take away their lives that professed it.

2. *Way.* The sword of the Spirit hath application to *the saints' persecuting enemies, when ruined and destroyed.* Indeed, if they continue impenitent, and harden themselves against the truths and servants of God, that is the end they must all look to come to. They are like ravenous beasts—'made to be taken and destroyed,' || Peter 2:12, and they may know beforehand, as the certainty of their ruin, so what shall procure it, and that is the word of God. 'And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed,' Rev. 11:5. It is spoken of those that shall dare to oppose and persecute the faithful preachers of the gospel—that fire comes out of their mouths to destroy them. Though they have their will on the bodies of the saints, butchering and burning them, yet the word they preach will be their destruction. That lives and stays behind, to pay the saints' debts and avenge them on their enemies. God is resolved they must and shall in this manner be killed, the word must give them the fatal stroke. Julian confessed as much, when bleeding under his deadly wound, though the arrow came out of a Persian bow, yet the wretch knew it was sent by a higher than a Persian hand, *vicisti Galileæ*—O Galilean, thou hast overcome and been too hard for me. His conscience told him that his spite against the truth of Christ was his death; and many more besides him have acknowledged as much when under the hand of justice. The face of the word of God which they have opposed, hath appeared to them as engraven upon their judgments.

O this sword of the word, it hath a long reach; it is at the breast of every enemy God and his saints hath in the world, and though at present they cannot see whence their danger should come (they are so great and powerful, so safe and secure, as they think), yet the word of God having set down their doom already, God will sooner or later open one door or other to let

in their destruction upon them. When the prophet would express the indubitable ruin of the Philistines impending, mark what prognostics he gives, 'Woe unto the inhabitants of the sea coast,... the word of the Lord is against you,' Zeph. 2:5. As if he had said, You are a lost undone people; the whole world cannot save you; for 'the word of the Lord is against you.' The threatening of the word, like lightning or mildew, blasts wherever it goes, and its curse burns to the very root. Hence all the seven nations of Canaan fell into the mouth of the Israelites like ripe fruit into the mouth of him that shakes the tree. The word of the Lord cursing them, had gone before them to make their conquest certain and easy. This Balak knew, and therefore would have given so much for a few words out of Balaam's mouth to have cursed Israel in God's name. The truth is, though we look upon the monarchs of the world, and their armies, as those which have the sway of the affairs of the world, yet these are no more than the fly on the wheel. It is the word of God that hath the great stroke in all that is done on the world's stage. 'I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down,...to build, and to plant,' Jer. 1:10. Indeed, the whole earth is God's ground; and who hath power to build on his ground, or pull down, but himself? And in his word he hath given his mind what he will have done to his enemies, and for his saints, and therefore all the mercies they have, they receive and acknowledge them as gracious performances of the promise, so all the judgments executed on all their enemies as accomplishments of the threatenings of the word, called therefore 'the judgment written,' Ps. 149:9.


[HERETICS are overcome by the 'word of God.']

*Second Enemy. The seducer is another enemy the Christian hath to cope with,* and no less dangerous than the other: nay, in this respect, far more formidable—the persecutor can kill only the body, but the seducer comes to poison the soul. Better to be slain outright by his sword, than to be 'taken alive,' as the apostle phraseth it, 'in this snare of the devil,' which these whom he sends forth abiding for souls privily lay, even where they are oft least suspected. When Paul fell into the mouth of the persecutor, he could

yet glory, and rejoice that he had escaped the latter: 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,' II Tim. 4:7, 8. See how this holy man triumphs and flourisheth his colours, as if the field were fought and the day won; whereas, good man, he was now going to lay his head on the block under the hand of bloody Nero's headsman, as you may perceive, 'I am now ready to be offered up,' ver. 6, alluding to the kind of death, it is like, he was shortly to undergo. But you will possibly say, What great cause had he then to cry *victoria* — victory, when his affairs were in such a desperate and deplored condition? Yes, this made him triumph, he had 'kept the faith;' and that was a thousand times more joy and comfort to him than the laying down his life was trouble. If he had left the faith by cowardice, or chopped it away for any false doctrine, he had lost his soul by losing of that; but having kept the faith, he knew that he did but part with his life to receive a better at God's hands than was taken from him by man's. The locusts mentioned, Rev. 9—which Mr. Mede takes to be the Saracens, who were so great a scourge and plague to the Roman world, newly Christianized—we find 'they had tails like unto scorpions, and their were stings in their tails,' ver. 10: which the learned writer fore-named interprets to be the cursed Mahometan doctrine with which they poisoned the souls of the people wherever their conquering sword came.


It seems, though the sword of war in the hand of a barbarous bloody enemy be a heavy judgment to a people, yet the propagation of cursed errors is a greater. This is the 'sting in the tail' of that judgment. I do not doubt but many that were godly might fall by the sword of that enemy in such a general calamity, but only those that were not among God's sealed ones felt the sting in their tail by being poisoned with their cursed imposture; and therefore they alone are said to be 'hurt' by them, ver. 4. We may be cut off by an enemy's sword and not be hurt; but we cannot drink in their false doctrine, and say so. Now, the word of God is the sword whereby the Spirit enables the saints to defend themselves against this enemy; yea, to rout and ruin this subtle band of Satan. We read of Apollos, Acts 18:28, that 'he mightily convinced the Jews.' He did, as it were, knock them down with

the weight of his reasoning. And out of what armoury fetched he the sword with which he so prevailed? See ver. 28. 'Showing by the Scriptures'—not their cabala —'that Jesus was Christ;' and therefore he is said to be 'mighty in the Scriptures,' ver. 24, a mighty man of valour, and so expert, through his excellent knowledge in them, that the erroneous Jews could no more stand before him holding this sword in his hand, than a child with a wooden dagger can against a giant formidably armed with killing weapons.

When Paul warns Timothy to stand upon his defence carefully against seducers, which snapped so many everywhere, he can devise no better counsel how he might keep out of their hands, than by sending him to the Scriptures, and bidding him shut himself up within these, as in a town of war. 'But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned,' II Tim. 3:14; and in the next verse he opens himself, and shows what lesson he means that he had learned, by telling him, that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation; and by consequence, wiser than all his enemies, if he stuck close to them. Other arms we may load ourselves with, by tumbling over many authors; but he that hath this sword, and hath been but taught of the Spirit the use of this weapon, is provided well enough to meet the stoutest champions for error the devil hath on his side, in an encounter. With this, poor women have been able to disarm great doctors of their studied arguments, ruffling all their art and logic with one plain place of Scripture, as she who brained Abimelech, that great commander, by tumbling a piece of millstone on his head. Out of this armoury came those weapons Paul tells us are so 'mighty through God, casting down imaginations,' or reasonings, , by which an ancient will have the Greek Philosophers' syllogisms to be meant. Indeed, he that hath the word on his side, and a holy skill to use it, hath as much advantage of his adversary that comes with other armour —let him be never so good a fencer—as a man with a good sword hath over him that comes forth only with a bulrush in his hand.

All error dreads the light of the word, and fears more to be examined by that, than a thief does to be tried before a strict judge.

*Hereticorum sententias prodidisse est superasse—to*

have expounded the doctrines of heretics is to have overcome them, saith Hieron. Unfold them, or bring them and the word face to face, and, like Cain, they hang down their head; they are put to shame. This is the only certain ordeal to try suspected opinions at. If they can walk upon this fiery law unhurt, unproved, they may safely pass for truths, and none else. Paul tell us of some that 'will not endure sound doctrine,' II Tim. 4:3. Alas! how should they, when their minds are not sound? It is too searching for them. Gouty feet cannot go but on soft way that gently yields to them. Such must have doctrine that will comply with their humour, which the word will not do, but rather judge them, and this they think it will do too soon at the great day; therefore now they shun it so much, lest it should torment them before their time. Thus the Quakers, they have their skulking hole to which they run from the Scripture, at whose bar they know their opinions would be cast undoubtedly, and therefore [they] appeal to another where they may have a more favourable hearing—the light within them, or, in plain English, their natural conscience; a judge which is known too well to be corrupt and easily bribed to speak what the lusts of men will oft have him do. Ah, poor creatures, what a sad change they have made!—to leave the word that is , an inflexible rule of faith, and can no more lie or deceive them than God himself can do—to trust the guidance of themselves to themselves, a more ignorant, sottish, unfaithful guide than which the devil could not have chosen for them. 'He that is his own teacher,' saith Bernard, 'is sure to have a fool for his master.' And Solomon, yea a greater then Solomon, God himself by Solomon, saith, 'The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise,' Prov. 12:15. But he is most wise that makes the word of God the man of his counsel. The Papist he hath his thicket and wood also—antiquity and traditions—to which he flees before the face of the Scripture for sanctuary, as Adam did to a bush when God came walking to him. As if any antiquity were so authentic as God's own oracles; and any traditions of men to be laid in the balance with the Scripture.

To name no more, the Socinian, he folds up himself in his own proud reason, and takes such

state on him, that the Scripture must come to that to be sensed, and not that stoop to it. He must have a religion and Scripture that fits the model his own reason draws, or [he] will have neither. This forms the root of many prodigious errors and heretics; like those of whom Tertullian speaks, *qui Platonium et Aristotelium Christianismum procuderunt*—who went to the philosopher's forge to shape a Christianity. What is this but to carry gold to be weighed at the chandler's scales, and to look for the sun by the light of the moon. A modern divine saith, 'Most heresies have sprung either *ex Samo Satani fastu, vel ex Aetii ignorantia, vel ex Arrii dialectica*—from pride, Aetian ignorance, or the Arian sophistry of reason'—the last of which seems to be the shelf on which Paul himself observes some to have split, 'and to have erred concerning the faith,' 1 Tim. 6:21; and therefore so affectionately exhorts Timothy to keep off this dangerous shore, and steer his course by the word, 'O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust,' &c., ver. 20. For this which is here committed to him, I take for no other than 'the form of sound words' he exhorts him to hold fast in 2 Tim. 1:13.

*Objection.* But we see heretics quote Scripture for their most prodigious errors, and draw this sword for their defence, as well as the orthodox; how then is it such a powerful instrument and engine against error?

*Answer.* What will not men of subtle heads, corrupt hearts, and bold faces, dare to do for the carrying on their wicked party, when once they have espoused an error or any sinful way? Korah and his ungodly company dare give out that 'the Lord is among them,' and they have as much to do with the priesthood as Aaron himself, on whom the holy oil was poured, Num. 16:3. And Zedekiah, that arch-flatterer, fears not to father his lie on the God of truth himself. He 'made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them,' 1 Kings 22:11; whereas God never spake such a word. It is no marvel then, to see any lay their bastard brats at God's door, and cry they have Scripture on their side. By this impudence they may abuse credulous souls into a belief of what they say, as a cheater may pick the purses of ignorant people by showing them something like the king's broad seal, which was indeed his own

forgery. Yea, God may suffer them to seduce others of more raised parts and understanding, as a just judgment on them for rebelling against the light of their own consciences. As Pharaoh, by the false miracles of the magicians, was set off further from any compliance with Moses. And those of the antichristian faction, who 'because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved, and for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie,' 2 Thes. 2:10, 11. But sincere souls that search humbly for the truth, and have no other designs in their inquiry after it but that they may know the will of God and obey it, shall find on their faithful prayers to God, a light most clear shining from the Scripture, to guide them safe from those pitfalls of damning errors into which others fall, towards whom the dark side of this cloud stands. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: Ps. 111:10. The fox, they say, when hard put to it, will fall in subtly with the dogs and hunt with them as one of their company, but even then his strong scent, which he cannot leave behind him, bewrays him.

Thus heretics, for to shelter their errors, will crowd in among Scripture truths, and by their fair colours and false glosses, make them seem to be of their company, but they cannot so perfume their rotten opinions but their rank scent and savour will be smelt and discerned by those who have their senses exercised. Never any heretic got by appealing to the Scriptures. What Christ saith in another case, 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword,' Matt. 26:52, is most true of all heretics. They are confounded and confuted by that very sword of the word which they lift up to defend them withal.

[CORRUPTIONS AND LUSTS *are overcome*  
by the 'word of God.']

*Third Enemy.* Our own *lusts make the next adversary we have to grapple with.* Thus the further we go the worse the enemy we meet. These are more formidable than both the former, partly because they are within us—men of our own house, lusts of our own bosom that rise up against us, and partly because they hold correspondence with a foreign foe also—the devil himself—who, as he did beat man at first



with his own rib, so he continues to do us the worst mischief with our own flesh. The fire of lust is ours, but the flame commonly is his, because his temptations are the bellows that blow it up. And when such a fire meets with such a strong wind to spread and carry it on its wings, whither will it fly? O how hard to slake and quench it! A whole legion of devils are as soon cast out of the body, as one lust out of the soul; yea, sooner. Satan likes his lodging better in the heart than in the house, and is loather out. He came more willing out of the man into the swine, Matt. 8:31, because by coming out of his body, and contenting himself a while with a meaner house—the swine I mean—he hoped for a fairer way thereby to get fuller possession of their souls; which indeed he obtained, Christ leaving them most justly to his rule that were so soon weary of his sweet company. Now the word is the only weapon. Like Goliath's sword, none to this for the hewing down and cutting off this stubborn enemy. The word of God can master our lusts when they are in their ruff<sup>ccviii</sup> and pride. If ever lust rageth more than other, it is when youthful blood boils in our veins. Youth is heady, and lust then hot and impetuous. Our sun is climbing higher still, and we think it a great while to night; so that it must be a strong arm that brings a young man off his lusts, who hath his palate at best advantage to taste sensual pleasures with; the vigour of his strength to take in more of the delights of the flesh than crippled age can do, and further from fear of death's gunshot (as he thinks) than old men, who are upon the very marches of the grave, and carry the scent of the earth about them into which they are sure suddenly to be resolved. Well, let the sword of God meet this young gallant in all his bravery, with his feast of sensual delights before him, and but whisper a few syllables in his ear, give his conscience but a prick with the point of its sword, and it shall make him flee in as great haste from them all, as Absalom's brethren did from their feast, when they saw their brother Amnon murdered at the table.

When David would give the young man a receipt to cure him of his lusts—not one, but all—how he may cleanse his whole course and way, he bids him only wash in this Jordan, Ps. 119.9. By what means or 'wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed

thereto according to thy word?' It is called 'the rod of his strength,' Ps 110:2. God, we know, wrought those great miracles, whereby he plagued the Egyptians and saved the Israelites, with the rod in Moses' hand. By that he tamed proud Pharaoh, making him and his people at last to let go their hold of the Israelites, yea, in a manner, to thrust them out from them, and be as glad of their room as before they were of their company. By that he divided the sea for Israel's passage, and covered the Egyptians in its waves. By that he smote the rock. And by this rod of his word he doth as great wonders in the souls of men as these. By this he smites their consciences, cleaves the rocks of their hard hearts, divides the waves of their lusts, and brings poor sinners from under the power of sin and Satan.

Never could Austin get a jail-delivery from his lusts till he heard that voice, *tolle lege, tolle lege*—take, read; upon which, as himself tells us (Lib. Confess. 8), he presently took up the Bible, and that one place, Rom. 13, to which his eye was directed, once read, like a mighty earthquake did so shake all the powers of his soul that the prison doors of his heart immediately flew open, and those chains of lusts which, with all his skill and strength, he could never file off, did now on a sudden fall off, and he became so strangely metamorphosed, that *quas amittere metus erat, jam dimittere gaudium fuit*—those lusts, to lose which was one all his fear, now to pack them away was his joy. Never man, by his own confession, was more slave to his lusts, and tied with a stronger chain of delight to them, than himself was. He did, as he saith, *volutare in cæno tanquam cinamonis et unguentis pretiosis*—he tumbled in the puddle of his filthy lusts with as much delight as if he had been rolling in a bed of spices, and anointing himself with the most precious ointments; yet this one word came with such a commanding power to him, that it tore them out of his very heart, and turned his love into a cordial hatred of them, who before would have let his heart sooner been plucked out of his bosom than these taken out of his heart. And as the word is the weapon by which he, with a strong hand, brings poor sinners out of the power of Satan and sin into a state of freedom, so he useth it to defend his saints from all after-storms of temptations, by which Satan, now thrown out of his kingdom, endeavours to

recover the same. Those kingdoms indeed that are got by the sword must be kept by the sword. David will tell us how he stood upon his guard, and made good his ground, against this enemy. 'Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer,' Ps. 17:4. As if he had said, 'Would you know how it comes to pass that I escape those ungodly works and practices which men ordinarily take liberty to do? I must ascribe it to the good word of God. It is this I consult with, and by am kept from those foul ways whereinto others, that make no use of the word for their defence, are carried by Satan, the destroyer of mankind.'

Can we go against sin and Satan with a better weapon than Christ used to vanquish the tempter with? And certainly Christ did it *per modum exempli*—by way of example, to set us an example how we should come armed into the field against them; for Christ could with one beam shot from his Deity (if he had pleased to exert it), have as easily laid the bold fiend prostrate at his foot, as afterwards he did them that came to attach him; but he chose rather to conceal the majesty of his divinity, and let Satan come up closer to him, that so he might confound him with the word, and thereby give a proof of that sword to his saints which he was to leave with them for their defence against the same enemy. The devil is set out by the 'leviathan,' Isa. 27:1, him God threatens to punish with his 'strong sword;' alluding to that great fish, the whale, which fears no fish like the sword-fish, [and] by whom this great devourer of all other fish is oft killed; for, receiving one prick from his sword, he hasteth to the shore, and beats himself against it till he dies. Thus the devil, the great devourer of souls, who sports himself in the sea of this world, even as the leviathan in the waters, and swallows the greatest part of mankind without any power to make resistance against him, is himself vanquished by the word. When he hath to do with a saint armed with this sword, and instructed how to use this weapon, he then, and not till then, meets his match.

[AFFLICTIONS, *outward and inward*, are overcome by the 'word of God.']

*Fourth Enemy.* A fourth enemy that meets the Christian, is an *army made up of many bands of afflictions, both outward and inward*, sometimes one, sometimes another, yea, of a whole body of them pouring their shot together upon them. This was Paul's case, 'without were fightings, within were fears,' II Cor. 7:5. He endured a great fight of external afflictions and buffetings within his own bosom at once. And that is sad indeed, when a city is on fire within at the same time that an enemy is battering its walls from without. Yet this is oft the condition of the best saints, to have both the rod on their backs, and rebukes from God in their spirits, at once. 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth,' Ps. 39:11.

God sometimes corrects with outward crosses, but smiles with inward manifestations; and then he whips them, as I may so say, with a rosemary rod. The one sweetens and alleviates the other. At another time he sends a cross, and incloseth a frown in it. He whips with outward affliction, and, as an angry father, every lash he gives his child, tells him, 'this is for that fault, and that for this,' which exceedingly adds to the smart of the correction, and is the very knot on the whip, to see his father so much displeased with him. And when the poor Christian lies thus under the hand of an afflicting God, or under the rebukes of a frowning God, Satan will not be long from the Christian, or wanting to throw his salt and vinegar into the wounds that God hath made in his flesh or spirit, thereby to increase his dolour, and so lead him further into temptation one way or other, if he can have his will. Indeed, God often sends so many troops of various afflictions to quarter upon some one Christian, that it puts him hard to it to bid them all welcome, and entertain them with patience; yea, it would pose any one—that knows not what service the word of God doth the Christian, and the supplies it brings him in—to conceive how his spirit should be kept, and his faith from being eaten up, and swallowed into despair by them. But the word of God, this bears all the charge he is at. This is his counsellor and comforter. David tells us plainly his heart had died within him but for it: 'Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction,' Ps. 119:92. The word was his spiritual Abishag, from which his soul got all its

warmth. All the world's enjoyments heaped on him would have left him cold at heart if this had not lain in his bosom to bring him a kindly heat of inward peace and comfort: 'This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me,' ver. 50. Not the crown in hope—for some think it was not, when this psalm was penned, on his head—but the word in his heart, to which he was beholden for his comfort. A word of promise is more necessary at such a time to a poor soul, than warm clothes are to the body in cold weather.

When Adam was thrust naked out of paradise into the cold blasts of a miserable world—where, from his own guilty conscience within, and crosses without, he was sure to meet with trouble enough—then God gave him a word of promise, as you may observe, to fence his soul, before he taught him to make coats to clothe his body, Gen. 3:15, compared with ver. 21. The Lord knew full well how indispensably necessary a word of promise was to keep him from being made a prey the second time to the devil, and from being swallowed up with the dismal sight of those miseries and sorrows in which he had thrown himself and posterity; and therefore, he would not suffer him to lie open to the shock of their assaults one day, but presently puts the sword of a promise into his hand, that with it he might defend and comfort his sorrowful heart in the midst of all his troubles. It was the speech of a holy man, after God had made that sweet place: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,' &c., Matt. 11:28, the messenger to open his dungeon of soul-trouble, and bring him into the light of inward joy—that he had better be without meat, drink, light, air, earth, life, and all, than without this one comfortable scripture.' If one single promise, like an ear of corn rubbed in the hand of faith, and applied by the Spirit of Christ, can afford such a full satisfying meal of joy to a hunger-bitten, pining soul, O what price can we set on the whole field of the Scripture, which stands so thick with promises, every way as cordial as this!

Love is witty, and sets the head on work to devise names for the person we love dearly—such names as may at once express how highly we prize them, and also yet more endear them to us by carrying on them the superscription of that sweetness which we conceive to be in them. Thus many holy persons have

commended the promises to us with their appreciating names—the saints' legacies—the breasts of God full of milk of grace and comfort—the saints' plank to swim upon to heaven. Indeed, we might rob the world of all her jewels, and justly hang them on the ear of the promise; apply all the excellencies she boasts of unto the promises. There is more riches and treasure to be had in one promise than all the gold and silver of the Indies are worth; 'exceeding great and precious promises,' II Peter 1:4; by them a poor believer may lay claim to heaven and earth at once; for godliness hath the promise of this life and the other also. But that which in this place I would commend their excellency from, is the admirable service they do, and succour they afford a poor soul in the day of his greatest distress. They are the granary of spiritual provision, whereby our Joseph, our dear Lord Jesus, nourisheth and preserveth alive his brethren in a time of famine. They are the 'hive of sweetness,' where the believing soul in the winter of affliction—when nothing is to be gathered abroad from the creature—both lies warmly, and lives plentifully on the stock of comfort there laid up. They are, in a word, 'the fair havens' and safe road into which the tempted soul puts his weather-beaten ship, where it lies secure till the heavens clear, and the storm is over, which the world, sin, and Satan raise upon him. Yea, when death itself approacheth, and the devil hath but one cast more for the game, one skirmish more to get or lose the victory for ever, then faith on the promise carries the Christian's soul out of the garrison of his body—where he hath endured so hard a siege—with colours flying, and joy triumphing to heaven, leaving only his flesh behind in the hands of death, and that also with an assured hope of having it redeemed out of its power ere it be long, at the day of resurrection and restitution of all things.

#### USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Cruelty and presumption of the Church of Rome, in disarming the people of this spiritual sword.]*

*Use First.* Is the word the sword of the Spirit whereby the Christian vanquisheth his enemies? Then we may justly charge the Church of Rome

of cruelty to the souls of people, in disarming them of that weapon with which they alone can defend themselves against their enemies, that seek their eternal ruin. It is true, they have some fig-leaves with which they would fain hide this their shameful practice, making the world believe they do it in mercy to the people, lest they should cut their fingers and wound themselves with this weapon. 'We see,' say they, 'how many errors and heresies the world swarms with, by the mistakes of the vulgar.' Yea, Peter himself they dare subpoena as a witness on their side, who saith that there 'are some things hard to be understood' in Paul's epistles, 'which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction,' II Peter 3:16. And therefore the Scripture, which is so dangerous for ordinary people to meddle with, they judge it safest to lay out of their reach, as we do a sword or edge-tool from children, though they cry never so much for it. See what a fair glove they draw over so foul a hand. But did Peter, because some unlearned and unstable souls wrested the Scripture, forbid them, or any other, how weak soever, to read the Scripture? This had carried some weight with it indeed. But we find just the contrary. For in the following verses, the counsel he gives Christians, that they may not be led away with the error of the wicked, is to 'grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,' ver. 18. *Lumen est vehiculum influentiæ* — light is the chariot that conveys the influences of the sun. So the knowledge of Christ brings with it the influences of his grace into the heart. And how did Peter mean they should grow in the knowledge of Christ, if he would not have them read the Scriptures, which is the only book where it is to be learned? But the Papists would have their people learn their knowledge of Christ from their preaching of him, and not from the Scriptures, which they cannot so safely converse with. But,

1. How shall they be assured that what they preach is *true*, except they have the Scripture, to which, as unto the true touch-stone, they may bring their doctrine to be tried? Thus did the Bereans by Paul's sermon, Acts 17:11—a preacher as good, I trow, as any of theirs. And,

2. Suppose they preach the truth, can they warrant that their words shall not be *perverted*

and *mistaken* by their hearers? And if they cannot, why then are they suffered to preach in a vulgar tongue, when the word of God, for the same reason, is forbidden to be read by the people in a known tongue? Truly, I am of that learned man's mind, who saith, 'that, if God himself may not speak in a vulgar tongue, I see far less reason that a friar should, and so the people should know nothing at all of Christ' (Mede on Jer. 10:11). No, the true reason why they forbid the Scripture to be read, is not to keep them from errors and heresies, but to keep them from discovering those which they themselves impose upon them. Such trash as they trade in would never go off their hand roundly, did they not keep their shop thus dark; which made one of their shavelings so bitterly complain of that unlucky Luther for spoiling their market, saying, 'But for him they might have persuaded the people of Germany to have ate hay.' Anything indeed will go down a blind man's throat. I do not wonder that their people thus nustled<sup>ccix</sup> in ignorance, do so readily embrace their fopperies, and believe all their forgeries so confidently. The blind man must either sit still, or go whither he pleaseth that leads him. We read of a whole army, when once smitten with blindness, carried out of their way by one single man that had his eyes in his head, II Kings 6. But this we may well wonder at, that men who know the Scriptures—as many of their leaders do—and acknowledge their divinity, dare to be so impudent and audacious [as] to intercept this letter sent from the great God to the sons of men, and not suffer them—except a few whom they think fit—to look on it, though it be superscribed and directed by God himself not to any party or sort of men, but to every man where it comes, Rom. 1:17, II Cor. 1:1. This is such a piece of impudence as cannot be paralleled. Wherefore are laws made, but to be promulgated?—Scripture written, but to be read and known of all men? I am sure the apostle by the same authority with which he wrote his epistles, commands them to be read in the church, Col. 4:16. And did the ministers of those churches pocket them up, and conceal them from the people's notice, lest they should, by perverting them, be made heretics?


It is too true some 'wrest' the Scriptures 'to their own destruction.' And so do some, for want in care of eating, choke themselves with

their bread. Must all therefore starve for fear of being choked? Some hurt themselves and friends with their weapons; must therefore the whole army be disarmed, and only a few chief officers be allowed to wear a sword by their sides? Truly, if this be argument enough to seal up the Bible from being read, we must not only deny it to the meaner and ore unlearned sort, but also to the great rabbis and doctors of the chair, for the grossest heresies have bred in the finest wits. Prodigious errors have been as much beholden to Arrius as the ignorance of Ætius: so that the upshot of all will be this—the unlearned must not read the Scripture, because they may pervert them through ignorance; nor the learned, because they may wrest them by their subtlety. Thus we see, when proud men will be wiser than God, their foolish minds will darken, till they lose the reason and understanding of men.

*[Reproof of the Church of Rome for the insufficiency it imputes to the Scriptures].*

*Use Second.* This falls heavy upon them that charge the holy Scriptures with insufficiency, as not containing all things necessary to salvation. What a horrid blasphemy is this, and reproach to the great God, that he should send his people into the field, and put such a wooden sword into their hand as is not sufficient to defend them and cut their way through their enemies' powers to heaven, whither he orders them to march. Would any gracious prince, that loves the lives of his subjects, give them arms that are not fit to oppose such an enemy as comes out against them, if he knows how to furnish them with better? Nay, would he give them such weak and insufficient weapons for their defence, and then charge them to use no other? This were to unworthily to send them as sheep to the shambles, and could signify nothing but that he had a mind either their throats should be all cut by their enemies. And doth not God himself highly commend this sword of the Scripture to his people, when he tells Timothy it is 'able to make thee,' as a Christian, 'wise unto salvation,' II Tim. 3:15, and as a 'man of God,' or minister of the gospel, 'perfect,' and 'thoroughly furnished unto all good works?' ver. 17. Yea, doth he not also forbid us the use of any other weapon but what the Scripture furnisheth us withal? 'To the

law and to the testimony' he sends us, Isa. 8:20, and makes it a renouncing our allegiance to him to go anywhere else for counsel or protection than to his written word: 'Should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?' Then follows, 'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,' ver. 19, 20. It seems then God doth not count we seek to him, except we inquire for him at 'the law and the testimony,' and bring all we hear to their test and touch.


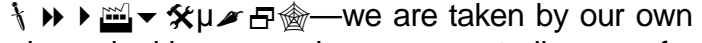
Surely, that which is intended by God to be to his people what the standard and town-bushel are to the market, a rule to measure all doctrines by, is itself exact and sufficient. But the world, by this time, knows where the insufficiency of the Scriptures lies. Sufficient they are enough for God's ends, but not for the pope's ends. They are able to furnish every true Christian in the world with wisdom enough how he should save his soul. But the pope finds himself grieved, that they are not so useful to help him to save the triple crown on his head, and do not furnish him with grounds from which he may defend the lordly power and godlike infallibility he claims, with the other doctrines held forth by him. And this is the only defect he can charge the Scriptures with, to supply which, the rabble-rout of traditions is brought into the church; all taught to speak the pope's sense before they see the light. And, that reputation may be gained to these unknown witnesses, this way with the devil's help—who owes the Scripture an old spite ever since the first promise rescued Adam, his prisoner out of his hand—have taken, that the Scriptures be declared insufficient and uncertain;—*minima particula veritatis revelatae*—the least particle of revealed truth, as one of them impudently writes, and so needs the patchery of these to make it perfect. Just as Andronicus served the emperor Alexius, who gave out he was weak and insufficient to govern alone, and so first got a joint power with him, and at last an absolute power over him to unthrone him. And whether their traditions have dealt better by the Scripture, the world may judge. When traditions go up, the written word is sure to go down. Ye have made, saith Christ to the Pharisees, the commandment of none effect by your tradition, Matt. 15:6, —you have unlarded it, and

supplanted its authority in the minds of men, who leave the word to hearken to your traditions.

*[Wickedness of those who uplift the sword of the Spirit in defence of any sin.]*

*Use Third.* This condemns those of prodigious wickedness, that, instead of using this sword to defend them against sin and Satan, lift it up audaciously for their defence in their wicked and abominable practices. Thus the heretic, he takes up the word to justify his corrupt tenets, forcing it, in favour of his way, to bear witness against itself. And many wretches we meet with, who, to ward off a reproof, will dare to seek protection for their ungodly courses from the word, which they have at their tongue's end, and interpose to break the blow that is made at them. Tell the sensualist of his voluptuous, brutish life, and you shall have him sometimes reply, Solomon was not so precise and scrupulous, who saith, 'A man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry,' Ecc. 8:15. As if Solomon, yea God himself that directed his pen, meant to fill the drunkard's quaffing-cup for him, and were a friend of gluttons and wine-bibbers! Whereas, 'to eat and drink, and be merry' in Solomon's mouth there, amounts to more than to serve God with gladness in the abundance of those good things which God gives us to enjoy, in the mouth of Moses, Deut. 28:47.

Such is the desperate wickedness of man's heart, that the sweetest and comfortablest portions of Scripture are most wrested by many to serve their lusts. The declarations of God's free-grace, made on purpose to melt sinners' hearts, and draw them from their lusts to Christ, how oft are they abused to wedge and harden them in their sins, and keep them from him! Examples of holy men's falls, recorded merely to make them fear that stand, and to preserve hope of mercy alive in those that have fallen, whereby they are in danger of being swallowed up with despair, how are they perverted by many, who lie like beasts wallowing in their own dung, and think all is well because such eminent saints fell so foully, and yet came off so fairly at last, with their sins pardoned and souls saved! The good success that late repentance hath now and then had in a few, yea very few Scripture-instances, it is strange to think what use and advantage Satan makes of them, to beg time of

the sinner, and make him linger still in the Sodom of his sins. 'The eleventh hour,' saith he, 'is not yet come; why will you repent so long before you need?' Why should he set out in the morning, who may despatch his journey well enough an hour before night? The penitent thief, that, as one saith, stole to heaven from the cross, hath, I fear, been an occasion—though on God's part an innocent one—to bring many a sinner to the gallows; yea, well, if not to a place of a longer execution in another world! O, take heed of this, sinners, as you love your souls! Is it not enough to have your lusts, but you must also fetch your encouragement from the word, and forge God's hand to bear you out? The devil indeed thus abuseth Scripture, Matt. 4:4, thinking thereby to make Christ more readily hearken to his accursed motion; and wilt thou tread in his steps? By this thou makest one sin two, and the last the worst. to be drunk was a fearful sin in Belshazzar; but to quaff in the bowels of the sanctuary was far worse. No sin is little, but the least sin amounts to blasphemy when thou committest it on a Scripture pretence. The devil cannot easily desire a greater occasion of glorying over God, than thus to wound his name with his own sword. When Julian the Apostate saw the Gentile philosophers confuted by the human learning of some Christians, he said  
  
—we are taken by our own wings; looking upon it as a great disgrace for them to be beaten and worsted at that which they counted their own weapon. The word is the Holy Spirit's sword. O, for shame, let not Satan make his boast over thy God, Christian, by thy means, which he will, if he can persuade thee to wound his name with this his own weapon. He that fetcheth an argument from the holy Scriptures to countenance any corrupt opinion or practice, what doth he but go about to make God fight against himself? He shoots at him with an arrow out of his won quiver. He sins, and then doth as it were say, God bids him do it. If there be a man on the face of the earth that God will single out as a mark for his utmost wrath, this is he who shelters his wickedness under the wing of the holy Scriptures, and so makes God patron of his sin.

*[Twofold exhortation in regard to the word of God.]*

*Use Forth.* Let us be exhorted to thankfulness to God for the word, and incited also to the study of it. 1. Let us bless God for furnishing us with this sword for our defence. 2. Let us study the word, so that we may make use of this weapon to defend ourselves against the many potent enemies that are in the field against us.

*[Exhortation to thankfulness for the word.]*

1. *Exhortation.* Let us be excited and provoked to bless God for this sword, with which he hath furnished us so graciously, whereby we may stand on our defence against all our bloody enemies. If a man had a kingdom in his possession, but no sword to keep the crown on his head, he could not expect to enjoy it long. This is a world that there is no living or holding anything we have in safety, without the help of arms. Least of all, could our souls be safe if naked and unarmed, which are here in the mouth of danger, and can no way pass to the place of bliss and happiness in heaven prepared for them, but through their enemies' quarters. When Israel took their march out of Egypt towards the promised land, few or none would trust them to travel through their country, but all rose up in arms against them. The Christian will find his march much more troublesome and dangerous to heaven. Satan is not grown tamer than he used to be, nor the wicked world better affected than it was wont to the people of God. O what a mercy is it, that we have this sword by our side, which puts us out of danger from any of them all! This is thy hand, Christian, as the rod was in Moses'. What though an army of devils be behind thee, and a sea of sins before thee roaring upon thee, with this sword, by faith wielding it, thou mayest cut thy way through the waves of the one, and set thyself out of the reach of the other. Truly, the Scripture is a mercy incomparably greater than the sun in the heavens. That might be better spared out of its orb, than this out of the church. If that were gone, we should be but knocked off our worldly business, and be only in danger to lose our bodily life, by missing our way, and stumbling on this pit and tumbling into that pond. But, if deprived of the word, salvation work would be laid aside, or gone about to little purpose, and

our souls must needs miss the right way to happiness, and stumble inevitably upon hell, while we think we are going to heaven, unless a miracle should interpose to prevent the same. But more particularly, bless God for these three mercies in reference to the Scriptures.

(1.) For their translation into vulgar tongues.

(2.) For the ministry of the word.

(3.) For the efficacy of the word and its ministry hath had upon thy heart.

(1.) Bless God for the translation of the Scriptures. The word is our sword. By being translated, this sword is drawn out of its scabbard. What use, alas! could a poor Christian, that hath but one tongue in his head—that understands but one language, I mean, which his mother taught him—make of this sword when presented to him as it is sheathed in Greek and Hebrew? Truly, he might even fall a weeping with John at the sight of the sealed book, because he could not read it, Rev. 5:4. O bless God that hath sent not angels, but men, furnished by the blessing of God on their indefatigable labours and studies, with ability to roll away the stone from the mouth of this fountain! And were it not sad to see the water of life brought to you with the expense of their spirits and strength (wasted in the work), to be spilled on the ground, and basely undervalued by you, so as hardly to be put into the catalogue of mercies which you praise God for? O God forbid! It cannot be, if ever you had but the sweetness of any one promise in it milked out unto you, or the power of one of its divine truths impressed on your hearts. Melchior Ad. tells us that Bugenhagius—whom Luther used, with others, for his help in translating the Bible—when the work was brought to a happy period, he was so affected with the incomparable mercy therein to the churches of Christ in Germany, that every year he invited his friends to a solemn feast that day whereon the work was finished, which they called, 'The feast of the translation of the Bible.'

When Queen Elizabeth, our English Deborah, opened the prisons at her coming to the crown—as at such times is {it} usual to scatter acts of grace—one as piously as ingeniously told her, that there were yet some good men left in prison undelivered, and desired they might also partake of her princely favour, meaning the four evangelists, and Paul, who had

been denied to walk abroad in the English tongue when her sister swayed the scepter. To this she answered, 'They should be asked, whether they are willing to have their liberty;' which soon after appearing, they had their jail-delivery, and have ever since had their liberty to speak to you in your own tongue at the assemblies of your public worship; yea, to visit you in your own private houses also. Now is that happy day come, and long hath been, which holy Mr. Tyndal told a popish doctor of, when a poor ploughman should be able to read the Scriptures, and allowed to as freely converse with them, as any doctor of them all! A blessed day indeed it is to the souls of men!

Now, Christian, when thou art prisoner to God's providence, and kept by his afflicting hand at home, thou hast the word of God to bear thee company in thy solitude; and so, though thou canst not sit up with thy brethren and sisters at thy Father's table in the public ordinances, yet thou dost not wholly go without thy meal. Thou canst not, it is like, carve so well for thyself as the minister useth to do for thee, yet it is an incomparable mercy thou hast liberty to pick up out of the word for thy present counsel and comfort, as thou art enabled by the Spirit of God upon thy humble prayer for his assistance. Admirable hath been the support the saints have found from this holy book in their confinements. God hath graciously ordered it, that the most useful and necessary truths for afflicted saints hang, as I may so say, on the lower boughs of this tree of life, within the reach of a poor Christian who is of but an ordinary stature in knowledge. O think, and think again, of those sad times when the bloody sword of persecutors was drawn to keep off the people of God from coming near this tree, and then you will the better conceive of your present privilege. Yea, look back unto those times of popish ignorance, when this cellar of cordial waters was locked up in the original tongues, and not one in a whole town could be found that had a key, by whom poor souls in their fainting fits and agonies of spirit could have it opened, so as to come by any of their sweet consolations to restore their swooning souls; and then you will surely bless God, who hath given you so free an access unto them, when others cannot have access to you to communicate their help unto you.

(2.) Bless God *for the ministry of the word*, which is the public school he opens to his people, that in it they may learn the use of this their weapon. It is a sad fruit that grows upon the little smattering knowledge that some have got from the word, to puff them up with a conceit of their own abilities, so as to despise the ministry of the word as a needless work. The Corinthians were sick of this disease, which the apostle labours to cure by a sharp reproof: 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us,' 1 Cor. 4:8. Paul, it seems, was nobody now with these high proficientes. The time was, when Paul came to town he was a welcome man. The sucking child was not more glad to see his mother come home, nor could cry more earnestly to be laid to the breast, than they did to partake of his ministry; but now, like the child when it hath sucked its bellyful, they bite the very teat they so greedily awhile before took into their mouths, as if they should never want another meal. So high did their waxen wings of pride carry them above all thoughts of needing his ministry any more. And hath not the pride of many in our days carried them as far into a contempt of the ministry of the word, though their knowledge comes far short of the Corinthians' knowledge? Well, take heed of this sin. Miriam's plague, yea a worse, a spiritual scab and leprosy, apparently cleaves to those, as close as a girdle to the loins, who come once to scorn and despise their ordinance, that they make all afraid to come near their tents. What prodigious errors are they left unto, whereby God brands them! Yea, what sensual lusts hath the once forward profession of many among them been quite swallowed up with! If once a man thinks he needs no longer go to the Spirit's school, he shall find, whoever he is, that he takes the ready way to deprive himself of the Spirit's teaching at home. 'Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings,' 1 Thes. 5:19, 20. They are coupled together. He that despiseth one loseth both. If the scholar be too proud to learn of the usher, he is unworthy to be taught by the master.

But I turn to you humble souls, who yet sit at the feet of Jesus in your right minds. Speak the truth and lie not; are you not well paid for your pains? Dare you say of your waiting on the ministry of the word, what a wretch—though a learned one, Politianus by name—said of his



reading the Scripture, 'That he never spent time to less purpose!' Do you count it among your lost time and misplaced hours that are bestowed in hearing the word? I trow not. Thou keepest thy acquaintance with the word at home if thou beest a Christian, and eatest many a sweet bit in a corner while thou art secretly meditating thereon. But does this content thee, or make thee think the word preached a superfluous meal? I am sure David knew how to improve his solitary hours as well as another, yet in his banishment, O how he was pinched and hunger-bitten for want of the public ordinance! And sure we cannot think he forgot to carry his Bible with him into the wilderness, loving the word so dearly as he did. 'My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is,' Ps. 63:1. Why, David? what is the matter thou thus complainest? Hast thou not the word to read in secret? Canst thou not let down thy bucket, and by meditation draw what thou wilt out of the well of the word? Why then dost thou say thou art in a 'thirsty land where no water is?' He means, therefore, *comparatively*. The sweetest refreshings he enjoyed in his private converse with the word, were not comparable to what he had met in public. And can you blame a sick child for desiring to sit up with his brethren at his father's table, though he is not forgot in his chamber where he is prisoner, but hath something sent him up? It was the sanctuary —there to 'see God, his power and glory, as of old' —that David's heart longed for, and could not well live without.

God threatens to bring 'a famine of hearing the words of the Lord,' Amos 8:11. Mark, not a famine of reading the word, but of hearing the word. If the word be not preached, though we have the Bible to read in at home, yet it is a famine; and so we ought to judge it. 'And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision,' 1 Sam. 3:1. The strongest Christians would find a want of this ordinance in time. We see in a town besieged, though it be well laid in with corn, yet when put to grind with private hand-mills all they spend, what straits they are soon put to. And so will the best grown saints, when they come to have no more from the word for their souls to live on, than what they grind with their own private meditation and labour, then they will miss the minister, and see it was a mercy indeed to have

one whose office it was to grind all the week for him. And if the stronger Christian cannot spare this office, because yet not perfect; what shift shall the weaker sort make, who need the minister to divide the word, as much as little children their nurse's help to mince their meat and cut their bread for them? To leave them to their own improving the word, is to set a whole loaf among a company of little babes, and bid them help themselves. Alas! they will sooner cut their fingers with the knife than fill their bellies with the bread.

(3.) Bless God *for the efficacy of the word upon thy soul*. Did ever its point prick thy heart? its edge fetch blood of thy lusts, and cut off any rotten member of the body of sin? Bless God for it. You would do as much for a surgeon for lancing a sore, and severing a putrefied part from thy body, though he put thee to exquisite torture in the doing of it. And I hope thou thinkest God hath done thee a greater kindness than so. Solomon tells us, 'faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful,' Prov. 27:6. The wounds that God thus gives are the faithful wounds of a friend; and the kisses sin gives come from an enemy. God's wounds cure, sin's kisses kill. The Italians say that, 'play, wine, and women consume a man laughing.' It is true of all pleasurable sins; and as sin kills the sinner laughing, so God saves poor souls weeping and bleeding under the wounds his word gives them. Happy soul, thou that hast made such an exchange to get out of the enchanting arms of thy lusts that would have kissed thee to death, and to fall into the hands of a faithful God, that means thee no more hurt by all the blood he draws from thee than the saving of thy soul's life! How far mightst thou have gone, and not met with such a friend and such a favour! There is not another sword like this in all the world that can cure with cutting; not another arm could use this sword to have done thus much with it, besides the Spirit of God. The axe does nothing till the hand of the workman lifts it up; neither can every one—may be none else —do with his tools what himself can. None could do such feats with Scanderberg's sword as himself. To be sure, none can pierce the conscience, wound the spirit, and hew down the lusts that there lie skulking in their fastness, but God himself. And this he doth not for every one that reads and hears it,

which still greatens thy mercy. There were many widows in Israel when God sent his prophet to her of Sarepta. And why to her? Was there never a drunkard, swearer, or unbeliever, beside thee in the congregation at the same time that God armed his word to smite *thee* down, and graciously prick *thy* heart? O cry out in admiration of this distinguishing mercy, 'Lord, how is it thou wilt manifest thyself to me and not unto the world!'

[Exhortation to the study of the word.]

2. *Exhortation.* Let this provoke you *to the study of the word, that you may thereby have a familiar acquaintance with it.* For this the Bereans obtained a mark of honour as a nobler sort of people than others, because they 'searched the Scriptures,' Acts 17:11. Shall God leave but one book to his church's care and study, and shall it not be read? Shall we be told there is so rich a treasure laid up in this mine, and we continue so beggarly in our knowledge rather than take a little pains by digging in it to come by it? The canker and rust of our gold and silver, which is got with harder labour than here is required, will rise up in judgment against many, and say, 'You could drudge and trudge for us that are now turned to rust and dust, but could walk over the field of the world, where an incorruptible treasure lay, and would lose it rather than your sloth!' O where is to be found—in what breast doth the ancient zeal of former saints to the word lodge! Have they not counted it above rubies and precious stones? Have they not trudged over sea and land to get the sight of it?—given the money out of their purse, the coat off their backs, to purchase a few leaves of it, and parted with their blood out of their veins rather than forego the treasure which they had found in it? And is the market now fallen so low that thou desirest not acquaintance with it when it is offered at a far lower rate! Either they must be charged for very fools to buy the knowledge of it so dear, or you that refuse it who may have it so cheap. But, lest you should think I set you upon a needless work, you are to understand there is an indispensable necessity of Scripture knowledge; and that is double: *necessitas præcepti et necessitas medii*—a necessity of command and a necessity of means.

(1.) There is *a necessity of command*: 'Search the Scriptures,' John 5:39. Indeed, were there not such an express word for this duty, yet the very penning of them, with the end for which they are written considered, would impose the duty upon us. When a law is enacted by a prince or state, for their subjects to obey, the very promulgation of it is enough to oblige the people to take notice of it. Neither will it serve a subject's turn that breaks this law, to say he was ignorant of any such law being in force: the publication of it bound him to inquire after it. What other end have lawgivers in divulging their acts, but that their people might know their duty? Christ fastens condemnation on the ignorance of men where means for knowledge is afforded: 'This is the condemnation, and men loved darkness,' John 3:19. They will not know the rule, because they have no mind to walk by it. Now if ignorance of the word be condemned where its light shines, then sure he commands us to open our eyes, whereby we may let in the knowledge it sheds forth; for a law must be transgressed before a condemning sentence be pronounced. It is the heathen that shall be judged without the written word; but thou that livest within its sound shalt be judged by it; whether thou wilt know it or not, II Thes. 1:8. And if thou shalt be judged by it, then surely thou art bound to be instructed by it. The Jews once had the word deposited in their hands, 'unto them were committed the oracles of God,' and do you think they had well discharged their trust by locking them up safely in the ark, and never looking into them? Surely, you cannot but think God intended another chest, even that in their own breasts, where he would principally have them bestowed. They were committed to them, and now to us, as a dying father doth his will and testament to his son whom he makes his executor, not to throw it aside among his waste papers, but carefully and curiously to read and observe it, that thereby nothing therein contained might be left unperformed. It is called 'the faith once delivered unto the saints,' Jude 3, that is, delivered to their study and care. If any of us had lived when Christ was here in the flesh, and he—when taking his farewell of the world—should have left to us some one thing in special charge to be done for his sake after he was gone to heaven, would we not religiously have performed the will of our dying Saviour, as did St. John, to whom

he left the care of his mother, who therefore took her home to his own house? Behold here a greater charge deposited in his saints' hands—'the faith which was once delivered to them,' that is, 'once' for all, to be by them kept and transmitted from one generation to another while this world lasts. So that, if thou takest thyself to be one of the saints' number, thou art concerned with the rest to take it home with thee, and see that it dwells in the richly, as becomes such a guest bequeathed by so dear a friend.

(2.) There is *a necessity of means*. The word contains the whole counsel of God for the bringing of poor sinners to eternal life, and none besides this—only as they borrow their notions out of it. If you will not search the Scripture, and sit here at the feet of the Spirit—who fits his scholars for heaven by this one book—where wilt thou meet another master? In whose works else wilt thou find the words of eternal life? Of Apollos, who was a man 'mighty in the Scriptures,' it is said, that Aquila and Priscilla 'expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly,' Acts 18:26. An exposition presupposeth a 'text.' The meaning is, they opened the Scripture more perfectly to him. This is 'the way of God' to lead us to God; yea, the only way. In other journeys we may miss the right way, and yet come at last to the place we intended, though not so soon; but no way will bring us to God but this of the word; neither can we walk in this way of God, if we be ignorant of it. A man may in his other journeys be in his right way, and, though he knows not he is right, may yet come safe home. But we can have no benefit from this way of God if wholly ignorant of it, because we can do nothing in faith. O labour therefore to study this book, though thou beest a dunce in all besides! What is it thou wouldst learn? Is it the true knowledge of God? thou mayest tumble over all the philosophers that ever wrote, and, when thou hast done, not be able to frame a right notion of him. The best of them all were but brutish in their highest knowledge of God. Indeed, God left the wise world to run into a thousand follies and vanities, while they were by their own wisdom shaping a religion to themselves, that, having proved them dunces, he might send them and the whole world to learn this lesson in another school, and that is the ministry of the gospel, which is naught else but the explication and application of the

word. 'After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,' I Cor. 1:21.

Wouldst thou come to the true knowledge of sin? This also is a notion to be found nowhere else. The Scripture alone dissects the whole body of sin, and reads to us a perfect anatomy lecture upon its most minute and secret parts. This discovers the ulcers of our wicked hearts, which thousands die of, and through ignorance of the Scriptures can never come to know what their disease is. If lust comes not out in spots and sores, to be seen in the outward conversation, the philosopher pronounceth him a clear man. The plague of the heart, though an old disease and epidemical, yet never was found out, or treated of, but by this sacred book, and this doth it fully, yea, acquaints us where and from whom we got this infection: even from Adam, by whom the whole world was tainted and turned into a pesthouse<sup>ccx</sup>. Which of the wise ones of the world ever dreamed of this genealogy? Poor man, till the Scripture informs him of this, he lies in the pit of sin, and knows not who threw him in!

In a word, wouldst thou be helped out? Thou must then be beholden to the Scripture to do this kind office for thee. Thy own cordage is too short to reach, and too weak to draw thee thence. If thou takest not hold of this cord of love which God lets down unto thee in his word, thy case is desperate. And now, having set life and death before thee, I leave thee to thy choice. If yet thou beest resolved to reject the knowledge of the Almighty, and put thy soul in launch into eternity without this chart to direct thee, not caring whether thou sinkest or swimst, at what port thou arrivest at in another world, heaven or hell; then prepare to take up thy lodgings among the damned, and harden thy stout heart, if thou canst, against those endless flames which are kindled for all those 'that know not God, and that obey not his gospel,' II Thes. 1:8. And to thy terror know that, in spite of thy now wilful ignorance, thou shalt one day understand the Scriptures to the increase of thy torment. Here thou shuttest out their light, but then it will shine full on thy face, when it would give thee some ease if thou couldst forget that ever thou didst hear of such a book as the Bible is, but then against thy will thou shalt carry the

remembrance thereof to hell with thee, that thy scornful neglect of it on earth may be continually pouring new horror—as so much fire and brimstone—into thy guilty conscience. How must it needs then fill thee with amazement to think of thy folly and madness, to sell thy soul for a little ease and sloth? Hell from beneath would be moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming thither. It will stir up the dead for thee; and the poor heathens, whom thou shalt find prisoners there, will come flocking about thee, and with their taunts reproaching thee, saying, ‘Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thou perish for thy ignorance, who hadst the key of knowledge at thy girdle, and at so easy a rate might have been instructed in the way of life! We, poor heathens, cannot bring an action against God for false imprisonment, though we never heard of such a thing as the gospel, for we did not walk up to our little light; and might have known more of God had we not darkened our own foolish minds by rebelling against the light we had; but never were we at such cost to damn our souls as you, who have rejected the word of God, and broke through all the threatenings and promises thereof, to come hither!’

*[Carnal objections to the study of the word removed.]*

*Objection First.* But you will say, ‘If we had so much time to spare as others, we would not be so unacquainted with the Scriptures. But alas! we have so much business to do, and our hands so full with our worldly callings, that we hope God will excuse us, though we have not so much knowledge of his word as others.’

*Answer.* Is this thy plea that thou indeed meanest to use when thou comest to the bar, and art called to give thy answer to Christ thy judge upon this matter? Does not thy heart quake within thy breast to think how he will knit his brow, and throw this thy apology with disdain and wrath upon thy face? Did so much anger sit on the countenance of meek Jesus when on earth, and such a dreadful doom proceed from his sweet lips against those that made their farms and oxen as a mannerly excuse for not coming to his supper, sentencing them never to taste thereof? O what then will glorious Christ say—when, mounted on his tribunal, not to

invite, but to judge sinners—to such an excuse as this? Could God find heart and time to pen and send this love-letter to thee, and thou find none to read and peruse it? The sick man no time to look on his physician’s bill! The condemned malefactor to look on his prince’s letter of grace, wherein a pardon is tendered to him! Poor wretch! must the world have all thy time, and swallow thee up quick? A curse not less than that of Corah! Art thou such a slave to thy pelf as to tie thy soul to thy purse-strings, and take no more time for the saving of thy soul than this cruel master will afford thee? Thou and thy money perish with thee! His soul is in an ill ease which hath an allowance from so base a lust. This is so far from mending the matter, that thou dost but cover one sin with another. Who gave thee leave thus to overlade thyself with the encumbrance of the world? Is not God the Lord of thy time? Is it not given by him to be laid out for him? He allows thee indeed a fair portion thereof for the lower employments of this life; but did he ever intend to turn himself out of all? This is as if the mariners, who are allowed by the merchant some small adventure for themselves, should fill the ship, and leave no stowage for his goods that pays the freight. Will it suffice for him to say, ‘There is no room left for his commodities?’ Or, as if a servant, when his master asks why he neglected such a business committed to his care for despatch, should answer, ‘He was drunk, and therefore could not do it.’ Why did you not read my word and meditate thereon? will Christ say at that day. Darest thou then to be so impudent as to say, ‘Lord, I was overcharged with the cares, and drunk with the love, of the world, and therefore I could not?’ Well, if this be the thief that robs thee of thy time, get out of his hands as soon as thou canst, lest it also rob thee of thy soul. The devil can desire no greater advantage against thee. He hath thee sure enough in his trap. He may better boast over thee than Pharaoh could over Israel. ‘He is entangled, in the wilderness of the world, and shall not escape my hands.’

If a friend should tell you that you kept so many servants and retainers as would beggar you, would you not listen to his counsel, and rather turn them out of doors, than keep them still to eat you out of them? And wilt thou not be as careful of thy soul? Wilt thou keep such a rout of worldly occasions, as will eat up all

thoughts of God and heaven? Certainly thou must either discharge thyself of these, or else fairly dismiss thy hope of salvation. But why should I speak so much to these? This ordinarily is but a cover to men's sloth. If they had hearts, they would find time to converse with the word in the greatest throng of their worldly occasions. These can find time to eat and sleep, to sport and recreate themselves, but no time for God and his word. Would they but allow their souls those broken ends of time to search the Scripture, which they spend in pastimes, idle visits, reading of empty pamphlets, it would not be long but they might give a happy account of their proficiency in their spiritual knowledge. What calling more encumbering than a soldier's? And of all soldiers the general's, to whom all resort? Such a one was Joshua, yet a strict command to study the Scripture: 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night,' Joshua 1:8. Must Joshua, in the midst of drums and trumpets, and distractions of war, find time to meditate on the law of God? And shall thy shop or plough, a few trivial occasions in thy private calling, discharge thee from the same duty? Dost thou think that the closet is such an enemy to thy shop, and the time spent with God a thief to thy temporal estate? God, I am sure, intends his people better; as appears in the former place, 'Then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.'

*Objection Second.* But I cannot read; how can I search the Scriptures?

*Answer.* It is sad, I confess, that parents, who are God's trustees, to whom the nurture of their children is committed, should take no more care for their souls than the ostrich doth of her eggs, not caring what becomes of them. What do these but throw them into the devil's mouth, by sending them out into a sinful world without the knowledge of God and his word, to become a prey to every lust that meets them? To hell they must needs swim, if God show no more pity to them than their bloody parents have done! But shall thy parents negligence be a plea for thy ignorance? Wilt not thou be merciful to thyself because they were cruel? In the fear of God be persuaded to supply their defect by thy diligence. I hope thou dost not think it a shame to learn *that*, now thou art old, which thou

shouldst have been taught when thou wert young. Had not thy parents learned thee a trade to get thy temporal living with, wouldst thou therefore have lived thee a beggar, rather than have applied thyself, though late, to some calling? There are many, for thy encouragement, who have begun late, and, by God's blessing on their diligence, have conquered the difficulty of the work. If thou wert in prison, thou hadst rather learn to read thy neck-verse, than lose thy life for want thereof. Now, though ability to read the word be not of absolute necessity for the salvation of thy soul, yet knowledge of its saving truths is, and few better private means to obtain this than reading. But if thou beest not capable of this, thou hast not by it an excuse for thy ignorance so long as thou hast an ear to receive instruction from others. As God sometimes recompenses the defect of one sense with the quickness of another, so may be thou shalt find thy inability to read supplied with a tenacious memory, to hold what thou hearest read or preached unto thee. Some martyrs we find mighty in the Scriptures, able to defend the truth against learned doctors, and yet not book-learned. One amongst the rest who could not read, 'yet carried always some part of the Scripture about with him, and when he met any Christian that could, he would get him to read some portion or other thereof to him,' whereby he attained to such a measure of knowledge and faith, as made him wiser than his enemies, and a stout champion for the truth, even to resist to blood.

*Objection Third.* 'O but,' saith a third, 'though I can read, yet I am of *so weak an understanding that I fear I shall make no work with such deep mysteries as are there contained.*'

*Answer.* Take heed this objection comes not from thy sluggish heart, which gets this fair pretence to ease thee of a duty thou fearest will be troublesome unto thee. Didst thou ever make a trial, and set about the work, conscientiously using all means that might conduce towards thy instructing in the mind of god? If not, lay not the blame on thy weak head, but wicked heart. When thou wentest first to be an apprentice, what skill hadst thou in thy trade? Didst thou therefore despair and run away? No, but by thy diligence didst learn the mystery of it in a few years, so as to maintain thyself comfortably upon it; and will not thy industry to

learn that, condemn thy sloth in not studying the word, which is able to bring in a better livelihood to thy soul than thy trade can do for thy body?

But, poor soul, if what thou sayest indeed ariseth from the deep sense thou hast of thy own weakness, then ponder upon this TWOFOLD ENCOURAGEMENT.

1. *Encouragement.* *God is able to interpret his own word unto thee.* Indeed none can enter into the knowledge thereof, but he must be beholden unto his Spirit to unlock the door. If thou hadst a riper head and higher parts than thou canst now pretend to, thou wouldst, without his help, be but like the blind Sodomites about Lot's house, groping, but not able to find the way into the true saving knowledge thereof. He that hath not the right key is as far from entering the house as he that hath none, yea in some sense further off. For he that hath none will call to him that is within, while the other, trusting to his false key, stands pottering without to little purpose. The Pharisees, who were so conversant in the Scriptures, and obtained the name for the admired doctors of the chair, called, 'the princes of the world,' 1 Cor. 2:8,—because so renowned and adored among the people, yet even these missed the truth which lay before them almost in every leaf of Moses and the prophets, whom they were, in their every-day's study, tumbling over—I mean that grand truth concerning Christ, of whom both Moses and the prophets speak. And at the same time the people whom they counted so base, yea accursed, as those that understood not the law, could see him whom they missed. None so knowing that God cannot blind and infatuate; none so blind and ignorant whose eyes his spirit cannot open. He who, by his incubation upon the waters at the creation, hatched that rude mass into the beautiful form we now see, and out of that dark chaos made the glorious heavens, and

garnished them with so many orient stars, can move upon thy dark soul, and enlighten it, though now it be as void of knowledge as the evening of the world's first day was of light. The school-master sometimes sends home and bids the father put him to another trade, because not able, with all his art, to make a scholar of him. But if the Spirit of God be the master, thou shalt learn, though a very dunce: 'The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple,' Ps. 119:130. No sooner is a soul entered into the Spirit's school, but he becomes a proficient. Thence we are commanded to encourage those that discourage themselves: 'Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees,' Isa. 35:3. Why? what good news shall we tell them? 'The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped,' ver. 5. 'An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein,' ver. 8.

2. *Encouragement.* The deeper sense thou hast of thy own weakness, *the more fit thou art for the Spirit's teaching.* A proud scholar and a humble master will never agree; Christ is 'meek, and lowly,' and so 'resisteth the proud,' but 'giveth grace unto the humble.' Though he cannot brook him that is proud, yet he can bear with thee that art weak and dull, if humble and diligent; as we see in the disciples, whom our Saviour did not disdain to teach the same lesson over and over again, till at last they say, 'Lo, now speakest thou plainly,' John 16:29. The eunuch was no great clerk when in his chariot he was reading Isaiah's prophecy; yet because he did it with an honest heart, Philip is despatched to instruct him.

## DIRECTION X.—THIRD GENERAL PART.

[HOW TO USE THE SWORD OF THE WORD.]

*'And the sword of the Spirit,' &c. (Eph. 6:17).*

But haply some may say, 'You have said enough to let us know how necessary a weapon this sword is to defend our souls, and of what admirable use in all the conflicts the Christian hath with any of his enemies. But we hope you will not leave us thus. It is a word of counsel we now listen to hear from you, how we poor Christians may wield and use this sword for our own defence, and the vanquishing of the several enemies whose approach you have alarmed us to expect; some whereof we already, to our great terror, see in the field against us, and how soon the other may appear we know not. What will a sword by our side, a Bible in our hand, yea mouth, do us good, if we be not instructed how we may ward off their blows, and make them feel the impression of ours therewith?'

Your request is reasonable, and for your better satisfaction I shall sort the directions into several branches, suited to the several kinds of enemies you have to grapple with; for their assaults being of a different nature, do require a resistance suitable to their way of fight. FIRST. How we are to use the spiritual sword against the persecutor. SECOND. Against the heretic. THIRD. Against the army of lusts lodged within our own bosoms. FOURTH. Against the bands of afflictions which from without invade, from within distress, him.

### BRANCH FIRST.

[DIRECTIONS *how to use the sword of the word* AGAINST PERSECUTORS.]

We shall begin with the *persecutor*. Now, wouldst thou, Christian, stand the shock of his furious assault, when he hangs out his bloody flag, breathing slaughter to the church and flock of Christ, if they will not let him trample upon all their glory, by defiling their consciences, and renouncing their faith at the lust of his imperious command. Then, FIRST. Let it be thy care to get clear Scripture ground for those principles and practices of thine which stir up the persecutor's rage against thee. SECOND. Improve those scriptures which teach us to dread God more and fear man less. THIRD. Be sure thou givest up thy lusts to the sword of the Spirit, before thy life is in any danger from the sword of the persecutor. FOURTH. Fortify thy faith on those promises which have an especial respect to persecution.

DIRECTION FIRST. Let it be thy *first care to get clear Scripture grounds for those principles and practices of thine which stir up the persecutor's rage against thee*. A man had need be well assured of that which brings life and dear enjoyments—that go all away with it—into hazard. It is enough to weaken the courage of a valiant man to fight in a mist, when he cannot well discern his foes from his friends; and to be a damp upon the Christian's spirit in a suffering hour, if he be not clear in his judgement, and fixed in his principles that he is to suffer for. Look, therefore, to put that out of question in thy own thoughts for

which the persecutor calls thee into question. And the rather because it ever was, and still will be the policy of persecutors to disfigure what they can the beautiful face of those truths and practices for which the servants of Christ suffer, that they may put a colour of justice upon their bloody cruelties, and make the world believe they suffer as evil-doers. Now thou wilt never be able to bear up under the weight of this their heavy charge except thou beest fully persuaded in thy own conscience that thou sufferest for righteousness' sake. But if thou standest clear in thy own thoughts concerning thy cause, thou wilt easily wipe off the dirt they throw upon thee, and sweetly entertain thyself with the comfort which thy own conscience will bring to thee through the reproaches of thy enemies. *Nemo est miser sensu alieno*, saith Salvian—what others say or think of us makes not miserable. One reproof from a man's own thoughts wounds ore than the reproaches do of all the world besides. When the Thessalonians were once satisfied of the certain truth of Paul's doctrine—for the gospel, it is said, came to them 'in much assurance,' 1 Thes. 1:5—then they could open their door 'with joy' to receive it, though afflictions and persecutions came along with it, ver. 6.

DIRECTION SECOND. Improve those scriptures which *teach us to dread God more and fear man less*. Every man is most loath to fall into his hands whom he fears most. So that, if God hath once gained the supremacy of thy fear, thou wilt rather skip into the hottest fire the persecutor can make, than make God thy enemy. 'Princes have persecuted me without a

cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word,' Ps. 119:161. David had put, it seems, man's wrath and that which God threatens in his word into the scales, and finding God's hand to be without compare the heavier, trembles at that, and ventures the worst that the other can do against him. Hence it is the Scripture is so much in depressing the power of man, that we may not be scared at his big looks or threats; in depressing the power of man, and representing his utmost rage to be so contemptible and inconsiderable a thing, as none that knows who God is needs fear the worst he can do. 'Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?' Isa. 2:22. 'Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell,' Matt. 10:28. *Pueri timent larvas, sed non timent ignem*—children are afraid of bugbears that cannot hurt them, but can play with fire that will burn them. And no less childish is it to be frightened into a sin at the frowns of a sorry man, who comes forth with a vizard of seeming dread and terror, but hath no power to hurt us more than our own fear gives him, and to play with hell-fire, into which God is able to cast us for ever. Truly this is to be scared with painted fire in the picture, and not in the furnace where it really burns. What was John Huss the worse for his fool's cap that his enemies put on his head, so long as under it he had a helmet of hope which they could not take off? Or how much the nearer hell was the same blessed martyr for their committing his soul to the devil? No nearer than some of their own wicked crew are to heaven for being sainted in the pope's calendar. Melancthon said some are *anathema secundum dici*—to be doubly cursed, as Luther and other faithful servants of Christ whom the pope cursed. But what saith David? 'Let them curse, but bless thou,' Ps. 109:28. He that hath God's good needs not fear the world's bad. The dog's barking doth not make the moon change her colour. Nor needs the saint change his countenance for the rage of his persecutors.

DIRECTION THIRD. Be sure thou *givest up thy lusts to the sword of the Spirit before thy life is in any danger from the sword of the persecutor*. He is not likely to be free of his flesh for Christ, when called to suffer at man's hand, that is dainty of his lusts, and cannot bear the edge of the Spirit's sword, when he comes to mortify them.

Canst thou be willing to lay down thy life for Christ, and yet keep an enemy in thy bosom out of the hand of justice, that seeks to take away the life of Christ? Persecutors tempt as well as torture, Heb. 11. They promise the honours of the court as well as threaten the hardship of the prison and cruelty of the devouring fire. Now, if thy love to the world be not mortified, it is easy to tell what choice thou wilt make, even the same that Demas did, thou wilt embrace the 'present world,' and leave Christ in the plain field. Or if thou shouldst through a natural stoutness bear up under sufferings, even to give thy body to be burned, rather than renounce the true religion thou professest, yet if any lust should at last be found to have been fostered by thee, thou shalt have no more thanks at Christ's hands than he who in the law offered up an unclean beast to God. It is possible for one to die in the cause of Christ and not be his martyr. Thy heart must be holy thou sufferest with as well as the cause holy thou sufferest for. Thy behaviour must be gracious in suffering, as well as the cause just that brings thee to suffer. He alone is Christ's martyr that suffers for Christ as Christ himself suffered. For he hath not only left us his truth to maintain to blood when called thereunto, but his example to follow also in our sufferings. 'If when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God; for even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps;...who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not,' 1 Peter 2:20, 21, 23.

This is hard work indeed, in the very fire to keep the spirit cool, and clear of wrath and revenge towards those that throw him so unmercifully into the devouring flames! But it makes him that by grace from above can do it, a glorious conqueror. Flesh and blood would bid a man call for fire from heaven, rather than mercy to fall upon them that so cruelly handle them. He that can forgive his enemy is too hard for him, and hath the better of him: because his enemy's blows do but bruise his flesh, but the wounds that love gives pierce the soul and conscience. Saul was forced to confess that David, persecuted so furiously by him, was the better man, 'Thou art more righteous than I,' 1 Sam. 24:17. And the people went from the execution of Christ, whom they were so mad to



have crucified, sick of what they had done, shaking their heads as if all were not right {what} they had done against so good a man, Luke 23. Now, when two contraries are in a contest, that overcomes which preserves its own nature, and turns the other into some likeness unto itself; as we see fire transfuseth its own heat into the water, forcing it to assimilate and yield to it. Thus a holy charitable spirit, by forgiving an enemy, if it doth not prevail to turn an enemy's heart to him in love, yet then it turns an enemy's conscience against himself, and forceth him to condemn himself, and justify him whom he persecutes wrongfully.

**DIRECTION FOURTH.** Fortify thy faith on *those promises which have an especial respect to such a condition as persecution*. This is the saints' victory over the world, even their faith. Thus David, when Saul seemed to have him under his foot, and had driven him from living in a court to earth himself for his safety in a cave of the wilderness, yet by faith triumphed over his proud enemy, and sung as pleasantly in his grot and earth-hole as the merriest bird in the wood, 'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise,' Ps. 57:7. Saul had his body higher fed, but not his heart fixed as David's was, and therefore could not sing David's tune. A thousand thoughts and fears distracted his head and heart, while David lives without fear and care, even when his enemies are in the field a hunting for his life. Faith on the promise will, like the widow's oil, not only set thee out of debt to all thy worldly fears and cares which by thy troubles thou mayest contract, but afford thee enough to live comfortably besides, yea, with joy unspeakable and glorious. There are two sorts of sorrows that do usually distress gracious souls most in their sufferings for Christ. *First*. They are prone to be troubled for their own persons and private affairs. *Second*. For the cause of Christ which they bear testimony unto, lest that should miscarry. Now there is abundant provision laid up in the promises to ease the Christian's heart of both these burdens.

*[Provision in the promises for the two sorts of sorrows to which believers are prone.]*

*First.* Believers are at times *prone to be troubled for their own persons and private affairs*. To meet this there is in the promises an ample

provision. Acquaint thyself with those promises that concern thyself as a sufferer for Christ, and see where any crevice is left unstopped, if thou canst, that may let in the least air of suspicion in thy mind to disturb thy peace and discompose thy joy. The promises are so many, and fitted so exactly to every particular query of which the soul can desire satisfaction, that it will require thy study and diligence to gather them. God having chosen rather to scatter his promises here and there promiscuously than to sort them and set every kind in a distinct knot by themselves, we may think on purpose that we might be drawn into an acquaintance with the whole Scripture, and not leave any one corner unsearched, but curiously observe it from one end to the other. And let not the present peace of the church cause thee to think it needless work. The apothecary gathers his simples in the summer which haply he may not use [*.e.* until] winter. And how soon persecution may arise thou knowest not. The church ever hath had, and shall have, its vicissitudes of summer and winter. Yea, sometimes winter strikes in before it is looked for; and then who is the man most likely to be offended? Surely he that received the word with joy in the prosperous estate of the church, but laid not in for foul weather. Well, what is thy fear? whence comes thy discouragement? Art thou scared with the noisomeness of the prison? or doth the terror of the fire, and torture of the rack, affright thee? Know for thy comfort, if thy strength be too weak to carry thee through them, thou shalt never be called to such hot service and hard work. The promise assures thee as much, he 'will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able,' 1 Cor. 10:13.

God who gives the husbandman his discretion with what instrument to thrash his corn, as it is harder or softer, will not let the persecutor's wheel come upon thee that art not able to bear it. God gives us this very account why he led his people the further way about—at their first coming out of Egypt—rather than by the land of the Philistines—the far shorter cut of the two—'for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt,' Ex. 13:17. See here God considers their weakness. They cannot yet bear war, and therefore they shall not be tried with it until more hardened for it. But if thou beest

called into the field to encounter with these bloody fiery trials, the promise takes the whole care and charge of the war off thy hands: 'When they deliver you up, take no thought'—that is, disquieting, distrustful—'how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak,' Matt. 10:19; and, it is 'the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you,' ver. 20. There is no mouth that God cannot make eloquent; no back so weak which he cannot make strong. And he hath promised to be with thee wherever thy enemies carry thee; fire and water shall not part thee from his sweet company. These promises make so soft a pillow for the saints' heads that they have professed, many of them, never to have lain at more ease than when most cruelly handled by their merciless enemies. One dates his letter 'from the delectable orchard his prison;' another subscribes herself, 'Your loving friend, as merry as one bound for heaven.' They have been so far from pitying themselves in their sufferings, that their chief sorrow hath been, that they could be no more thankful for them. And whence had they their strength? Where drew they their joy? Had they not both from the same Spirit applying the promises to them?

*Second.* Believers are at times *prone to be troubled for the cause of Christ which they bear testimony unto, lest that should miscarry.* As for this trouble, though God takes the good-will to his cause and church very kindly, from which those thy fears arise, yet there is no need of tormenting thyself, believer, with that which is sure never to come to pass. The ark may shake, but it cannot fall; the ship of the church may be tossed, but it cannot sink, for Christ is in it, and will awake time enough to prevent its wreck. There is therefore no cause for us, when the storm beateth hard upon it, to disturb him, as once the disciples did, with the shrieks and outcries of our unbelief, as if all were lost. Our faith is more in danger of sinking at such a time than the cause and church of Christ are. They are both by the promise set out of the reach of men and devils. The gospel is an 'everlasting gospel,' Rev. 14:6. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one iota of this shall perish, Matt. 5:18. 'The word of the Lord endureth for ever,' 1 Peter 1:25, and shall be alive to walk over all its enemies' graves, yea, to see the funeral of the whole world, when, at the great day of the Lord,

it must be everlastingly buried in its own ruins. And for the church, *that* is built upon a rock, impregnable. 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it,' Matt. 16:18. It hath been oft in the sea, but never drowned; seldom out of the fire, but never consumed; sometimes swallowed up to reason, but, like Jonah in the whale's belly, cast up again, as too heavy a charge for the strongest stomach that ever persecutor had to digest. The faith of this hath carried the blessed martyrs to the grave, when they swam to it in their own blood with joy, because they knew the church should have the day at last, and that they left others behind in pursuit of the victory on earth, while themselves were taken out of the field to triumph in heaven. Yea some, by prophetic spirit have foretold the very time when the persecuted truths, that were then buried with so much ignominy and scorn, should have a happy resurrection and victory over their proud enemies. Thus John Huss cited his enemies to answer him a hundred years after, comforting himself, that though they then 'burned the goose'—alluding to his own name—'a swan' would come in his stead, that should fill the air with his sweet singing, which was fulfilled in Luther, whose doctrine went far and near, and charmed the hearts of multitudes everywhere. And Hiltenius, another German divine, alleviated the miseries he endured in his stinking prison—where he died for rubbing the monks sores too hard—with this, that another, naming the very time, 1516, should arise after him, that would ruin the monks' kingdom—whose abuses he had but gently reprov'd—and that they should not be able to resist his power, nor so much as fasten a chain upon him; which came to pass in Luther; for, to a miracle, he was kept out of the hands of his bloody enemies, though never man's blood more thirsted for.

## BRANCH SECOND.

[DIRECTIONS *how to use the sword of the word* AGAINST HERETICS.]

Now the second enemy that comes forth against the Christian is the *heretic or seducer*, who is so much more to be feared than the former by how much it is worse to part with God's truth than our own life; to be corrupted in

our minds than to be tortured in our members; in a word, to have our souls damned by God than our bodies killed by man. If the martyrs had feared death more than heresy, they would not have leaped into the persecutors' flames rather than consent to their doctrine. Now, that thou mayest be able to lift up this sword of the Spirit—the only weapon to defend thee—with victory against this dangerous enemy, apply thyself in the use of the best means with thy utmost care to find out the true sense and meaning of the Spirit in his word. This sword in another's hand will defend thee not. No, it must be in thy own, or else thou canst not have the benefit of it. The phrase and outward expression are but the shell, the sense and meaning is the pearl, which thou, like a wise merchant, shouldst seek for. To tumble over a chapter and not reach the mind of God therein held forth, and to tumble over a prayer in an unknown tongue, are both alike, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; Rev. 2:7. We are to listen what the Spirit saith in the word as we hear or read it. And he that hath an ear for the Spirit will not have an ear for the seducer.

Now to help thee in thy search for the sense and meaning of the word, these directions, I hope, may stand thee in some stead. FIRST. Take heed thou comest not to the Scriptures with an unholy heart. SECOND. Make not thy own reason the rule by which thou measurest Scripture truths. THIRD. Take heed thou comest not with a judgment preengaged to any party or opinion. FOURTH. Go to God by prayer for a key to unlock the mysteries of his word. FIFTH. Compare scripture with scripture. SIXTH. Consult with thy faithful guides which God hath set over thee in his church.

DIRECTION FIRST. *Take heed thou comest not to the Scriptures with an unholy heart.* If ever you know the mind of God in his word, the Spirit must impart it to you. And will he that is so holy take thee by thy foul hand, thinkest thou, to lead thee into truth? No, thy doom is set: 'None of the wicked shall understand,' Dan. 12:10. The angel who took Lot's daughters into the house smote the Sodomites with blindness, that they might grope for the door and not find it. And so are those like to be served that come with unclean hearts to the word. 'Without are dogs:' not only without heaven at last, but without the

true knowledge of God on earth. The wicked have the word of God, but the holy soul hath 'the mind of Christ,' I Cor. 2:16. Therefore the same apostle exhorts us that we 'be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God,' Rom. 12:2. And what amounts this to, but if we will have truth for our guest, and be acquainted with the mind and will of God, we must prepare a holy heart for its lodging? They commonly are taken captive by seducers who were before prisoners of their lusts, 'and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,' II Tim. 3:6, 7. When David would beg understanding in the word, he makes his purpose for a holy life the argument with which he urgeth God: 'Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart,' Ps. 119:33, 34.

DIRECTION SECOND. *Make not thy own reason the rule by which thou measurest Scripture truths.* Is that fit to try the revelations of the word by, which is dunced and posed with so many secrets in nature? Doth not the word reveal such things to us as are not only above sense, for eye hath not seen them, nor ear heard them; but also above the ken of reason? being such as never 'entered into the heart of man,' I Cor. 2:9. Indeed the whole system of gospel truths speaks in a foreign and outlandish tongue to reason; it can make no sense of them, except faith be the interpreter. The Scriptures are like the Red Sea, through which the Israelites by faith passed safely, but the Egyptians attempting to do it, for want of that guide were drowned. A humble believer passeth through the deep mysteries of the word safely, without plunging into any dangerous mistakes; whereas those sons of pride, who leave faith and take reason for their guide, we see how they are drowned in many damnable errors, Arianism, Pelagianism, Socinianism, and what not. The most dangerous errors fathered upon the Scriptures have sprung from this womb. This was the Sadducees' ground on which they went for their denying the resurrection of the dead. They owned the book of Moses for the word of God, and yet denied the resurrection asserted therein; because it seemed so impossible a thing to their

reason that our bodies, after so many alterations into slime and dust, should stand up in life. This their reason laughed at; for so our Saviour's answer plainly shows, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God,' Matt. 22:29.

DIRECTION THIRD. When thou consultest with the word, *take heed thou comest not with a judgment pre-engaged to any party and opinion*. He is not like to hold the scales even whose judgment is bribed beforehand. A distempered eye sees the object of that colour with which itself is affected; and a mind prepossessed will be ready to impose its own sense upon the word, and so loseth the truth by an overweening conceit of his own opinion. Too many, alas! read the Scriptures not so much to be informed by them, as confirmed in what already they have taken up! They choose opinions, as Samson his wife, because they please them, and then come to gain the Scriptures' consent. Thus the Jews first made up the match with their idols, and then ask counsel of God what they should do, Eze. 14:4. It is a just judgment of God, that such should not see the truth when it lies fair before them, but be given up to an injudicious heart, to believe the word favours their fancies, and chimes as they think. 'I the Lord will answer him...according to the multitude of his idols: that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart,' Eze. 14:4, 5. And when is a man taken in his own heart, if not when ensnared in the fancies and follies which his erroneous mind hath weaved?

DIRECTION FOURTH. *Go to God by prayer for a key to unlock the mysteries of his word*. It is not the plodding but the praying soul that will get this treasure of Scripture-knowledge. St. John got the sealed book opened by weeping, Rev. 5:5. God oft brings a truth to the Christian's hand as a return of prayer, which he had long hunted for in vain with much labour and study; there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, Dan. 2:22. And where doth he reveal the secrets of his word but at the throne of grace? 'From the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words,' *i.e.* for thy prayer, Dan. 10:12. And what was this heavenly messenger's errand to Daniel but to open more fully the Scripture to him? as appears by ver. 14, compared with ver. 21. This holy man had got some knowledge by his study in the word, and this sets him a praying, and

prayer fetched an angel from heaven to give him more light. If ever we know the mind of God, we must be beholden to the Spirit of God for it. 'When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth,' John 16:13. And the Spirit is the fruit of Christ's intercession: 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter,' &c. Now there must be a concurrence of our prayers with his intercession. While our High-priest is offering incense within the vail, we are to be praying without for the same thing that he is interceding within. Now to quicken thee up to pray with more fervent importunity for this manuduction of the Holy Spirit to lead thee into truth,

[MEANS to quicken us to pray with more fervour for the leading of the Holy Spirit.]

*First Means.* Let the dread of those scriptures which set forth the danger of errors and false doctrines fall upon thee, that thou mayest not think thou goest upon a slighty errand, when praying to be preserved from them, as if the odds were not great, whether thou hast thy request or hast it not. It is one of the devil's master-policies, by sinking the price of errors in the thoughts of men, to make them thereby the more vendible. Many think they shall not pay so dear for an error in judgment as for a sin in practice. Yea, some have such a latitude, that they fancy a man may be saved in any religion—a principle that must needs tend to make them that hold it careless and incurious in their choice. That sin shall not want customers which men think they shall pay little or nothing for. Some can be content to be drunk on free cost, that would not, were they assured their own purse should pay soundly for the reckoning. How comes fornication to abound so much among the Romish clergy, but because it is counted so petty a sin by them? And I wish that error and heresy—which are the fornication of the mind—were not by many among ourselves sized as low. But woe to those clerks of the devil's market, that tempt and toll men on to sin by setting cheaper rates on their head than the word of God hath done. If once the dread of a sin be word off the conscience, no wonder then if we see men as boldly leap upon it, as the frogs in the fable on the log, that lay so still and tame at the bottom of the river. Fear makes the

body more apt to take infection, but it preserveth the soul from the infection of sin.

Now that thou mayest the more stand in fear of drinking in the poison of any corrupt and unsound doctrine, let thy mind ponder on a few scriptures, which show both their detestable, and also damning nature of them. Gal. 5:19, there heresy is called 'a work of the flesh,' and reckoned among those sins which shut the doors of them out of heaven; 'they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God,' ver. 21. They are called 'doctrines of devils,' I Tim. 4:1. And if they come from the devil, whither must they lead but to hell? Such as are against the fundamental principles of the gospel are inconsistent with the love and favour of God. He that 'abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God,' II John 9. And who, think you, shall have him that hath not God? Were there no other scripture against this kind of sin, but that one, II Peter 2:1, it were enough to strike the heretic through his loins, and make the knees of every seducer, like Belshazzar's at the sight of the 'handwriting on the wall,' to knock one against the other. 'But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.' So that if a man hath a mind to get the start of other sinners, and desires to be in hell before them, he need do no more than open his sails to the wind of heretical doctrine, and he is like to make a short voyage to hell of it; for these bring upon their maintainers 'swift destruction.' Nay, the Spirit of God, the more to aggravate their deplored state brings in three most dreadful instances of divine vengeance that ever was executed upon any sinners, viz. the detrusion of the apostate angels from heaven to hell, the drowning of the old world, and the conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah by raining hell, as it were, out of heaven upon them. I say, he brings these as patterns and pledges of that vengeance which shall certainly befall this kind of sinners. And by this time I hope thou wilt be warm in thy prayer against this dangerous enemy. But,

*Second Means.* When thou hast thus possessed thy heart with the dread of being led into any corrupt opinion, then *strengthen then thy faith from those comfortable scriptures which assure*

*thee that no sincere saint shall be left to fall finally into any soul-damning error.* Christ is as able for, and faithful in, his prophetic and kingly offices, as his priestly. Surely he will not have the least care of his people's understanding, which is guide to their whole man, and is that faculty which he first practiseth upon in the work of conversion. Thou hast therefore as strong ground to believe he will preserve thee from damnable principles as damnable practices. It would be little advantage to be kept from one enemy, and left open to the will and power of another. Christ's hedge comes round about his people. Solomon tells us, 'The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein,' Prov. 22:14. And so is the mouth of the seducer, who comes with strange doctrines—whorish opinions. Now who is this pit digged for? Indeed, if we look at Satan's design, it is a trap chiefly laid to catch the saint; he would, if possible, 'deceive the very elect.' His greatest ambition is to spread his banners in this temple of God, and defile them whom God hath washed. But if we eye God's intention, it is a pit he suffers to be made for hypocrites and false gospellers—such who would never heartily close with Christ and his truth. These are they whom God abhors, and therefore they are left by him to become a prey to those that go a birding for souls with their corrupt doctrines. 'Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness,' II Thes. 2:10-12. These, like the outsetting deer, are shot, while they within the pale are safe; or, like the suburbs, taken by the enemy, but those within the city escape their fury. It is the outward court that is left to be trampled underfoot, Rev. 11:2. And in the fore-quoted place in the epistle to the Thessalonians—though he gives up hypocrites to be deceived by false teachers, as once Ahab by those knights of the post his false prophets—yet, ver. 13 he speaks comfortably to the elect, and shows that the same decree which appointed them to salvation provided also for their embracing the truth, as the necessary means leading thereunto. 'But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning

chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.' And if God had got possession of the head by his truth, and of the heart by his sanctifying grace, he will keep them out of Satan's clutches.

Go, therefore, and plead the promise for thy preservation. The promise improved by faith at the throne of grace will be thy best antidote in these times of general infection. Never fear speeding when the promise bids thee 'go and prosper.' The mercy is granted before thou askest it; only God will have thee by prayer lay claim to it, before thou beest possessed of it. And for thy help I have set down some sweet promises of this nature, with which, if thou acquaintest thyself, thou mayest be furnished both with grounds for thy faith, and arguments for thy prayer in this case, Matt. 24:24; John 7:12; 10:5, 29; 1 Cor. 11:19; Php. 3:15; 1 John 2:19, 20.

DIRECTION FIFTH. *Compare scripture with scripture.* False doctrines, like false witnesses, agree not among themselves. Their name may be called 'Legion, for they are many.' But truth is one; it is homogeneous. One scripture sweetly harmonizeth with another. Hence it is, though there were many penmen of sacred writ, and those of several ages, one after another, yet they all are said to have but one mouth; 'As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began,' Luke 1:70. All had one mouth, because they accord so perfectly together. The best way, therefore, to know the mind of God in one text is to lay it to another. The lapidary useth one diamond to cut another. So should we one place of Scripture to interpret another. Scriptures compared, like glasses set one against another, cast a light each to the other. 'They (*i.e.* the Levites) read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading,' Neh. 8:8. *Et exponendo sensum dabant intelligentiam per Scripturam ipsam*—so Tremelius reads the words—they gave them the meaning of what they read, by the Scripture itself.

Now, in comparing scripture with scripture, be careful thou interpretest obscure places by the more plain and clear, and not the clear by the dark. Error creeps into the most shady obscure places, and there takes sanctuary. 'Some things hard to be understood, which they that are unstable wrest.' No wonder they should stumble in those dark and difficult places, when

they turn their back on that light which plainer scriptures afford to lead them safely through. 'He that is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not,' 1 John 5:18. This is a dark place, which some run away with, and from it conclude there is a perfect state free from all sin attainable in this life; whereas a multitude of plain scriptures testify against such a conclusion, 1 Kings 8:38; Prov. 20:9; Ecc. 7:20; Job 9:20; Php. 3:12; 1 John 1:8-10, with many more. So that it must be in a limited and qualified sense that he 'that is born of God sinneth not.' He sins not finally or comparatively, not as the carnal wretch doth. 'And the wicked one toucheth him not,' *i.e. non tactá qualitativo*, as Cajetan saith—not so as to transfuse his own nature and disposition into him; as the fire toucheth the iron or wood it comes near, assimilating them to its own nature. This rule of using plain scriptures to be a key for to unlock obscure, will hold in all other instances. And blessed be God, though to tame our pride he hath inserted some knotty passages, yet the necessary saving truths are of easy access even to the weakest understanding. *Salubritèr Spiritus Sanctus ita, modificavit, ut locis apertioribus fami occurreret, obscurioribus fastidia detergeret* (Aug. de Doc. Ch. lib. ii. c. 6)—there is enough in the plain places of Scripture to keep the weak from starving, and in the obscure to lift them above contempt of the strongest.

DIRECTION SIXTH. *Consult with thy faithful guides which God hath set over thee in his church.* Though people are not to pin their faith on the minister's sleeve, yet they are to 'seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts,' Mal. 2:7. Christ directs his kids for their safety, that they turn not aside into by-paths of error, and fall not into the hands of false teachers—those cheating companions—that they go 'go forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed...beside the shepherds' tents,' Song 1:8. The devil knows too well—'send away the shepherd and he may soon catch the sheep.' And these times prove sadly that he is not mistaken. When were people's affections more withdrawn from their ministers? And when were their judgments more poisoned with error? Of what sort, I pray, are those that have been trappanned<sup>ccxi</sup> into dangerous errors in our late unhappy times? Have they not most this brand upon them? Are they not such who would sooner hearken to a stranger—may be a Jesuit

in a buff-coat or with a blue apron before him?—seek to any mountebank that comes they know not whence, is here to-day and gone tomorrow, than to their own ministers, who from God have the rule over them, and watch for their souls as they that must give account to God for them; yea, who from many years' experience in life and doctrine they have found able and faithful? In the fear of God consider this. They are not your ministers—I speak as to the most—in their pulpits and public ministry, but these hucksters and quack-salvers in corners practicing upon you, that privily have brought in damnable doctrines, and leavened so great a lump of people in the nation with sour and unsound doctrine. If thou wouldst therefore be preserved from error, make use, as of the sword of the word in thy own hand, so of the holy skill that God hath given thy faithful minister for thy defence. Wait on his public ministry, praying for divine assistance to be poured down on him, and a divine blessing from his labours to fall on thyself. If at any time thou art in the dark concerning his message, resort to him, and I dare promise thee—if he answers his name, and be a faithful minister of the gospel—an easy access and hearty welcome to him. Only come to learn, not cavil; to have thy conscience satisfied, not any itch of vain curiosity rubbed. Our Saviour, who was so willing to satisfy his disciples concerning the doctrine he publicly preached, that in private he opened it to them more fully, yet when they came with nice and curious questions, did rather choose to repel that humour by a reproof than cherish it by a satisfying answer. 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons;' and at another time, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.' He takes Peter off from a profitable question to ind a necessary duty.

### BRANCH THIRD.

[DIRECTIONS *how to use the sword of the word AGAINST LUSTS.*]

The third enemy we are to fight is made up of an *army of lusts lodged within our own bosoms, which have Satan to head and lead them forth against us*. And who that believes he hath a soul to lose or save can be unwilling to engage against this cursed combination of lusts and devils? The Romans were said, when in war with other nations, to fight for honour and glory; but against the Carthaginians for their very life and being. In this war against sin and Satan both lie at stake. This, this is the most noble war of all other.

It is noble, because *just*. It is too true, I fear, what one saith of the wars which the great monarchs of this world wage one against another, 'that the cause is very seldom so clear for which they take arms but there is some ground of scruple left in the conscience of the undertaker.' But here we are put out of all doubt. This, without abusing the name, may be called, 'the holy war.' For it is against the only enemy that the holy God hath in the world, who hath himself taken the field, and set up his royal standard in defiance of it; to which he calls all mankind, some by the voice of a natural conscience, and others by the loud sound of his word, to repair, and upon our allegiance to him, our sovereign Lord and Creator, to help him 'against the mighty;' not because he needs our help, but [because he] expects our duty, and had rather reward our loyalty than punish our rebellion. Some have been found who for shame have killed themselves, that their prince through their cowardice had lost the victory. O what confusion then will one day fill our faces if we, by our faintness or treachery, do what lies in us [to] help Satan and sin to triumph over God himself!

But again, it is a noble war, because *hard and difficult*. This is an enemy stout and stubborn, such as will try both our skill and strength to the uttermost. Never did coward overcome in this war. What sin loseth is by inches, and what it gains hardly lets go. They who follow this war closest will find a life's work at least of it. O you that love brave exploits, and hunt for enterprises that only a few generous spirits dare undertake, here is that you look for.

Fighting with men and storming of castles is but children's play to this encounter, where devils and lusts are to be repelled. 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city,' Prov. 16:32. 'Better,' because he overcomes a worse enemy, infinitely more potent and puissant. Few, alas! of the world's swordsmen, so famed for their conquests, but have lived and died slaves to sin!—cowardly submitting the neck of their souls to draw the iron chariot of a base lust, while they have proudly sat to be drawn in triumph by those whom they have taken prisoners in war. Thus as Hannibal was beaten at home in his own country, who was a victor in his foreign expeditions; so too, many that do great feats in arms abroad, which makes them famous in this world, are miserably beaten and shamefully trampled upon by their own corruptions at home, that will make them much more infamous in the other world.

But be not you, O ye saints, dismayed at the report of your enemies' strength and number. The greater will be your victory, and the more your captives to draw your triumph and chariot. Neither let your hearts faint to see the conquering Cæsars despoiled of their ensigns of honour by this enemy, which themselves had won from others, and to die in chains slaves to their lusts, that had lived conquerors over men. Remember, for your comfort, it is but the unbelieving world—such as are without spiritual arms, and so abandoned of God—that are left thus to become a prey to sin and Satan. But you have a God on your side, who gives you the consecrated sword of his word for your defence—a weapon whose edge Satan hath already felt, and therefore trembles whenever faith draws it forth. He that made this leviathan, as is said of the other, Job 40:19, can make this his sword to approach to him, and the heart of all thy lusts also. But I forbear; my task in this place being not to excite you to, but direct you in, the management of your fight with this your enemy, and that also only by teaching you the use of this one weapon, the word of God, in order to repelling motions to sin from within, or temptations to it from Satan without. **FIRST**, therefore, Take some pains to collect out of the word the several lineaments with which the Spirit of God doth paint out the deformity of sin, that so thou mayest make it the more odious and

hateful to thy thoughts. **SECOND**. Provide thyself with Scripture answers to Satan's false reasonings. **THIRD**. Hide the word in thy heart. **FOURTH**. Plead the promise against sin at the throne of grace.

*[We are to collect out of the word the several lineaments of sin's deformity.]*

**DIRECTION FIRST**. Take some pains to *collect out of the word the several lineaments with which the Spirit of God doth paint out the deformity of sin, that so thou mayest make it the more odious and hateful to thy thoughts*, when, by laying them together, thou shalt see in its true picture and portraiture—drawn by so skilful and faithful a hand—the fair face of this goodly lady, whose beauty Satan doth so highly commend to thy wanton embraces. Poor man sins upon Satan's credit, and receives it into his bosom, as Jacob did his wife into his bed—before he sees its face, or knows well what it is—and therefore, as he in the morning found her to be, not that beautiful Rachel as was promised, but a blear-eyed Leah; so the sinner, too late—when his conscience awakes—sees himself miserably cheated, and disappointed of what he looked for, and finds a purgatory where he expected a paradise. Now, that thou mayest, Christian, the better see the ugly shape of this monster sin, observe from the word of God these four particulars concerning it. *First*. The birth and extraction of it. *Second*. The names given it. *Third*. Its nature. And, *Fourth*. Its properties.

*[Four particulars concerning sin, taken from the word of God.]*

*First Particular*. The birth and extraction of sin. Who is its father, and from whom is it descended? The holy God disowns it. The sun can as soon beget darkness, as God, who is 'the Father of lights,' be the author of sin. From him comes 'every good and perfect gift,' James 1:17. But, O sin, whence art thou? Thou art not his creature; he neither made thee, nor ever moved any to thy production. Certainly if it were from him he would like and love it. Every one loves his own child, though never so black. Much more doth God like what is his. We find him looking back upon every day's work of the creation, and upon all at last, pleased with what he had done, all 'was very good,' Gen. 1:31. But



of sin what he thinks, see Deut. 7:25, 26; Prov. 6:16; Rev. 2:6, 15, where he expresseth his detestation and hatred of it, from which hatred proceed all those direful plagues and judgments thundered from the fiery mouth of his most holy law against it. Nay, not only the work, but the worker also, of iniquity, becomes the object of his hatred, Ps. 5:5. So that if God were the author of sin, he would be a hater of himself. Well, at whose door then doth God lay this brat to find a father? Surely at the devil's: 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do,' John 8:44. And again in the same place, 'When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.' Sin is a brat which calls the devil both father and mother. For of himself, even of his own free will—the womb wherein it was conceived—did he beget it; and having begot it, put it out to nurse to man. And is not man, who was made to serve and enjoy the great God his Maker, highly set up, to suckle and carry this his infernal child about in his arms? Ah, poor man, whence art thou fallen? It is strange that the very remembering whose offspring thyself wert doth not strike thee into a horror, to see thy precious soul debased unto such servitude as to fulfil the lusts of that cursed spirit. Never let us spit at the witch for suffering the devil's imps to suck on her body, while we can prostitute our souls to any of his lusts.

*Second Particular.* The names and titles with which the word stigmatizeth sin. And God, to be sure, miscalls none. If a thing be sweet, he will not say it is bitter; if good, he will not call it evil. For he claps a woe upon his head that doth so, Isa. 5:20. Never think to find honey in the pot when God writes poison on its cover. We may say of every sin in this respect what Abigail of her husband—as is its name in Scripture, so is it. If God call it folly, then there is no wisdom to be found in it. The devil indeed teacheth sinners to cover foul practices with fair names. Superstition must be styled devotion; covetousness, thrift; pride in apparel, handsomeness; looseness, liberty; and madness, mirth. And truly there is great need for sinners to do thus, to make this fulsome dish go down with less regret. There are some have made a hearty meal of horseflesh, or the like carrion, under a better name, whose stomachs would have risen against it if they had known what it was.

Therefore as persecutors of old wrapped the Christians in the skins of those beasts which would render them the most desirable prey to those they were cast; so Satan and our false hearts present sins to us under those names that will sharpen our appetites to them, or at least take away the abhorrence our consciences else would show against them.

But canst thou be content, poor soul, to be so easily cheated? Will the fire burn thee the less, into which thou art emboldened to put thy finger, because a knave that owes thee and ill turn tells thee that it will not hurt thee? Hear rather what the God of truth saith of sin, and by what names he calls it, and you shall find that whatever is dreaded by us, or hated, feared, or loathed, in all the world, they are borrowed, and applied to sin—the vomit of dogs; the venom of serpents; the stench of rotten sepulchres; dunghills and jakes; the deadliest diseases and sores, gangrenes, leprosy, and plague, attributed to it, II Peter 2:22; Luke 3:7; Rom. 3:13; II Tim. 2:17; I Kings 8:38; yea, hell is raked for an expression to set it out—it being compared to the very fire of hell itself, James 3:6. And because of their penury and straitness of these appellations—therefore it is called by its own name, as the worst that God himself can say thereof, 'sinful' sin, Rom. 7:13. Now what shall be done to the thing that the great God thus loathes, and loads with such names of dishonour, thereby to signify his abhorrence of it? What? Every gracious heart will soon resolve, that he should pursue it with fire and sword, till we have executed upon it the judgement written in its utter ruin and destruction.

*Third Particular.* The nature of sin, as the word defines it. See its description, 'sin is the transgression of the law,' I John 3:4—a few words, but of weight enough to press the soul that commits it to hell, yea to press sin itself to death in the heart of a saint, if laid on with these considerations—

1. *Whose law it is by sinning we break.* It is not that of some petty prince—and yet such conceive their honour so deeply concerned in their laws, that they take vengeance on the violators of them—but of the great God, whose glorious name is in every attribute assaulted and reproached by the sinner, yea the very life and being of God is endeavoured to be destroyed.

*Peccatum est deicidium*—sin is deicide. For he that would rob God of his honour is an enemy to his very being; because God's being is so wrapped up in his glory, that he cannot outlive the loss of it. These, it is true, are above the reach of the sinner's short arm, but that is no thanks to him, because his sin aims at these, though it cannot carry its shot so far as to hurt him.

2. *What law it is*; not cruel, written with the blood of his creatures, as the laws of some tyrant princes are, who consult their own lust, and not their people's good, in their edicts. But this law is equal and good; in {the} keeping of which is life. So that no provocation is given by any rigour of unnecessary taxes imposed upon us to rise up against it. 'What iniquity,' saith God, 'have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?' Jer. 2:5. He that put away his wife was to give her a bill of divorce, declaring the cause of his leaving her. Thus God condescends to expostulate with sinners, and asks what evil they can charge upon him or his government that they forsake him. But, alas! no more cause can be given than why a beast, in a fat sweet pasture, should break the hedge to get into a barren heath or a dirty lane, where nothing but starving is to be had.

3. *At whose notion* the poor creature transgresseth the good law of God, and that is *of a cursed spirit the devil, no less our enemy than God's enemy*. Now for a child at the solicitation of his father's greatest enemy, and his own also, to take up rebellious arms against a dear loving parent, adds to the monstrosity and unnaturalness of the fact. This thou dost, Christian, when by sin thou transgressest the law of God. And now, by this time, methinks I see thy blood to rise and boil with anger in thee, while thy God points to thy sin and tells thee, 'This, O my child, is the enemy that would take away my glory and life too by thy means—who by debt both of nature and grace owest thy whole self to live and die for the maintaining of my honour!' Art thou not as ready to fall upon thy sin, and drag it to execution, as the servants of Ahasuerus were to lay hold of Haman, and cover his face as a son of death, when their prince did but vent his wrath conceived against him? Est. 7:8. Certainly, were but the love of God well kindled in our bosoms, we should even spit

fire on the face of any that durst tempt us to sin against him.

*Fourth Particular.* The *properties of sin* discovered by the word of God. I shall content myself with three. It hath, 1. A defiling property. 2. A disturbing property. 3. A damning property.

1. Sin hath *a defiling property*, called 'filthiness of flesh and spirit,' II Cor. 7:1. It besmears both. 'The whole world' is said to, 'lie in wickedness,' as a beast in his dung and ordure, or as a rotten carcass, in its slime and putrefaction, I John 5:19. It is that leprosy which infects man, and the very house he lives in also. Wherefore did God send the flood in Noah's time, but to wash away that filthy generation as dung from the face of the earth? But, because this pest-house of the world is not cleared sufficiently, it is reserved for a more thorough purgation by fire at the last day. Do but think, Christian, what a beauty man was till he was pock-broken—if I may say so—by sin, and what a glory shined upon the whole creation before sin, by its poisonous breath, had dimmed and blasted it; and then guess what a filthy thing it is—what a strong poison it is that not only diffused its malignity through the soul and body of man, but had such direful effects upon the whole compages and frame of the visible creation, that it will never come to its first beauty, till, like a battered, cankered piece of plate, it be melted and refined by a universal conflagration. And is not your soul yet loathed with the thoughts of sin? Some beasts, they say, the ermine for one, will die before she will be got in the dirt to defile her beautiful skin. And wilt thou, Christian—and that after it hath cost Christ his blood to purchase his Spirit for thy cleansing—bedabble thyself in sin's puddle? God forbid! Did Ezekiel so abhor to eat man's dung imposed on him by God that he cries out, 'Ah Lord God! behold, my soul hath not been polluted?' &c., Eze. 4:14. And is any unclean lust, which God himself compares to no better thing, so dainty a bit as to be desired by thee, Christian, who has sat at Christ's table, and knowest what entertainment there is to be had? Methinks thou shouldst rather cry out with the prophet, 'Ah, Lord God! my soul hath not been (or at least let it not be) polluted with this abominable thing.'

2. Sin hath *a disturbing property*. Sin, it breaks the peace of the soul, yea of the whole world. It brings confusion with it, and makes the

place a seat of war wherever it comes. An army of evils are at its heels to set down where it is lodged: 'If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door,' Gen. 4:7. 'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,' Isa. 57:21. Here is God's hand, we see, to the warrant sentencing the sinner to the rack of a self-torturing conscience. Who is able to express the anguish which an accusing conscience feels, and those dreadful fits of convulsion with which it rends and tears itself? One you hear roaring and crying out, 'There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither...any rest in my bones because of my sin,' Ps. 38:3. Another, 'while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted,' Ps. 88:15. A third, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear,' Gen. 4:13. And a fourth, so unable to stand under the clamour of his guilt, that he runs to the halter and hangs himself to get out of the din and dolour it makes in his ears, Matt. 27:5. And is not he like to be well cured of his torment that throws himself into hell-fire to find ease? And as sin disturbs the inward peace of the soul, so the outward peace of the world. What else but sin hath put the world in an uproar, and set all the creatures together by the ears? 'From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?' James 4:1. This sets nearest relations at bitter feud, firing the house over their heads, so that husband and wife, parents and children, cannot abide together under one roof. Delilah, she betrays her husband into his bloody enemies' hands. And Absalom riseth up to take away the life of his dear father. This is the whisperer that 'separates chief friends,' and makes those that have drunk of our cup to lift up the heel upon us; and with whom we have 'taken sweet counsel together,' to plot our ruin, and give counsel against our very life. In a word, such a kindle-fire sin is, that the flames it kindles fly not only from one neighbour's house to the other, but from one nation to another. All the water in the sea that runs between kingdom and kingdom, cannot quench the wars it raiseth; but it makes men that live at one end of the world thirst for the blood and treasure of those that live at the other. So that the earth is but as a cockpit, where there is little else but fighting and killing one another. And is this the guest thou canst find in thy heart to bid welcome within thy bosom?

3. Sin hath *a damning property*. If all the mischief sin did us was in this world, it were bad enough; but considering our short stay here, it would give some ease to our thoughts, that we should have done with it and this life together. But to be worried here by it, and damned for it also to eternal torments in another world, this is intolerable! Methinks that place, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,' Matt. 25:41, should make us sit down and consider, whether any sin be so pleasurable or desirable, as should make it worth lying in endless torments to obtain and enjoy it a few fleeting days and months, that are at an end almost as soon as their beginning commenceth. Thou knowest, sinner, already the best of thy sinful pleasure, but not the worst of thy punishment, which is so great as loseth its chief emphasis by translating into our language, and clothing it with expressions borrowed even from those things that most dread us in this life. Alas! what is the fire and brimstone we see and fear so much here, to that which burns in the infernal lake? Truly, little more than painted fire in the wall is to that which burns on our hearth. This in our chimney was made for our use and comfort chiefly, but the fire in hell—whether material or not is not material to know—is for no other end than to torment sinners in. This in our kitchen is kindled by a little puff of wind, and quenched by a little water; but 'the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle that,' Isa. 30:33. And where shall we find buckets to quench that which God kindles? They say smelling of the earth is healthful for the body, and taking in the scent of this sulfurous pit by frequent meditation cannot but be as wholesome for the soul. If many had descended thus into hell while on earth, their souls had not, it is like, dropped into hell when their bodies fell into the grave. O Christian! be sometimes walking in the company of those places of Scripture which set out the state of the damned in hell, and their exquisite torments there. This is the true 'house of mourning,' and the going into it by serious meditation is a sovereign means to make 'the living lay it to heart,' and, laying it to heart, there is the less fear that thou wilt throw thyself by thy impenitency into this so uncomfortable a place, who art offered so fairly a mansion in heaven's blissful palace, upon thy faith and repentance.

*[We are to provide ourselves with Scripture answers to Satan's false reasonings.]*

DIRECTION SECOND. Provide thyself with *Scripture answers to Satan's false reasonings with which he puts a fair colour on his foul motions, the better to gain thy consent.* He is wily. Thou hadst need be wary. He doth not only propound the sinful object, but also sets a fair gloss upon it, and urges the soul with arguments to embrace his offer. And when sin comes thus forth Goliath-like, it is not Saul's armour, but the 'smooth stones of the brook,' not thy own resolution, but the divinity of Scripture-arguments, that can preserve thee, or prostrate thy enemy. Now, thou wilt find in the word an answer put into thy mouth to refute<sup>ccxii</sup> all Satan's sophistry. And this indeed is to be an Apollos, 'mighty in the Scripture,' when we can stop the devil's mouth, and choke his bullets with a word seasonably interposed betwixt us and the temptation. It will not therefore be amiss to give a few INSTANCES whereby this direction may be made more easily practicable in the hand of weaker Christians. *First.* Sometimes Satan insinuates himself into a soul by endeavouring to make one sin appear of no account. *Second.* By giving an opportunity of committing a sin in secret. *Third.* By the example of others.

*[Satan tempts to sin by making one sin of no account.]*

*First Instance.* Sometimes Satan thus insinuates himself into a soul—'what, man, *will one sin, if yielded to, so much hurt thee?* One mole doth not mar the beauty of the face, nor can one sin spoil the beauty of thy soul; and it is no more than I am a suitor for. If I bade thee wallow in every puddle, thou mightst well abhor the motion; but why art thou so afraid of one spot being seen on thy garment? The best jewel hath its flaw, and the holiest saint his failing.' Now to refute this motion, when so mannerly and modestly proposed

1. *Answer.* The word will tell thee that *no sin is single.* It is impossible to embrace or allow one sin, and be free of others. For,

(1.) He that yields to one sin *casts contempt upon the authority that made the whole law, and upon this account, breaks it all.* 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all,' James 2:10. And he gives the

reason in the next words, 'for he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.' Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill thou art a transgressor of the law. Not that he is guilty of all *distributively.* but *collectively,* as Estius well notes. For the law is one copulative. One commandment cannot be wronged, but all are interested in the same; as the whole body suffers by a wound given to one part: 'God spake all these words,' Ex. 20. They are ten words, but one law.

(2.) By allowing one sin we *disarm and deprive ourselves of having a conscientious argument to defend ourselves against any other sin.* He that can go against his conscience in one, cannot plead conscience against any other. For, if the authority of God awes him from one, it will from all. 'How can I do this,...and sin against God?' said Joseph. I doubt not but his answer would have been the same if his mistress had bid him lie for her, as now when she enticed him to lie with her. The ninth commandment would have bound him as well as the seventh. Hence the apostle exhorts not to 'give place to the devil,' Eph. 4:27—implying, that by yielding to one we lose our ground, and what we lose he gains; and let him alone to improve advantages. The little wimble once entered, the workman can then drive a great nail. One sin will widen thy swallow a little, that thou wilt not so much strain at the next.

(3.) Allow one sin and *God will give you over to other sins.* 'Wherefore God also gave them up unto uncleanness,' Rom. 1:24. The Gentiles gave themselves to idolatry, and God gave them up unto other beastly lusts, ver. 22. When Judas began to play the thief, I question whether he meant to turn traitor. No, his treason was a punishment for his thievery. He allowed himself in a secret sin, and God gave him up to one more open and horrid. But,

2. *Answer.* Suppose thou couldst—which is impossible—take one sin into thy bosom, and shut all the rest out, yet the word will tell thee *that thou art a servant to that one sin, and that thou canst not be so and a servant to God at the same time.*

(1.) That thou wouldst be *a servant to that one sin.* 'His servants ye are to whom ye obey,' Rom. 6:16; and consequently the devil's servants, whose kingdom you endeavour to hold up by defending though this one castle, against God

your Maker. Neither will it excuse thee to say thou intendest not so. Haply, covetousness is thy sin, and it is thy profit thou aimest at, not siding with the devil against God. Though this is not thy express end who sinnest, yet it is the end of the sin which thou committest, and of Satan that puts thee upon the work, and so will be charged upon thee at last. The common soldier ordinarily looks no higher than his pay. This is it draws him into the field. Yet they make themselves traitors by assisting him that leads them on against their prince; and it will not serve the turn for them to say they fought for their pay, and not to dethrone him. Ahab sold himself 'to work evil in the sight of the Lord,' 1 Kings 21:20. And yet we read not that he made any express covenant with the devil. But the meaning is, he did that which in effect amounted to no less. He knew that if he sinned he should pay his soul for it, and he would have his lust, notwithstanding he was acquainted with its price; and therefore, interpretatively, he sold his soul that he might enjoy his sin.

(2.) Thou mayest learn from the word *that thou canst not be a servant to any one sin and to God at the same time*. 'No man can serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and mammon,' Matt. 6:24. By mammon is meant one particular lust, covetousness. One body may as well have two souls, as one soul two masters. One soul hath but one love, and two cannot have the supremacy of it. I have heard, indeed, of a wretch that said, 'He had one soul for God, and another for the devil also.' But, if he hath one soul in hell, I am afraid he will not find another for heaven. And one sin will certainly send thee thither as a thousand. 'Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters,' &c., 'shall inherit the kingdom of God.' He doth not only exclude him that is *all these*, but *any* of these. It is certain that all men shall die, but all do not die of the same disease. And as certain all impenitent sinners shall be damned, but one is damned for one sin, and a second for another. But all meet at last in the same hell.

*[Satan tempts to sin by opportunity given for committing it in secret.]*

*Second Instance.* May be thou art tempted to sin *by an opportunity of committing it in secret* — where thou shalt not pay the loss of thy credit for

the purchase of thy pleasure. This was the snare the simple young man's foot was taken in, Prov. 7:19. His strumpet tells him, 'the good man was from home;' the coast was clear. They might drink their stolen waters without fear of being indicted for the theft. Too many, alas! whom the shame of the world keeps from knocking at the fore-door, are easily persuaded to sin if they may slip in at the postern. Saul himself, though ashamed to go to a witch in his princely robe, because he had possessed the world with an opinion of his hatred of that sin by putting such to death, yet is not afraid to go *incognito* to one. Therefore, as it added much to the weight of the temptations with which the devil assaulted Christ, that he came to him in the wilderness and solicited him but to a private, yea secret, acknowledging of him, where none could tell tales what passed between them; so it doth to the glory of that complete victory which Christ got over Satan in them all. And how got Christ it, but by the sword of the word? Take thou, Christian, therefore the same weapon up to defend thyself against the same enemy.

1. The word will tell thee that God is *privy to thy most secret sins*. 'Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance,' Ps. 90:8. They are as plainly seen by him as anything can be by us at noonday. Nay, he doth not only see and know them, but he sets them before him as a mark to shoot his arrows of vengeance at. So, Prov. 15:3, 'the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' As he sees when thou shuttest thy closet to pray in secret, and will reward thy sincerity; *so* he seeth when thou dost it to sin in secret, and will reward thy hypocrisy. Now, if a king sitting on his throne 'scattereth away all evil with his eyes,' Prov. 20:8, how much more powerfully would the eye of God, if seen looking on us, chase away the most secret motion that stirreth in our heart to sin! Better all the world to see thee, than God, who hath the wrong done him by the sin, and therefore concerned in justice to do himself right upon thee. He cannot let any sin go unpunished, because a righteous judge. But there are some sins which require a more immediate hand of divine vengeance than other, and therefore called 'crying sins.' And they are such which, either by the place and power of the offender, man dares not punish, or else so secretly committed, that man cannot

take cognizance of the fact: as Cain's bloody murder of his brother—'Thy brother's blood crieth,' Gen. 4:10.

2. The word will inform thee of *an informer that thou hast in thy own bosom*—thy conscience, I mean, which goes along with thee, and is witness to all thy fine-laid plots, and what it sees it writes down, for it is a court of record. Thou canst not sin so fast but it can write after thee. And the pen with which conscience writes down our sins hath a sharp nib; it cuts deep into the very heart and soul of the sinner. The heathens, their thoughts are said to accuse them, Rom 2:15. And no torment in the world comparable to an accusing conscience. 'The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?' Prov. 18:14. Who? Not men, not angels. *Nullus oculus molestior cuique suo: non est aspectus quem tenebrosa conscientia suffugere magis velit, minus possit* (Bern.)—no eye affrights a sinner more than his own; it is that which he most desires to run from, but least can. Such a poor wretch is like Regulus in his barrel stuck with nails, which way soever he turns himself, *in vulnus inclinatus*, he is pricked and wounded. O read those sad instances of Cain, Saul, and Judas, with others upon Scripture record, who have been on this rack, and thou wilt be afraid to sin where conscience stands by.

3. Consult 'the word,' and thou wilt find that God *usually hath put them to shame in this world, that have promised themselves most secrecy in their sinning*. It is one of God's names to be a 'revealer of secrets,' Dan. 2:47. And among other secrets, he forgets not to 'bring to light' these 'hidden things of darkness, I Cor. 4:5—those sins that are forged in a darker shop than others—and that often in this world. In these men speak what base thoughts they have of God, as if he were a God of the day and not of the night; therefore to vindicate this attribute, and to strike an inward fear thereof into the hearts of men, he doth dig these foxes out of their holes wherein they earth themselves, and expose their sins to the view of the world, which they thought none should have known besides themselves and their partners in the sin. Such an effect had the discovery of Ananias and Sapphira's secret sin. 'And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things,' Acts 5:11, 13.

See therefore how God hath befooled men when they have arted it most in packing their sins, to hide them from the world's eye. No art was wanting in the patriarchs to conceal their unnatural sin against their brother. What a fair probable tale do they tell the old man their father, who believed all, and inquired no further! How true were they among themselves, though so many in the plot; that none of them should blab it out, at one time or another, was strange. How long did this sleep before discovered? And what a strange providence to bring their wickedness to light! So Gehazi played his part cunningly enough, one would think, which made him so bold to come before his master, and impudently lie to his head, not dream the least that he was privy to his sin. Yet this man is found out, and for the garments he got of Naaman by a lie, he had another given of the Lord, which he was to wear as a livery of his sin—for he was clothed with a leprosy—a garment not as others, to hide his shame, but to discover it to all the world—a garment more lasting than the two change of suits he had from the Syrian; for this lasted him all his life; neither was it then worn out, but to be put on by his children after him, II Kings 5:27. In a word, be he never such a saint, yet if he goes about to save himself from the shame of a sin by any secret plot of wickedness, he takes the direct way to bring that upon him which he contrives to keep off. Uriah's blood was shed only as a sinful expedient to save David's credit, that would have suffered if his folly with Bathsheba should become a town-talk. And how sped he with this his plot? Ah, poor man! all comes out to his greater shame. David shall know that God will be as tender of his own honour, as he is of his credit; 'for thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun,' II Sam. 12:12. Yea, David himself at last is sick of his own plot, and was not at first more studious to hide his sin, than he was afterwards willing to acknowledge it; and therefore we find him, Ps. 51, standing as it were in a white sheet, and doing voluntary penance for his sin in all the churches of God so long as the Scriptures shall be read in their assemblies to the end of the world.

[Satan tempts to sin, by the example of others.]

*Third Instance.* May be thou art tempted to sin, *by the example of others.* Indeed, though example be an inartificial argument, yet it is of great force with many, especially if the persons quoted in favour of a sin be either the most, or thought to be the best. When *most*, they carry presently with them those that are false-hearted or weak-headed—as dead fishes and light straws swim with the stream; for which such, *shame* strikes the greatest stroke, and a multitude to bear one company in a sin, takes away the shame of it. Where all go naked, few will blush. They rather are exposed to shame that will be singular, and not do as the rest; as Micaiah, who was made a scorn because he would not tune his pipe to Ahab's ear, nor join with the whole college of his flattering chaplains in their judgment. Or, if they be such who have the reputation for wisdom and piety, then it oft proves a snare to them that are none of the worst; which should make all of high place or eminent grace very circumspect what opinion or practice they espouse. The devil is very brag when we can get such to set their hand to his testimonial. The country will soon ring of this, and their example be shown everywhere to draw in others. Why, such a one is of this opinion, he holds this and doth that, and I hope he is one you reverence and honour. Now, in this case, consult with the word, and it will bring thee off this temptation.

1. The word commands, that we *bring the examples of men*—be they who they will—to the *test of the word*. Is it their *opinion* that is quoted? 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,' Isa. 8:20. It is the light which a man carries in his lantern for which we follow him. That gone we leave him. Now, we see by this scripture, he hath no light that hath not the word to vouch his opinion. So that, neither knows he whither himself goes, nor we whither such a one will lead us. Again, is it the *practice* of another that is laid before thee for thy copy to write after? What saith the word? 'Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil,' Ex. 23:2. Examples are not our warrant, but precepts. Neither will it procure a man a discharge, because he had a precedent in his sin. Adam, indeed, said the woman gave him the apple; but it did not excuse him from paying the reckoning with her. She was indeed the first in the

transgression, yet both met in the punishment. Wouldst thou eat poison because another dares be so bold to be thy taster? Surely his example cannot make the poison less deadly to thee that dost pledge him.

2. The word will tell thee that *the best of saints do not always foot it right*; but too oft are found to tread awry. 'In many things we offend all,' James 3:2. And that is himself subject to step awry, may also lead thee aside. Therefore Paul, as holy a man as lived, when he calls others after him, would have them follow him with their eyes open, to see whether he followed Christ. 'Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ,' I Cor. 11:1. The holiest life of the best saint on earth is but an imperfect translation of the perfect rule of holiness in the word, and therefore must be tried by it. Hence it is the character of sincerity to look to the way rather than the company. 'The highway of the upright is to depart from evil,' Prov. 16:17. He consults with the word, whether the way be good or evil. If he finds it evil, he will not go into it to bear another company, no, though he be a saint. Indeed, God suffers some to step awry, for the proof of others. Thus heresies come, 'that they who are approved may be made manifest,' I Cor. 11:19; Deut. 13:1. 'Thou shalt not hearken to the words of that prophet,...for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord you God with all your heart.' Thus I have given a few instances by which you may see how this sword of the word—as that in the cherubim's hand—may preserve the Christian from venturing to sin upon any pretence whatever it be.

[We are to hide the word in our heart, for our defence against the temptations to sin.]

DIRECTION THIRD. *Hide the word in thy heart.* This was David's preservative. 'Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee,' Ps. 119:11. It was not the Bible in his hand to read it; not the word on his tongue to speak of it; nor in his head to get a notional knowledge of it; but the hiding it in his heart, that he found effectual against sin. It is not meat in the dish, but [in the] stomach, that nourisheth; not physis in the glass, but taken into the body, that purgeth. Now '*heart*' in Scripture, though it be used for all the faculties of the soul, yet,

principally, it is put for the conscience, and the affections.

*First.* Heart in Scripture, is often put *for the conscience*. 'For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things,' 1 John 3:20. That is, if our conscience condemn us justly, to be sure our case is sad, because God knows by us more than we by ourselves, and can charge us with many sins that conscience is not privy to.

Now thus, Christian, labour to hide the word in thy heart—that is, in thy conscience; let it there have a throne, and it will keep thee in a holy awe.

1. Look upon the word *as stamped with divine authority*, the law which the great God gives thee his poor creature to walk by. This impressed on thy conscience would make tremble at the thought of a sin, which is the traitor's dagger that strikes at God himself, by the contempt it casts upon his law. And if some assassins, intending to stab a prince, have been so overawed by a few beams of majesty shot from his mortal brow, that their hearts would not serve them to make the horrid attempt, how much more must the dread of the great God's majesty, darted from his word into the creature's conscience, deter him from practicing any treason against his Maker? 'Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word,' Ps. 119:161. As if he had said, I had rather incur their wrath for my holiness, than make thy word my enemy by my sin.

2. Look upon the word of God *as that law by which thou art to be judged at the great day*. 'God shall judge the secrets of men...according to my gospel,' Rom. 2:16. Then the book of thy conscience shall be opened and compared with this, and accordingly will sentence of life or death be pronounced by Christ thy Judge. Thou mayest know beforehand how it will go with thee at that day. If now thou canst not stand before the word as opened by a poor minister, and applied to thy own conscience, what will you do when it is opened by Christ? Now thy conscience from the word condemns thee, but not finally; for by thy timely repentance and faith, the sentence of this private court may be reversed, and the word which even now bound thee over to death, will acquit and justify thee. But at that great day of assize there will be a final decision of thy cause. If then the

judgement goes against thee, thou art a lost man for ever. No reversing the sentence, not so much as a reprieve to stay the execution. But as the word goeth out of the Judge's mouth, the sinner's face is covered to be immediately delivered into the tormentor's hands. And darest now thou, O man, bid any lust welcome, while thou seest the gibbet set up, and the everlasting chains prepared, in which the word of God dooms every sinner to hang? Canst thou read thy sentence, and yet like thy sin that brings it inevitably upon thy head?

*Second.* Heart, in Scripture, is most frequently taken for *the will and affections*. 'My son, give me thine heart, Prov. 23:26, that is, thy love. So, Deut. 10:12, 'to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' And thus, Christian, *to hide the word in thy heart* would be a rare antidote against the poison of sin. The chains of love are stronger than the chains of fear. Herod's love of Herodias was too hard for his fear of John. *He* had some hold of his conscience that awed him, and bound his hands awhile. But his minion had his affections, and the heart can unbind the hands. His love to her made him shake off his respect to him, and at last embroil his hands in his blood. He that is only prisoner to the command, and bound to his good behaviour by the chains of terror which the threatening claps upon his conscience, may have these knocked off, and then he will shake off his obedience also. But he that loves the word, and the purity of its precepts, cannot turn traitor. When such a one sins, he makes as deep a wound in his own heart as in the law, and therefore trembles at displeasing God. 'I love thy testimonies; my flesh trembleth for fear of thee,' Ps. 119:119, 120. O that is the blessed fear which is the daughter of love. Now, to inflame thy heart with love to the word, consider that it is the *faithfullest monitor* and the *sweetest comforter* thou hast in all the world.

1. It is thy *faithfullest monitor*. It tells thee plainly of all thy faults, and will not suffer sin to lie upon thee, but points to the enemy that hunts for the precious soul's life; it discovers all the designs and plots Satan and thy beloved lusts have against thee. This made David love it so dearly, 'Moreover by them is thy servant warned,' Ps. 19:11. Besides all its other good offices it doth for thee, it warns thee of every danger, and shows thee how to escape it. O



how should this endear it to thee! Did Ahasuerus heap such abundant honour upon Mordecai, who had but once been a means to save his life by discovering a treason plotted against his person? How much more shouldst thou honour and love the good word of God, which hath so oft saved thy soul out of thy spiritual enemies' hands, and doth daily give thee warning how to escape the snares of sin, without which it were impossible for thee to find them out or avoid them. Was David so affected with the wisdom and love of Abigail in the advice she gave him, whereby he was kept from shedding blood in his fury, that he took her into his bosom to be his wife, as a reward of her kindness to him? And shall not the counsel the word hath given thee make thee in love much more with it?

2. The word is thy *sweetest comforter*. When the poor soul is distressed with guilt, and conflicteth with the terrors of divine wrath for his sins, O what miserable comforters then are this world's pleasures and treasures! How little can any creature contribute to the ease of such a one! No more than he who, standing upon the shore, and sees his friend drowning in the sea, but knows not how to reach any help to him. It is the word alone that can walk upon those waves, and come to the soul's relief. This is able to restore the soul, and buoy it up from the bottom of the sea of despair. Though the soul be, with those mariners, 'at its wits' end,' and knows not what to do, yet then the word stands up—as Paul before them—and, as it were, thus speaks to him, 'Poor soul, thou shouldst have hearkened to my voice, and not have loosed from thy harbour by sinning against God, to come to this harm and loss. But, be of good cheer; do thus and thus; repent of thy folly, and speedily turn to thy God in Christ Jesus, and there shall be no loss of thy life.' There is forgiveness with the Lord, therefore he may be feared. And so, in all other troubles, this sends in the saint's comfort. When the world gives him gall, this brings wine; when it meets with nothing but crosses and vexations from that, this sweetly recreates and cheers his spirits. Here the Christian hath those cooling waters with which he quencheth and allays all his sorrows. And you know what a treasure a spring or fountain is accounted in dry or hot countries. Surely, Christian, when thou considerest how many a

sweet draught thou hast had from the wells of salvation, thou wilt cry out with David, 'I will never forget thy precepts: for with them thou hast quickened me,' Ps. 119:93. I do not wonder to see thy enemy endeavour to stop thy well at which thou shouldst draw thy comfort, but that he should be able to persuade thee to do it thyself is strange.

*[We are to plead the promise against  
sin at the throne of grace.]*

DIRECTION FOURTH. *Plead the promise against sin at the throne of grace.* He that hath law on his side, we say, may sue the king; and he that hath a promise on his side may, with a humble boldness, commence his suit with God. As the veins in the body have arteries to attend them with spirits, so precepts in the word have promises to inspirit the Christian, and empower him with strength for his duty. Is there a command to pray? There is also a promise to enable for prayer, Zech. 12:10; Rom. 8:26. Doth God require us to give him our heart? 'My son, give me thine heart,' Prov. 23:26. The promise saith, 'A new heart also will I give you,' Eze. 36:26. Doth he command us to mortify our corruptions? And doth he not promise, 'Sin shall not have dominion over us?' Rom. 6:14. Now, to obtain this promise, thou must plead and press it believingly at the throne of grace. *Quod lex imperat, fides impetrat*—what the precept commands, the prayer of faith begs and receives. Look, therefore, thou takest God in thy way. First besiege heaven, and then fear not overcoming sin and hell, when thou hast conquered heaven. Now thou warrest at God's cost, and not thy own. He that sets thee on will bring thee off. David was a man at arms, and could handle his weapon against this enemy as well as another, yet dares not promise himself success till he hath made God his second. 'Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me,' Ps. 119:133. But if thou thinkest to steal a victory by the strength of thy own resolution, expect an overthrow. And it will be a mercy thou shouldst be so served; for a foil will learn thee humility for the future, but a victory would increase thy pride. And that is a sad victory, when one sin carries away the spoils which thou hast taken from another. Jehoshaphat took the right course to speed,

who, though he had almost a million men he could draw into the field—and that without draining his garrisons—yet bespeaks God's help, as if he had not a man to fight for him: 'We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee,' II Chr. 20:12. If an Alexander, or a Cæsar, had been at the head of such an army, I warrant you they would not have known what to have done, and not doubted all before them. But Jehoshaphat, a holy humble man, was better instructed. He knew a host signifieth nothing which hath not the Lord of hosts with them; and that the most valiant can find neither heart nor hand in the day of battle without his leave who made both. Nor wilt thou, Christian, be able to use thy grace in an hour of temptation, without new grace from God to excite and enforce what thou hast already received from him. And if thou expectest this from him, he expects to hear from thee. Neither speaks it God unwilling to give what he hath promised, because he pays not the debt of the promise until it be sued for at the throne of grace. No, God takes this method, only to secure his own glory in the giving, and also to greaten our comfort by receiving it in this way of prayer, which is a fit expedient to attain both.

#### BRANCH FOURTH.

[DIRECTIONS *how to use the sword of the word*  
AGAINST AFFLICTIONS, *outward or inward.*]

I come now to give some little help, by way of direction, how the Christian may use this sword of the word for his defence against the fourth enemy and the last, but not the least—*an army made up of many bands of afflictions, which from without invade, and from within distress, him.* The Christian in this world stands not as you may see some houses, so fenced and shadowed with hills or woods that the wind beats but upon one side of them. No, he lies open to storms and tempests from all quarters of the heaven. We read of a strange kind of wind that at once 'smote the four corners of the house' in which Job's children were. Truly, thus the Christian's afflictions beset him round: no corner left unassaulted. And very often he is smitten on all sides at once; crossed in his

estate, feeble in his body, and afflicted in his spirit all at once. And when so many seas of sorrows meet, it is no easy work for the poor Christian's heart to stand unbroken amidst the concurrent violence of their waves. Though this is most certain, that those dejections and perturbations with which the minds of the best saints are so discomposed and ruffled, yea sometimes dismayed and distressed, cannot be charged upon any deficiency of the gospel's principles for their support and comfort; but rather on their own impotence and unskillfulness to apply them in their several exigencies. My present task is to drop a few words of counsel to the weak Christian—how he may use and wield this sword of the word for his defence and comfort in any affliction without, or distress of spirit from within, that may assault him. And here I must not descend to particular cases—that were a voluminous work, and not so proper for this place—but only content myself with some general rules, that may be applicable to all. Now the cordial and restorative part of the word—that, I mean, which principally prepared and provided for the soul's comfort in all its discomforts and distresses—is contained in the promises. These well studied and improved, can alone make thee a comfortable Christian. Now, if thou wouldst improve the promises, so as not to be run down and trampled upon by Satan in any day of distress that comes upon thee, but comfortably lift up thy head in hope and confidence above the waves of thy present sorrows, then hearken to what follows in a few general rules or DIRECTIONS, prepared for thy help. FIRST. Let it be thy first and chief care to get thy interest in and right to the promises cleared up. SECOND. Take some pains to sort the promises and reduce them to their proper heads. THIRD. Observe the latitude of the promises. FOURTH. Be much in meditation on the promises. FIFTH. Plead the promises at the throne of grace. SIXTH. When thou hast sued the promise, act thy faith on the power and truth of God for the performance of it.

[*We must see to have our interest  
in the promises made clear to us.*]

DIRECTION FIRST. Let it be thy first and chief care to *get thy interest in and right to the promises cleared up.* For this is the hinge on which the

great dispute betwixt between thee and Satan will move in the day of trouble, except the case can be resolved before that overtakes thee. O, it is sad for a poor Christian to stand at the door of the promise in the dark night of affliction afraid to draw the latch! Whereas, he should then come as boldly for shelter as a child into his father's house. 'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast,' Isa. 26:20. He that hath his title to the promise proved from the word to his own conscience, will not be wrangled easily out of his comfort. Naboth would not part with his inheritance for the pleasure or displeasure of a king; but stands up in the defence of his right to death. And so resolves Job: 'Till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me,' Job 27:5. This was his evidence for heaven. And therefore Satan used his best wits to make him throw it up, but never could effect it. His title was clear, and he will not be disputed out of it by Satan; no, nor afraid to vouch it before God himself, when God in his providence seemed most to disown him, and to handle him as an enemy: 'Thou knowest that I am not wicked!' Job 10:7. He saith not that he hath no sin, but in a humble appeal to God defends his state, that he is 'not wicked.' And this kept the chariot of his hope on its wheels all along his sad sufferings; that it was never quite overthrown, though sometimes it seemed to totter and shake.

*[How our interest in the promises  
may be made clear to us.]*

*Question.* But how shall I know whether I have a right to the promises?

*Answer First.* Inquire *whether thou art united to Christ by faith or no.* The promises are not a common for swine to root in; but Christ's sheep-walk, for his flock to feed in. 'And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise,' Gal. 3:29. The promise is the jointure, and cannot be had but by taking the person of Christ in marriage. And faith is the grace by which the soul gives his consent to take Christ as he is offered in the gospel. It is called, therefore, a receiving of Christ, John 1:12. There is no doubt but thou hast often been wooed in the ministry of the word by Christ's

spokesmen, and that question hath been put to thee for Christ, which was once to Rebekah, concerning her taking Isaac to husband, 'Wilt thou go with this man?' They have from the word set him forth in his glories before thee, who he is, and what he brings. Thou hast heard the articles upon which he is most willing to proceed to marriage, and take thee as his beloved into his bed and bosom. As,

1. That thou *send away all other lovers which have had any pretensions to thee.* For he will endure no competitor or partner with him in thy affections. The names of Baalim must be taken out of Israel's mouth, and then God marries himself to her, Hosea 2:17, 18.

2. That thou *like his law as well as his love.* Christ will not be husband where he may not be master also.

3. That thou take him for better and for worse, *with his cross as well as with his crown*—to suffer for him as well as to reign with him. Now, what entertainment hath this motion found with thee? Dost thou, upon the discovery made of Christ, take liking in his person? Is he transcendently amiable in thy eye, and precious to thy soul, so as to inflame thee with an insatiable desire of him? Canst thou freely pack away thy once darling lusts to gain him? and leap out of the arms of all thy carnal delights and sinful pleasures, to be taken into his embraces? Art thou as willing he should be thy Lord, as thy love? and as content to bow to his sceptre as lie in his bosom? In a word, art thou so enamoured with him, that thou now canst not live without him, nor enjoy thyself except thou mayest enjoy him? Thy heart is wounded with the darts which his love and loveliness have shot into it, and he himself carries the balm about him which alone can heal it. Let him now require what he will at thy hands, nothing he commands shall be denied. If he bids thee leave father and father's house, thou wilt go after him, though it be to the other end of the world. If he tells thee though must be base and poor in the world for his sake, thou art resolved to beg with him rather than reign without him, yea die for him than live without him. Come forth, thou blessed of the Lord, and put on the bracelets of the promises; they are the love-tokens which I a from Christ's hand to deliver, and in his name to promise marriage to thee. Thou art the happy soul, if there be one on earth, that Christ betroths to

himself. Languish no longer in thy unbelieving fears. For thy comfort know it is not Christ's custom to entangle soul's affections, and when he hath got their love, then to deny his to them, and cast them off.

*Answer Second.* Inquire *what effect the promises have on thy soul.* All who have right to the promises are transformed by the promise. As Satan shed his venomous seed into the heart of Eve by a promise, 'Ye shall not surely die,' Gen. 3:4—whereupon she presently conceived with sin, and was assimilated into the likeness of his diabolical nature, wicked as was the devil himself—so God useth the promises of the gospel—called therefore the 'incorruptible seed'—to beget his own image and likeness in the hearts of his elect. 'Exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature,' II Peter 1:4, that is, be partakers of such heavenly holy qualities and dispositions as will make you like God himself. The promises of the gospel have in them a fitness, and, when by the Spirit of God applied, a virtue to purify the heart, as well as to pacify the conscience. 'Now ye are clean,' saith Christ to his disciples, 'through the word which I have spoken unto you,' John 15:3. Lay, therefore, thy hand upon thy heart, and speak freely, poor soul. Have the promises had a sanctifying transforming virtue upon thee? What of God dost thou find in thy heart more since thy acquaintance with the promises than before? Some use promises as a protection for sin rather than an argument against it. As sin takes occasion by the commandment to work in the carnal heart all manner of concupiscence, so many are from the promise emboldened to sin more freely—like mountebanks that drink poison in confidence of their antidote. Now which way works the promise upon thy heart? If the seal of the promise leaves not the impress of God's image on thee, it ratifies no good to thee. If it produceth no holiness in thee, it brings no joy to thee. In a word, if the promise be not to thee a seed of grace, it is no evidence for glory. But if thou canst find it leaves the superscription of God upon thee, then it assures the love and favour of God to thee.

*Answer Third.* Inquire *in what posture thy heart stands to the word of command.* The promise, may be, is sweet to thy palate. This thou rollest like a lump of sugar under thy tongue, but are

not thy teeth set against the command as if it were gall and wormwood? Thou smilest on the promise, but when put in mind of thy duty to the command, then haply thy countenance is changed, and a frown sits on thy brow, as if God were some austere master that breaks his servants' backs with heavy burdens. And thou couldst wish, with all thy heart, that a dispensation might be procured for thee to break now and then a command without forfeiting thy claim to the promise; but, because that is not to be hoped for, thou art so kind to thyself, as to give thyself leave to bow down to some idol of pleasure or profit that thou hast set up in thy heart, and hopest God will be merciful to thee, because it is only in this or that one way thou makest bold with him in. If this shoe fit thy foot—this be the true character of thy heart—which God forbid! thou hast no one lot belongs to thee in the lap of the promise. We have a comfortable promise, Ps. 50:15 but a guard is set about it, that no disobedient wretch should gather its sweet fruit: 'But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do,...that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth, seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee,' ver. 16, 17. On the other hand, if thou canst in truth say that it is not the holy command thou art offended with, but with thyself, because thou canst obey it no more perfectly—that it is not grievous to thee to keep, but break the laws of God; and, though thy foot too often slips, yet thy heart cleaves to them, and will not let thee lie where thou fallest, but up thou gettest to mend thy pace, and mind thy steps better—for thy comfort know, poor soul, this sincere respect thou hast to the commandment is a most comfortable evidence for thy true title to the promise. When David was able to vouch his love to the command he did not question his title to the promise; Ps. 119:113, there he asserts his sincere affection to the precepts: 'I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love.' Mark, he doth not say he is *free* from vain thoughts, but he *hates* them. He likes their company no better than one would a pack of thieves that break into his house. Neither saith he that he *fully kept* the law; but he *loved* the law, even when he failed exact obedience to it. Now from this testimony his conscience brought in for his love to the law, his faith acts clearly and strongly on the promise

in the next words, 'thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word,' Ps. 119:114.

*Answer Fourth.* If thou questionest thy right to one promise, inquire *whether thou canst not discern thy interest in a second*, which, if thou canst, thou mayest conclude thou hast a right to that other thou didst doubt of, yea and to all the rest. For, as there is a concatenation of graces—he that finds one hath all—so of promises, he that is heir to one hath right to all. May be, when thou readest that promise, 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God,' Matt. 5:8, the remainders of corruption, not yet fully mortified in thy heart, scare thee from applying it to thyself as thy portion. But, for its next-neighbour promise, 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled,' ver. 6, haply thou feelest such a pinching sense of thy guilt, and want of holiness, as will enforce thee to acknowledge, that if ever man in a burning fever thirsted for drink, or one half-starved desired food, then dost thou crave and cry for the righteousness of Christ to justify thy person, and grace from Christ to sanctify thy nature,—so that thou canst not but see this promise spoken to thee. And if this belongs to thee, then the former, and all the other with it. For they are branches in the same covenant, which God doth not dismember, but gives it entire with all the branches growing on it to be the believer's portion. Hence it is they are called 'heirs of promise,' Heb. 6:17. Not heirs of this promise or that, but 'of promise'—that is, of the covenant, which comprehends all the promises of the gospel. So that, as he hath hold of the man's whole body that hath fast hold of his hand—though it be but one member of it—because it is knit to the rest, and by it he may draw the rest to him; so, if thou hast hold of any one promise thou hast hold of all other, and mayest infer thy right from this to them. And as one may draw out the wine of a whole hogshead at one tap, so may a poor soul derive the comfort of the whole covenant to himself through one promise which he is able to own and apply. 'We know,' saith Saint John, 'that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren,' 1 John 3:14. Eternal life is the cream and top of all covenant-blessings. Now, a poor Christian may, upon the inward feeling of this one grace of love in his heart—being the condition annexed to this promise—know that he

is in a state of life and happiness. And why? Because wherever this grace is in truth there are all other saving graces. Christ is not divided in these, and consequently he that can apply this promise hath a right to all.

*[We must sort the promises under their proper heads.]*

DIRECTION SECOND. Take some pains *to sort the promises, as thou readest the Scriptures, and reduce them to their proper heads*. There is great multiplicity of trials and temptations which God is pleased to exercise his saints with: 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous,' Ps. 34:19. And there is variety of promises provided to administer suitable comfort to their several sorrows. The Scriptures are a spiritual physic-garden, where grows an herb for the cure of every malady. Now it were of admirable use to the Christian if he would gather some of every sort, such especially as he hath found most to affect his heart, of which he can say with Origen, '*hæc est scriptura mea*,'—this portion of Scripture is mine, and then to write such down, as the physician doth his receipts for this and that disease, by themselves. May it not shame the Christian to see a scholar know every book in his great library, and what it treats on, so that he can presently go to any one of them all, and make use of their notions as he hath occasion; and that the Christian, who hath but one book to advise with, and that none of the greatest bulk, but sufficient as to make him wise unto salvation, so to make him comfortable in every condition that can befall him, should not be acquainted, if not with all, yet with some choice promises of every sort, to which he may be able to resort for counsel and comfort in the day of his distress? Now the best time for this work is when thou art yet at ease, in the lap of health and prosperity. The apothecary gathers his simples in the spring which he useth in winter. The mariner provides his tackling in the harbour before he puts forth to sea. And the wise Christian will store himself with promises in health for sickness, and in peace for future perils. It is too late for a man to think of running home for his cloak when on his way he is caught in a storm. 'A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished,' Prov. 22:3.

*[We must observe the comprehensiveness  
of the promises.]*

DIRECTION THIRD. Observe the *full latitude of the promises*. The covenant of grace comprehends the weak Christian as well as the strong, 'if children, then heirs,' Rom. 8:17. Not if children grown to this age, or that stature, but 'if children.' Christ hath in his family children of all sizes, some little, and others tall Christians. If thou beest a child, though in the cradle, the promise is thy portion. 'All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen,' II Cor. 1:20. 'There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,' Rom. 8:1. See here, it is the state and relation the creature stands in, that gives him his title to the promise. Some saints have more grace from Christ than others, and so have more skill to improve these promises than their weaker brethren, whereby their present profits and incomes from the promise are greater. But they have no more interest in Christ than the other, and consequently the title of the weak Christian is as true to the promise as [that] of the strong. Shall the foot say, 'Because I am the lowest member of the body, therefore the tongue will not speak for me, or the head take care of me?' We will grant thee to be of the least and lowest rank of Christians; yet thou art in Christ, as the foot is in the body. And Christ hath made provision in the promise for all that are in him. We disfigure the promises when we make them look askew, with an eye upon one saint and not on another, whereas they belong to all: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,' John 3:36. Who now is there meant? Only he that believes above doubting? I trow not. He that bids us receive the 'weak in faith,' will not himself reject them.

*[We must be much in meditation of the promises.]*

DIRECTION FOURTH. Be *much in meditation of the promises*. Whence is it that the poor Christian is so distressed with the present affliction that lies upon him, but because he museth more on his trouble than on the promise? There is that in the promise which would recreate his spirit, if he could but fix his thoughts upon it. When the crying child once fastens on the teat, and begins to draw down the milk, then it leaves wrangling, and falls asleep at the breast. Thus the Christian

ceaseth complaining of his affliction when he gets hold on the promise, and hath the relish of its sweetness upon his heart. 'In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul,' Ps. 94:19. When a swarm of bees dislodge themselves they are all in a confusion, flying here and there without any order, till at last they are hived again. Then the uproar is at an end and they fall to work peaceably as before. Truly, even so the Christian will find it in his own heart. God, in the promise, is the soul's hive. Let the Christian dislodge his thoughts thence, and presently they run riot, and fly up and down as in an affright at the apprehension of the present affliction or temptation lies upon him, till he can recollect himself, and settle his heart again upon the promise, and then he recovers his former peace and composure. Hence the Spirit of God sounds a retreat to the troubled thoughts of afflicted saints, and calls them off from poring on that which roils them, into God, where alone they can be quiet and at ease. 'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him,' Ps. 37:7. And David, finding his soul, like the dove while flying over the waters, without all repose, calls it back into the meditation of God and his promise, as the only ark where it could find rest. 'Return unto thy rest, O my soul,' Ps. 116:7. The Christian's heart is of that colour which his most abiding constant thoughts dye into. Transient flitting thoughts, be they comfortable or sad, do not much work upon the soul, or alter its temper into joy or sorrow. Neither poison kills, nor food nourisheth, that doth not stay in the body. No, then the affliction soaks into the heart, and embitters the Christian's spirit into perplexing fears and disconsolate dejections, when his thoughts lie steeping in his sorrows from day to day—when, like her in the gospel, he is 'bowed down with a spirit of infirmity,' that he cannot raise his heart from the thought of his cross and trial to meditate on any promise that should refresh him. Such there are, God knows, whom Satan and their own pensive hearts keep such close prisoners, that no comfortable meditation is suffered to speak or stay with them.

And again, on the other hand *then* the promise works effectually, when it is bound upon the Christian's heart, when he wakes with it and walks with it. No pain he feels, no danger he fears, can pluck him from his breast; but, as Samson went on his way eating of the

honeycomb, so he feeding on the sweetness of the promise. Here is a Christian that will sing when another sighs, will be able to spend that time of his affliction in praising God, which others—whose thoughts are scattered and split upon what they suffer—too commonly bestow on fruitless complaints of their misery, and discontented speeches which reflect dishonourably upon God himself. Let it be thy care therefore, Christian, to practice this duty of meditation. Do not only exchange a few words with the promise, as one does with a friend passing by at his door. But invite the promise, as Abraham did the angels, Gen. 18, not to pass away till thou hast more fully enjoyed it. Yea, constrain it as the disciples did Christ, to stay with thee all the night of thy affliction. This is to ‘acquaint’ ourselves indeed with God, the ready way to be at peace. This is the way the saints have taken to raise their faith to such a pitch, as to triumph over the most formidable calamities. ‘My beloved,’ saith the spouse, ‘shall lie all night between my breasts.’ That is, when benighted with any sorrowful afflicting providence, she shall pass away the night comfortably in the meditation of his love and loveliness, his beauty and sweetness. Never will the Christian come to any kindly heat of comfort in his spirit, till he takes this Abishag of the promise into his bosom to cherish him. And this will do it indeed. A soul that hath learned this heavenly art of meditation will feel no more the extremity of any affliction, than you do the sharpness of the cold weather when you are sitting by a good fire, or lying in a warm bed. It was a notable speech of Julius Palmer, an English martyr: ‘To them,’ saith he, ‘that have their mind fettered to the body as a thief’s foot is to a pair of stocks, it is hard to die. But if any be able to separate his soul from his body, then by the help of God’s Spirit, it is no more mastery for such a one than to drink this cup.’ He meant, if the creature be able to elevate his mind and thoughts above his sufferings by heavenly meditation on the ‘great and precious promises,’ then it were nothing to suffer. Such a one, his soul is in heaven; and a soul in heaven feels little what the flesh meets with on earth. Here, O ye Christians, is the most glorious prospect to be seen on this side heaven!

When the soul stands upon this Pisgah of meditation, looking by an eye of faith through the

perspective of the promise upon all the great and precious things laid up by a faithful God for him, it is easy to despise the world’s love and wrath. But alas! it is hard for us to get up thither, who are so short-breathed and soon tired with a few steps up this mount of God. O let us all cry out, as once David, ‘Lead me to the rock that is higher than I!’ And with him in another place, ‘Who will bring me into the strong city?...wilt thou, O God?’ So, who will lift us up to this high, holy hill of meditation, higher than all the surging waves that dash upon us from beneath, where we may see all our creature-enjoyments drowned, yet ourselves not wetshod? Wilt thou, O God? Yes, our God would do this for us, would we but shake off our sloth, and show, by parting with our mandrakes to purchase his company, that we highly prize the same. My meaning is—would we but frequently retire from the world, and bestow some of that time in secret waiting upon God which we lavish out upon inferior pleasures and entertainments of the creature, we should invite God’s Holy Spirit to us. Let a wicked man set up a lust for his thoughts to dally with, and the devil will soon be at his elbow to assist him. And shall we not believe the Holy Spirit as ready to lend his helping hand to a holy meditation? Doubtless he is. Spread thou thy sails and the Spirit will fill them with his heavenly breath. Be but thou the priest to lay the wood and sacrifice in order, and fire from heaven will come down upon it. Be thou but careful to provide fuel—gather from the promises matter for meditation, and set thy thoughts awork upon it—and the Spirit of God will kindle thy affections. ‘While I was musing,’ saith David, ‘the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue,’ Ps. 39:3. Isaac met his bride in the fields; and the gracious soul her beloved, when she steps aside, to walk with the promise in her solitary thoughts.

*[We must plead the promises at the throne of grace.]*

DIRECTION FIFTH. *Plead the promises at the throne of grace.* This must not be disjointed at the former. Indeed, as the ingredients of an excellent receipt do not work the cure severally, but as tempered together; so these directions, being social means, must not be severed, but jointly observed. And this direction I am now speaking to, besides a universal influence it hath

upon all the other, is linked by an especial affinity to the former. In vain do we charge the gun, if we intend not to let it off. Meditation filleth the heart with heavenly matter, but prayer gives the discharge and pours it forth upon God, whereby he is overcome to give the Christian his desired relief and succour. The promise is a bill or bond, wherein God makes himself a debtor to the creature. Now, though it is some comfort to a poor man that hath no money at present to buy bread with, when he reads his bills and bonds, to see that he hath a great sum owing him, yet this will not supply his present wants and buy him bread. No, it is the putting his bond in suit must do this. By meditating on the promise thou comest to see there is support in, and deliverance out of, affliction engaged for. But none will come till thou commencest thy suit, and by the prayer of faith callest in the debt. 'Your heart shall live that seek God,' Ps. 69:32. 'They looked unto him, and were lightened,' Ps. 34:5. God expects to hear from you, before you can expect to hear from him. If thou restrainest prayer, it is no wonder the mercy promised is retained. Meditation, it is like the lawyer's studying the case in order to his pleading it at the bar. When, therefore, thou hast viewed the promise, and affected thy heart with the riches of it, then ply thee to the throne of grace, and spread it before the Lord. Thus David, 'Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope,' Ps. 119:49.

*[We must act our faith on the power and truth of God for the performance of the promises.]*



DIRECTION SIXTH. When thou hath sued the promise, *act thy faith on the power and truth of God for the performance of it*; and that against sense and reason, which rise up to discourage thee. For, as thy faith is feeble or strong on these, so wilt thou draw little or much sweetness from the promises. The saints' safety lies in the strength and faithfulness of God who is the promiser; but the present comfort and repose of an afflicted soul is fetched in by faith relying on God as such. Hence it is, though all believers are out of danger when in the saddest condition that can befall them, yet too many, alas! of them are under fears and dejections of spirit, because their faith acts weakly on a mighty God, timorously and suspiciously on a faithful God. 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?' Matt. 8:26. You see the leak at which the water came in to sink their spirits; they had 'little faith.' It is not what God is in himself, but what our apprehensions at present are of God, that pacifies and comforts a soul in great straits. If a man fear the house will fall on his head in a storm, though it be as unmovable as a rock, yet that will not ease his mind till he thinks it so. Were a man under the protection of never so faithful a friend, yet so long as his head is full of fears and jealousies to the contrary, that he will at last leave and cast him off, this man must needs have an uncomfortable life, though without cause. You see then of what importance it is to keep up the vigour and vivacity of thy faith on the power and truth of the promises. And if thou meanest to do this, banish sense and reason from being thy counsellors. How came Abraham not to stagger in his faith, though the promise was so strange? The apostle resolves us: 'He considered not his own body now dead,' Rom. 4:19. And what made Zacharias reel? He made sense his counsellor, and thought he was too old for such news to be true. This is the bane of faith, and consequently of comfort in affliction. We are too prone to carry our faith, with Thomas, at our fingers' ends; and to trust God no further than our hand of sense can reach. It is not far that sense can reach; and but little further that reason's purblind eye can see. God is oft on his way to perform a promise and bring joyful news to his afflicted servants, when sense and reason conclude their case is desperate.

These three, *sense, reason, and faith*, are distinct, and must not be confounded. Some

things we know by sense which we do not understand the reason of, as the sympathy of the lodestone with iron —why it draws that the baser metal, and not gold; and why the mariner's needle espouses the north point rather than any other. Some things we apprehend by reason that are not discerned by sense—as the magnitude of the sun's body to exceed the circumference of the earth, which, the eye being judge, may be almost covered with one's hat; and other things clear to faith, that dunce and pose both sense and reason. Paul knew by faith, in that dismal sea-storm where all of being saved was taken away—that is, sense and reason being judges—not a man should lose his life. 'Be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me,' Acts 27:25. When the angel smote Peter on the side, and bade him 'arise up quickly...and follow me,' he did not allow sense and reason to reply and cavil at the impossibility of the thing. How can I walk that am in fetters? Or to what purpose when an iron gate withstands us? But he riseth, and his chains fall off—he follows, and the iron gate officiously opens itself to them.

Say not, poor Christian, 'It is impossible to bear this affliction, or pass that temptation.' Let faith follow the promise, and God will loose these knots that sense and reason tie. Luther bids, *crucifige illud verbum, quare?*—crucify that word, wherefore? Obey the command, and ask not a reason why God enjoins it. It is necessary to bid the Christian, in great afflictions and temptations, to crucify the word *quomodo?*—*how* shall I go through this trouble—hold out in that assault? Away with this 'how shall I?' Hath not the great God who is faithful given thee promises enough to ease thy heart of these needless fears and cares, in that he tells thee, 'He will never leave thee or forsake thee, his grace shall be sufficient for thee?' Nothing 'shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' And a hundred more comfortable assurances from the lip of truth to stand betwixt thee and all harm. Why then dost thou trouble thyself about this improbability and that mountainous difficulty that sense and carnal reason heave up and interpose to eclipse thy comfort from thy approaching deliverance? 'Shut the windows, and the house will be light,' as the Jewish proverb saith. Judge not by sense, but by faith on an

omnipotent God; and these bugbears will not scare thee. *Credere improbabilia vigoris est intellectus, sicut amare damnosa et ignominiosa vigoris est affectus.* (Parisiensis, De Fide)—it is the highest act of our understanding to believe those things which seem most improbable; as it is the highest act of love, for Christ's sake to take pleasure in those things that bring pain and shame with them. For as in the latter we deny ourselves the satisfaction of our carnal desires, which goes near to flesh and blood; so, in the former, we deny our carnal reasonings, that would be disputing against God's power and strength.

### USE OR APPLICATION.


[EXHORTATION TO MINISTERS, *to whom this sword is specially committed.*]

To the ministers—into your hand this sword of the word is given in an especial manner. Unto you the ministry of it is committed. God hath not left it at random to all; that who will may publicly preach the gospel. That which is everybody's work is nobody's. He hath therefore set up a standing office with officers in his church, on whom he hath laid this burden, and from whom he expects an account. He 'hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation,' II Cor. 5:19—as a prince commissionates this or that man to be his ambassador—'O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust,' I Tim. 6:20. See here, and tremble at the charge which is deposited in your hands. You are *ambassadors* from the great God to treat with poor sinners concerning their eternal peace upon those articles which are contained in the gospel. You are his *under-workmen*, to rear up his temple in the hearts of men, and to lay every stone by the line and rule of this word. His *stewards*, to give his family their portions in due season, and all your provision to be taken out of this store-house. In a word, you are his *shepherds*, to lead and feed his flock, and that in no other than these 'green pastures.' Now, if the peace be not concluded, the ambassador is sure to be called to an account where the fault lies. If the house be not built, or go to decay, woe to the negligent workman. If the family starve, what reckoning will the

steward make? If the sheep wander, or die of the rot through thy neglect, who shall pay for the loss but the idle shepherd? Now, in order to the discharge of this your public trust, I shall only point at two duties incumbent on you both, with a reference to this word left in your hands—one to be performed in your study, the other in your pulpit.

*First Duty.* In your study *acquaint yourselves with the word of God.* That which may pass for diligence in a private Christian's reading and search into the Scripture, may be charged as negligence upon the minister. The study of the Scriptures is not only a part of our general calling in common with him, but of our particular also, in which we are to be exercised from one end of the week to the other. The husbandman doth not more constantly go forth with his spade and mattock, to perform his day labour in the field, than the minister is to go and dig in this mine of the Scripture. He is not to read a chapter now and then as his worldly occasions will permit; or steal a little time from his other scholarly studies to look into the Bible *in transitu*—in passing, and bid it farewell. But it must be his standing exercise—his plodding work. All other must stoop to this. Suppose thou shouldst know what Plato, Aristotle, with the rest of the princes of worldly learning, have written, and hadst encircled all the arts within thy circumference, but art unskilful in the word of righteousness, thou wouldst be Paul's unlearned person—as unfit to be a minister as he that hath read all the body of the law is to be a physician if ignorant of this art. I do not here intend to nourish the vain conceit of those sons of ignorance who think human learning unnecessary for a minister's furniture. Truly, without this, we should soon come to our old mumpsimus, and run into the barbarism of former times. I have read of one Beda, that dissuaded Francis I., a French king—and that when learned Budæus was present—from his princely resolution of setting up professors of languages in his university, saying, 'The Greek tongue was the fountain of all heresies;' but the man was found to understand not a word of Greek himself. Indeed, few or none will speak against learning but those that have not so much of it as to make them understand its use. I dare not bid our ministers, as some fanatics have done, burn all their books but the Bible. No; but

I would exhort them to prefer it above all their other books, and to direct all their other studies to furnish them with Scripture knowledge. As the bee that flies over the whole garden, and brings all the honey she gets from every flower therein into her hive; so should the minister run over all his other books, and reduce their notions for his help in this. As the Israelites offered up the jewels and ear-rings borrowed of the Egyptians to the service of the tabernacle, *benedicta philosophorum sunt peculia Christianorum*—the good saying of philosophers are the property of Christians. And certainly there are such jewels to be borrowed even from them, as may become the ear of the Christian, so they be refined and gospellized. Thus the captive virgin, Deut. 21, when her head was shaved, her nails pared, and her garment changed, might be taken into an Israelite's bosom. Religion and learning revived together. The light which Erasmus brought into the schools helped Luther's labours in the church.

But, to return to the exhortation in hand. O, let us that are ministers of the gospel give up ourselves to the study of the word. We are, as one well calls us, but 'younger brethren' to the apostle. Ministerial gifts were left them by Christ, as the inheritance by the father to his eldest son and heir. But we must work for our living. They had their knowledge of the word, as Jacob his venison, brought to their hand without hunting; but if we will know the mind of God, we must trace it out by our diligence; but ever taking prayer in our company. This I am sure was Paul's charge to Timothy, 'Give attendance to reading,' 1 Tim. 4:13. Follow thy book close, O Timothy, and 'Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them,' ver. 15. ☸☸☸  
, in his *totus sis*—be wholly taken up therewith. And mark why: 'That thy profiting may appear to all;' that is, that thou mayest appear to be a growing preacher to those that hear thee. O how shall the people grow if the minister doth not? And how shall he grow, if he doth not daily drink in more than he pours out? That minister must needs spend upon the stock that hath no comings in from a constant trade in his study. If the nurse doth not feed, and that more than another, she may soon bring herself and child into a consumption. As we would not therefore see the souls that hang on our breasts languish for want of milk, or our-

selves faint in our work, let us endeavour our recruits be suitable to our expense. Study and pray: pray and study again. Think not your work is done for all the week when the Sabbath is past. Take a little breath, and return to thy labour; as the sèedsman sits down at the land's end to rest himself a while, and then rises up to go before the plough again. We have reason to be more choice of our time than others, because it is less our own. There is none in thy parish but have a share in it. We are thieves to our people's souls when we do not husband it to their best advantage. 'All...are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas;' yours for the service of your faith. Is the parent bound to husband his estate and time for the provision of his children? And should not the spiritual father have as natural affection to his people? How great a labour this must needs be both to mind and body, did they understand, they would both more pity, and encourage, his minister in his work. God move your hearts to it whom he hath blessed with faithful labourers. Help them in their study for you, by easing them of their worldly cares for themselves. Some people may thank themselves that their provision is so mean, by being accessory to the minister's distractions in his work and diversion from his calling. For, by their oppression or purloining his livelihood, they force him in a manner to turn worldling; and the time which he should spend in providing bread for their souls is laid out to get bread for his family's bodies.

*Second Duty.* In the pulpit *use no other sword but this, and handle it faithfully*. Remember whose errand thou bringest, and deliver it, 1. Purely. 2. Freely.

1. Use the sword of the word *purely*. And that in a threefold respect: (1.) Pure from error. (2.) Pure from passion. (3.) Pure from levity and vanity.

(1.) *Pure from error*. Think it not enough your text is Scripture, but let your whole sermon be also such—I mean agreeable to it. Thou art an ambassador, and as such bound up in thy instructions. Take heed of venting thy own dreams and fancies in God's name. 'He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully,' Jer. 23:28—that is, purely, without embasing or mingling it with his own dreams. So he expounds himself, 'What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord.' All is chaff besides the

pure word of God; and what hath it to do to be blended with it? Such a one may fear lest God from heaven should give him the lie while he is in the pulpit. O stamp not God's image on thine own coin. We live in high-flown times. Many people are not content with truths that lie plain in the Scripture. And some, to please their wanton palates, have sublimated their notions so high, till they have flown out of the sight of the Scripture, and unawares run themselves with others into dangerous errors. Be well assured it is a truth, before thou acquaintest thy people with it. If thou wilt play the mountebank, choose not the pulpit for thy stage. Make not experiments upon the souls of thy people, by delivering what is doubtful and hath not abode the trial of the furnace. Better feed thy people with sound doctrine, though plain meal; than that thou shouldst, with an outlandish dish, light on a wild gourd that brings death into their pot.

(2.) *Pure from passion.* The pulpit is an unseemly place to vent our discontent and passions in. Beware of this strange fire. The man of God must be gentle and meek, and his words with meekness of wisdom. The oil makes the nail drive without splitting the board. The word never enters the heart more kindly, than when it falls most gently. 'Ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness,' Ps. 45:4. Be as rough to thy people's sins as thou canst, so thou beest gentle to their souls. Dost thou take the rod of reproof into thine hand? Let them see that love, not wrath, give the blow. Nurses are careful that they do not heat their milk, knowing that it will breed ill blood in the child that sucks it. The word preached comes indeed best from a warm heart, but if there goes a feverish heat withal, it breeds ill blood in the hearers' thoughts, and prejudice to the person makes him puke up the milk. God knows I speak not against the minister's zeal, so it be from above, 'pure' and 'peaceable.' Save all thy heat for God, spend it not in thine own cause, and it was enough God heard it. But when a sin was committed immediately against God, this meek man can be all of a flame: 'Who is on God's side? who?' He may take most liberty in reproving his people's sins against God, that takes least liberty in his own cause, and who hath a grave ready to bury injuries done to himself in.

(3.) *Pure from levity and vanity.* The word of God is too sacred a thing, and preaching too

solemn a work, to be toyed and played with, as is the usage of some, who make a sermon nothing but a matter of wit, and to flaunt it forth in a garish discourse. What is this to the business of preaching? Their sermon is too like a child's baby, from which if you take the dressing, the rest is worth nothing. Unpin this story, take off that gaudy phrase, and nothing is left in the discourse. If we mean to do good, we must come not only in word, but with power. Satan budes not for a thousand such squibs and witcracks. Draw thou therefore this sword out of thine own fine scabbard, and strike with its naked edge. This you will find the only way to pierce your people's consciences, and fetch blood of their sins. I do not here speak against the use of those parts which God hath given unto any; nor against the fitting and laying our discourse so as it may most insinuate into our people's affections, and steal into their hearts, by the gratefulness it finds with their ear. This is our duty. 'Because the preacher was wise,...he sought to find out acceptable words,' Ecc. 12:9. Not rude, loose, and indigested stuff, in a slovenly manner brought forth, lest the sluttiness of the cook should turn the stomachs of the guests. The apothecary mixeth his potion so as his patient may take it down with less regret, if not with some delight; but still he hath a care that he weakens not its purging operation by making it over-pleasant to the palate. As they were 'acceptable words,' so upright, 'words of truth,' ver. 10.

2. Use the sword of the word, as purely, *so freely*. O take heed of enslaving the word of God to thy own lust or another's will, though the greatest in thy parish. In a steward it is required that he be 'faithful,' 1 Cor. 4:2. Now the preacher's faithfulness stands in relation to him that intrusts him. It is very unlikely that a steward, in giving out provision, should please all the servants in the house. Such officers have least thanks when they do their work best! He that thinks to please men, goes about an endless and needless work. Man's word's will not break thy bones. A wise physician seeks to cure, not please, his patient. He that chides when he is sick for the bitterness of the potion, will con thee thanks for it when he is recovered. The apostle passeth by the thoughts of men as a thing inconsiderable, not worthy the interrupting him in his work. 'With me it is a very small thing that I

should be judged of you,' ver. 3 of the fore-quoted place. As if he had said, 'It shall be known at the great audit, when my Master comes to reckon with me, whether I have been faithful; and it is time enough to have my name righted when he will vindicate his own.' No doubt it was a great temptation to Micaiah, when Ahab's messenger, by colleaguings with him, endeavoured to bring him in his message over unto the king's sense; but mark his noble answer—'As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith, that will I speak.'

Some think that Micaiah was that disguised prophet that denounced judgment against Ahab for Benhadad's dismissal, and that now he was fetched out of prison; for the king bids, 'carry him back unto Ammon the governor,' I Kings 22:26. If so, then Micaiah had the advantage by one flattering sermon to have gotten his liberty and the king's favour to boot. Yet to the dungeon he will go again, rather than prostitute the word to Ahab's lust. Blessed Paul was of the same mind: 'Wherein,' speaking of the gospel, 'I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound,' II Tim. 2:9. As if he had said, 'They shall never make me enslave that neither in prison nor at the block.' No doubt Paul might have been free, could he have been content the word should have been bound. But he was too faithful to procure his liberty with imprisonment of the truth by a sinful silence. If ever it was a time of temptations to ministers—and there were need to stir them up in it to keep the word of God's patience—it is in these last dreggy days of the world, of which it is prophesied, 'men shall not endure sound doctrine.' Now therefore, to bear witness to the truth, and to make full proof of their ministry in such a perverse and froward generation, needs more greatness of spirit than flesh and blood can help them to. It is no trial for a minister to speak truth freely among its friends, but among those that despise it, and are enraged with the messenger for delivering his errand. This made the confession of our Lord so glorious, I Tim. 6:13. It was before Pontius Pilate, a bloody enemy against him and the truth he witnessed to. Therefore our people may well bear with us when we speak freely in God's name; yea, though we come upon their ground, and our message rifles their consciences. We have it in our commission: 'I have set thee for a tower and a fortress among my people, that thou mayest

know and try their way,' Jer. 6:27. If a warrant lies but in a constable's hand to search your house, you cannot be angry with him for doing his office, because you dare not stand betwixt him and the displeasure of his prince, should he neglect it.




## DIRECTION ELEVENTH.

THE NECESSARY DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN, AS CLOTHED IN THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD:  
OR, HOW THE SPIRITUAL PANOPLY MAY ALONE BE KEPT FURBISHED.

*‘Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints’ (Eph. 6:18).*

We have at last set before you the Christian in his armour; and now he wants nothing to furnish him for the battle, or enable him for the victory, but *the presence of his general* to lead him on, and bring him honourably off again by the wisdom of his conduct; which, that he may obtain, the apostle sets him to prayer—*‘praying always,’* &c. As if he had said, ‘You have now, Christian, the armour of God; but take heed thou forgettest not to engage God of this armour by humble prayer for your assistance, lest for all this you be worsted in the fight. He that gives you the arms, can only teach you to use them, and enable you to overcome by their use.’ I am not ignorant that some make this of ‘prayer,’ a piece of armour, and to be reckoned as a part of the panoply. The truth is, it matters not much in what notion we handle it, whether as a distinct piece of armour, or as a duty and means necessarily required to the use of our armour. The latter I shall follow; partly because it hath no piece of material armour, as the other all have, allotted to it for a resemblance; as also, because by the connection it hath, not with the last preceding words only, but with the whole discourse of the armour, it seems to be superadded as a general duty influential upon all the pieces forenamed; and may be read with every piece:—Take the girdle of truth, praying with all prayer, &c.; having on the breastplate of righteousness, praying with all prayer, &c., and the same of the rest. The Christian’s armour will rust except it be furbished and scoured with the oil of prayer. What the key is to the watch, that [is] prayer to our graces—it winds them up and sets them agoing. In the words observe,


FIRST. The *duty* commanded, ‘*prayer;*’ with the end for which it is appointed, viz. as a help to all his graces and means to carry on his war against sin and Satan: —‘praying.’

SECOND. A *directory for prayer;* wherein we are instructed how to perform this duty in six distinct divisions of the subject. FIRST. The time for prayer—‘*praying always.*’ SECOND. The kinds and sorts of prayer—‘*with all prayer and supplication.*’ THIRD. The inward principle of prayer from which it must flow—‘*in the Spirit.*’ FOURTH. The guard to be set about the duty of prayer—‘*watching thereunto.*’ FIFTH. The unwearied constancy to be exercised in the duty—‘*with all perseverance.*’ SIXTH. The comprehensiveness of the duty, or persons for whom we are to pray—‘*for all saints.*’

## DIRECTION XI.—FIRST GENERAL PART.

[THE DUTY COMMANDED, AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE WHOLE DISCOURSE.]

*‘Praying’ (Eph. 6:18).*

We begin with the first, the duty in general, together with the connection it hath with the whole preceding discourse of the armour, implied in the participle —‘praying.’ That is, furnish yourselves with the armour of God, and join prayer to all these graces for your defence against your spiritual enemies. Let us take the three following branches of the subject. FIRST. Prayer as a necessary duty to the Christian. SECOND. Why it is so necessary a means, with our other armour, for our defence. THIRD. Satan’s designs against prayer.

So that the point deducible from this is—

## BRANCH FIRST.

[*Prayer A NECESSARY DUTY to the Christian  
in his spiritual warfare.*]

We lay down as the point deducible from what we have said the following doctrine.

DOCTRINE. That prayer is *a necessary duty to be performed by the Christian, and used with all other means in his spiritual warfare.* This is the 'silver trumpet,' by the sound of which he is to alarm heaven, and call in God to his succour, Num. 10:9. The saints' enemies fall till God riseth; and God stays to be raised by their prayers. 'Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered,' Ps. 68:1. Prayer, it is a catholic duty, and means to be made use of in all our affairs and enterprises. What bread and salt are to our table, that prayer is to the Christian in all his undertakings, enjoyments, and temptations. Whatever our meal is, bread and salt are set on the board; and whatever our condition is, prayer must not be forgot. As we dip all our morsels in salt, and eat them with bread; so we are to act every grace, season every enjoyment, mingle every duty, and oppose every temptation, *with prayer*. It hath been the constant practice of the saints in all their dangers and straits, whether from enemies within or without, from sin, devils, or men, to betake themselves to the throne of grace, and draw a line of prayer about them; accounting this the only safe posture to stand in for their defence. When God called Abraham from Haran into a strange country, where he wandered from place to place amidst strangers, who could not but have him in some suspicion — considering the train and retinue he had—and this their suspicion create many dangers to this holy man from the kings round about, it is observable what course Abraham takes for his defence. You shall find in his removes from place to place, the memorable thing recorded of him is, that 'he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord,' Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:3, 4. This was the breastwork he raised and entrenched himself in. When he had once by prayer cast himself into the arms of God for protection, then he made account that he was in his castle. But what need Abraham have put himself so often to this trouble? Had he not the security of God's promise when he set forth, that God would bless them that blessed him, and curse them that cursed him? And had he not faith to believe God would be a God of his word to perform what he had promised? We confess both. But neither God's promise, nor Abraham's faith thereon, gave any *supersedeas*<sup>30</sup> to his duty in prayer. The promise is given as a ground of faith, and faith as an encouraging help in prayer; but neither [are] intended to discharge us of our duty, and save us the labour of that work.

And what Abraham did, the same have all the saints ever done. The great spoils which they ever got from their enemies was in the field of prayer. If Moses sent Joshua into the valley against Amalek, himself will be on the mount to storm heaven by his prayer, while *he* is engaged in fight with the enemy below; and the victory it is plain was not got by Joshua's sword, so much as Moses' prayer. Jehoshaphat, when he had near a million of men mustered for the field, besides his garrisons that were all well appointed, yet we find him as hard at prayer as if he had not had a man on his side: 'We know not what to do, but our eyes upon thee,' II Chr. 20:12. Now if these worthies when they had but flesh and blood—men like themselves—to contest with, did yet fetch in their help from heaven, and make such use of prayer's auxiliary force—and that when other helps were not wanting—lest they should be found under the neglect of an indispensable duty and prevalent means in order to their defence, how much more doth it behove the Christian, both in point of duty and prudence, to take the same course in his spiritual war against principalities and powers! For the saint's graces, when best trained and exercised, are, without prayer, far less able to stand against Satan than they, with their military preparation, were to repel the force of men like themselves. 'Watch and pray,' saith our Saviour, 'that ye enter not into temptation,' Matt. 26:41. The not keeping this pass gave the enemy Satan a fair occasion to come in upon them. For we see, not

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<sup>30</sup>*Supersedeas*, — a legal document issued to halt or delay the action of some process of law. *Webster's*.



taking Christ's counsel, they were all, though holy men, shamefully foiled. Most of them shifted for themselves by a cowardly flight, while they left their Lord in his enemy's hands. And he that thought to show more courage than his fellows, at last came off with deeper guilt and shame than them all, by denying his Master, who was even then owning him in the face of death, yea his Father's wrath. And it is observable that, as they were led into temptation through their own neglect of prayer, so they were rescued and led out of it again by Christ's prayer, which he mercifully laid in beforehand for them. 'I have prayed...that thy faith fail not,' Luke 22:32.

But that which above all commends this duty to us, is Christ's own practice; who, besides his constant exercise in it, did, upon any great undertaking wherein he was to meet opposition from Satan and his instruments, much more abound in it. At his baptism, being now to enter the stage of his public ministry, and to make his way thereunto through the fierce and furious assaults of Satan—with whom he was to grapple as it were hand to hand after his forty days' solitude—we find him at prayer, Luke 3:21. Which prayer had a present answer, heaven opening, and the Spirit descending on him, with this voice, saying, 'Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased,' ver. 22. And now Christ marcheth forth undauntedly to meet his enemy, who waited for him in the wilderness. Again, when he intended to commission his apostles, and send them forth to preach the gospel—which he knew would bring the lion fell and mad out of his den, as also derive the world's wrath upon those his messengers—he first sets his disciples on praying, Matt. 9:38, and then spends the whole night himself in the same work before their mission, Luke 6:12. But above all, when he was to fight his last battle with the prince of this world, and also conflict with the wrath of his Father, now armed against him, and ready to be poured upon him for man's sin—whose cause he had espoused—on the success of which great undertaking depended the saving or losing his mediatory kingdom, O how then did he bestir himself in prayer! It is said, 'He prayed more earnestly.' As a wrestler that strains every vein in his body, so he put forth his whole might, 'with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard,' Heb. 5:7, so that he won the field, though himself slain upon the place. The spoils of this glorious victory believers do now divide, and shall enjoy it to all eternity. And what is the English of all this, but to show us both the necessity and prevalency of prayer? Without this, no victory to be had, though we have our armour; but this, with that, will make us conquerors over all.

## BRANCH SECOND.

*[WHY prayer is necessary to the Christian  
in his spiritual warfare.]*

Now, to proceed and show why prayer is so necessary a means with our other armour for our defence, let us set forth these reasons in order. FIRST. Because of the co-ordination of this duty with all other means for the Christian's defence, and that by divine appointment. SECOND. Because of the influence that prayer hath upon all our graces. THIRD. Because of the great prevalency prayer hath with God.

*[THE CO-ORDINATION OF PRAYER with other means for  
the Christian's defence makes it necessary.]*

REASON FIRST. The first reason is taken from the *co-ordination of this duty of prayer with all other means for the Christian's defence, and that by divine appointment*. He that bids us take the girdle of truth, breastplate of righteousness, &c., commands also not to neglect this duty. Now what God joins we must not sever. The efficacy of co-ordinate means lies in their conjunction. The force of an army consists not in this troop, or that one regiment, but in all the parts in a body. And if any single troop or company shall presume to fight the enemy alone, what can they expect but to be routed by the enemy and punished by their general also? Let not any say they use this means and that. If any one duty be willingly neglected, the golden chain of obedience is broke. And *bonum non*

*nisi ex integris*—nothing is really good that is not so in all its parts. As to a good action, there is required a concurrence of all the several ingredients and causes; so to make a good Christian, there is required a conscientious care to use all appointed means. He must follow the Lord ‘fully;’ not make here a balk and there a furrow. It is not the least of Satan's policy to get between one duty and another, that the man may not unite his forces, and be uniform in his endeavour.

Few so bad as to use no means; and not many so faithful to God and themselves as conscientiously to use all. One, he pretends to sincerity, and dares appeal to God that he means well, and his heart is good. But, for ‘the breastplate of righteousness,’ it is too heavy and cumbersome for him to wear. Another seems very just and righteous, so that he would not wrong his neighbour, no, not of one penny, to gain many pounds. But, as for faith in Christ, this he never looks after. A third boasts of his faith and hope, as if he did not doubt of his salvation. But, as for the word of God that should beget and increase it, he cares not how seldom he looks on it at home, or hears it in the public. And a fourth, he hath this to say for himself, ‘That he is a constant hearer, his seat at church is seldom found empty, and at home the Bible often in his hands.’ But, as for prayer, his closet, could it speak, would bear witness against him, that he seldom or never performs it. This half doing will prove many a soul's whole undoing. Samuel asked Jesse, ‘Are here all thy children?’ Though but a stripling wanting, he must be sent for before he will sit down. So may I say to many that are very busy and forward in some particular duties and means, ‘Is here all that God hath given thee in charge?’ If but one be wanting, God's blessing will be wanting also. And as that son was wanting of Jesse's which God did intend to set the crown upon, so that duty and means which is most neglected, we have cause to think is the means which God would especially crown with his blessing upon our faithful endeavour.

[THE INFLUENCE OF PRAYER *upon Christian  
graces makes it a necessary duty.*]

REASON SECOND. The second reason is taken from *the influence that prayer hath upon all our graces*. And that in a double respect. It will help to evidence the truth of grace, and also advance its growth.

*First.* The duty of prayer, frequently and spiritually performed, will be a means *to evidence the truth of our graces*. And this is of no small importance to the Christian, when he hath to do with the tempter. For that which he mainly drives at, is to bring the Christian into a suspicion of himself as to the work of grace in him, thereby to overturn the very foundation of his hope, and put him to a stand in his endeavours. He, indeed, will have little list to go on that fears he is not in his right way. I have heard that politicians can make use of a state lie—though the credit of it lasts but a little while—for great advantage to their designs. And he that learns them this art makes much more use of it himself to further his designs against the Christian. Because he could not keep Christ in the grave, therefore he raiseth a lie, to hinder the belief of his resurrection in the world. And when he cannot hinder the production of grace, he misreports the work of the Christian, as if all were but a cheat put upon him by his own deceitful heart; which the poor creature is prone enough, God knows, to believe. And so, though the fear be false and groundless; yet, being believed, [it] produceth as sad a confusion to his thoughts, and distress to his spirit, as if it were true. Jacob could not have mourned more if Joseph had indeed been slain, than he did when there was no such matter. Nor could a wicked wretch easily endure more terror and horror than some precious saints have felt, for the time that Satan's false report—slandering the truth of their grace—hath found credit with them. Now, in prayer, the Christian stands at great advantage to find out the truth of his state, and that upon a double account.

1. God doth commonly take this season, when his people are pouring out their souls to him, to *open his heart to them, and to give his testimony both to their persons and graces*. God hath his sealing hours, in which his Spirit comes and bears witness to his children's state and grace. And this of prayer is a principal one. Where was it that God so marvellously dignified, and if I may so say, knighted Jacob with that new title of honour, ‘Thou shalt be called Israel,’ but in the field of prayer?

What was the happy hour in which the angel knocked at Daniel's door to let him know how God loved him? was it not when he was knocking at heaven door by his prayer? 'At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew thee; for thou art greatly beloved,' Dan. 9:23. When got the woman of Canaan the sight of her faith, not only that it was true, but also strong—'O woman, great is thy faith!' but when her heart was carried forth so vehemently in prayer? Yea, Christ himself heard that miraculous voice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son,' when he was lifting up his eyes in prayer to heaven, Luke 3:21.

2. The duty of prayer affords a demonstrative argument for the truth of that soul's grace which spiritually performs it. The Spirit of God, when he testifies to the truth of a saint's grace, useth to join issue with the saint's own spirit, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit,' Rom. 8:16. Now the testimony which the Christian's own spirit gives for him, is taken from those vital acts of the new creature that operate in him—such as sincerity, godly sorrow for sin, love of holiness, and other of this nature are. Now, no way do these and other graces more sensibly discover themselves to the Christian's view than in prayer. Here sincerity shows itself in the Christians' plain-heartedness to confess all his sins *freely*, without extorting, and *nakedly*, without extenuation or reservation—when there is no false box in the cabinet of the soul to lock up a darling sin in. Holy David, Ps. 32, having, ver. 1, pronounced him 'blessed' that had no sin imputed to him, and, 'in whose spirit there is no guile,' gives ver. 5, this instance of his own sincerity, that he 'acknowledged his sin, and did not hide his iniquity;' as also how well he sped thereby, 'And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.' Again, here [*i.e.* in prayer] doth the Christian give vent to his heart, aching with inward grief for sin. Prayer is the channel into which godly sorrow pours forth itself, and runs down in brinish tears, while the Christian is accusing himself of, and judging himself for, his abominations, with deep shame and self-aborrancy. In a word, here the soul's love to holiness flames forth in his fervent vehement desires and requests for grace that can bear no denial, but even breaks for the longing it hath to it.

Thus we see spirit of prayer is both an argument of true grace, and a means to draw out that true grace into act, whereby its truth may be the better exposed to view. A 'spirit of grace and of supplications' are both joined together, Zech. 12:10. The latter doth indicate the former. What is prayer but the breathing forth of that grace which is breathed into the soul by the Holy Spirit? When God breathed into man the breath of life, he became a living soul. So, when God breathes into the creature the breath of spiritual life, it becomes a praying soul. 'Behold he prayeth,' saith God of Paul to Ananias, Acts 9:11. As if he had said, 'Be not afraid of him; he is an honest soul; thou mayest trust him for he prays.' Praying is the same to the new creature as crying is to the natural. The child is not learned by art or example to cry, but instructed by nature; it comes into the world crying. Praying is not a lesson got by forms and rules of art, but flowing from principles of new life itself.

*Second.* The duty of prayer, as it is a means to evidence, *so to increase, grace.* The praying Christian is the thriving Christian; whereas he that is infrequent or slothful in praying, is a waster. He is like one that lives at great expense, and drives little or no trade to bring wherewithal to maintain it. Now prayer helps toward the increase and growth of grace in these two ways:—1. As it draws the habits of grace into act, and exerciseth them. 2. As it sets the soul nigh to God.

1. As it *draws the habits of grace into act, and exerciseth them.* Now as exercise brings a double benefit to the body, so this to the soul.

(1.) Exercise doth *help to digest or breathe forth those humours that clog the spirits.* One that stirs little, we see, grows palsy, and is soon choked up with phlegm, which exercise clears the body of. Prayer is the saint's exercise-field, where his graces are breathed. It is as the wind to the air to sweep the soul; as bellows to the fire, which clears the coals of those ashes that smother them. The Christian, while in this world, lives but in an unwholesome climate. One while the delights of it deaden and dull his love to Christ; another while, the troubles he meets in it damp his faith on the promise. How now should the poor Christian get out of these his distempers, had he not a throne of grace to resort to, where, if once his soul be in a melting frame, he, like one laid in a king's sweat, soon breathes out the malignity of his disease, and comes into his right temper again. How oft do we find the holy prophet, when he first kneels down to pray, full of fears and doubts, who yet before he and the duty part, grows into a sweet familiarity with God and repose in his own spirit?

He begins his prayer, as if it were come to that pass that he thought that God would never give him a kind look more: 'How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?' Ps. 13:1. But by that time he hath exercised himself a little in duty, his distemper wears off, the mists scatter, and his faith breaks out as the sun in its strength. 'I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation, I will sing unto the Lord,' ver. 5. Thus his faith lays the cloth, expecting a feast ere long to be set on. He that even now questioned whether he should ever hear good news from heaven, is so strong in faith, as to make himself merry with the hopes of that mercy which he is assured will come at last. Abraham began with fifty, but his faith got ground on God every step, till he brought down the price of their lives to ten.

(2.) Exercise *whets the appetite to that food which must be taken before strength can be got. And causa causæ est causa causati*—the remoter cause of an immediate one is, in a certain sense, *the cause* of that which flows as an effect from the more immediate. The hone that sets the edge on the husbandman's scythe, helps him to mow the grass. None comes so sharp-set to the word—which is the saint's food to strengthen his grace—as the Christian that takes prayer in his way to the ordinance. The stronger natural heat is, the better stomach the man hath to his meat. Love in the soul is what natural heat is in the body. The more the soul loves the word, the more craving it has after it. Now, as exercise stirs up the natural heat of the body, so prayer excites this spiritual heat of love in the saint's bosom to the word. Cornelius is an excellent instance for it. We find him hard at prayer in his house, when behold a vision that bids him send for Peter, who should preach the gospel to him—a happy reward for his devotion! Now, see what a sharp appetite this praying soul hath to the word. He upon this presently posts away messengers for Peter, and before he comes, gathers an assembly together—no doubt all of his friends that he could get. There he sits with a longing heart waiting for the preacher. As soon as ever he sees his face, he falls down at his feet, receiving him with that reverence and respect as if he had been an angel dropped out of heaven. Presently he sets Peter to work, though some may think he passed good manners in putting him to labour after so long a journey, before he had refreshed him with some collation or other; but the good man was so hungry to hear the message he brought, that he could not well pacify his soul to stay any longer, and like a man truly hunger-bit, he is ready to catch at any truth—though never so bitter—which shall be set before him. 'Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God,' Acts 10:33. And when the sermon is done, so savoury and sweet was the meal, that he is bath to think of parting with Peter before he gets more from him; and therefore beseeches him to stay some days with him. One sermon did but make his teeth water for another. O how unlike are they who come reeking out of the world to a sermon, to Cornelius that riseth from prayer to wait for the preacher?

2. Prayer helps our graces, *as it sets the soul nigh to God*. In prayer we are said to 'draw nigh to God,' James 4:8—to 'come before his presence,' Ps. 95:2. In it we have 'access by one spirit unto the Father,' Eph. 2:18, as one that brings a petition to a prince is called into his presence-chamber—one of the nearest approaches to God which the creature is capable of on this side heaven, which was signified by the incense altar, that stood so high even within the vail. Prayer, it is called, 'The throne of grace.' We come in prayer to the throne of God, and put our petition into the very hand of God, as he sits on his throne in all his royalty. Now, as prayer is so near an approach to God, it hath a double influence into the growth of the saint's grace.

(1.) By this near access to God, the soul is *put the more into a holy awe and fear of that pure and piercing eye of God which he sees looking on him*. It is true, God is ever near us. Pray or not pray, we cannot rid ourselves of his presence. But never hath the soul such apprehensions of his presence as when it is set before God in prayer. Now the soul speaks to God as it were mouth to mouth; and considering how holy that majesty is with whom he hath to do in prayer, he must needs reverence and tremble before him. Now the natural issue of this holy fear, what can it be but a care to approve itself to God? And this care cherishes every grace. They are carried in its arms, as the child in its nurse's. It keeps the girdle of truth buckled close about his loins. 'O,' saith the soul, 'I must either leave praying, or leave doubling and juggling with God by hypocrisy!' It will strengthen the breastplate of holiness. It is not possible that a Christian should walk loosely all day, and be

free and familiar with God at night. He that waits on the person of a prince will be careful to carry nothing about him that should be offensive to his eye; yea, afraid lest anything should come to his ear, that should bring him under a cloud in his prince's thoughts, and remove him from his place about him. And courtiers have those that will be always undermining them if they can; and the Christian wants not such an adversary—for Satan is at his right hand at every miscarriage to accuse him unto God, saying, 'This is your favourite. Though he be so devout in prayer, he can do this or that, when the duty is over.' And therefore, if any in the world have a tie upon them more than others to walk exactly, it is they that minister before the Lord in this duty. Princes are more curious of their attendants than of others at further distance from them. When David showed some distraction of mind before king Achish, he bids away with him. 'Have I need of madmen, that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence?' And does a poor mortal man that sits on a throne of dust, only heaped up and raised a little above his fellows, take such state on him as not to bear the discomposure of any before him? How much less will the great God—though we wink for a time at the foul sins of others—brook any unholy behaviour in those that wait so nigh upon him! This, no doubt, made Cain run so fast from the presence of God, because he knew that it was no standing so nigh God with such an unholy heart as he carried in his bosom.

(2.) By the soul's near access to God in prayer, it *receives sweet influences of grace from him*. All grace comes from the God of grace; not only the first seed of grace, but its growth and increment; and God usually sheds forth his grace in a way of communion with his people. Now, by prayer the Christian is led into most intimate communion with God. And from communion follows communication. As the warmth the chicken finds by sitting under the hen's wings cherisheth it, so are the saints' graces enlivened and strengthened by the sweet influences they receive from this close communion with God. The Christian is compared to a tree, Ps. 1. And those trees flourish most, and bear sweetest fruit, which stand most in the sun. The praying Christian is, as they say of the Rhodians, *in sole positus*—placed in the sun. He stands nigh to God, and hath, God nigh to him in all that he calls upon him for. And therefore you may expect his fruit to be sweet and ripe, when another stands as it were in the shade, and at a distance from God (through neglect of, or infrequency in, this duty), will have little fruit found on his branches, and that but green and sour. 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing,' Ps. 92:13, 14.

[THE PREVALENCY OF PRAYER *with God*  
*makes it a necessary duty.*]

REASON THIRD. The third reason the Christian should join prayer to all other means, is taken from *the great prevalency prayer hath with God*. He will do no great matter for a saint without prayer, and nothing is too great for him to do at his request. Prayer, like Jonathan's bow, when duly qualified as to the person and act, never returns empty. Never was faithful prayer lost at sea. No merchant trades with such certainty as the praying saint. Some prayers indeed have a longer voyage than others; but then they come with the richer lading at last into the port. In trading, he gets most by his commodity that can forbear his money longest. So does the Christian that can with most patience stay for a return of his prayer. Such a soul shall never be ashamed of his waiting. The promise is an assuring office to secure him his adventure, 1 John 3:22. O who can express the powerful oratory of a believer's prayer! *Vocula Pater formaliter dicta in corde, est eloquentia, quam Demosthenes, Cicero, et eloquentissimi in mundo nunquam possunt exprimere* (Luther)—this little word Father, lisped forth in prayer by a child of God, exceeds the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero, and all other so famed orators in the world.

We read of taking heaven 'by force,' Matt. 11:12. If ever this may be said to be done it is in prayer. *Cælum tundimus et misericordiam extorquemus*, saith Tertullian—we knock at heaven, and the merciful heart of God flies open, which we bring away with us. And in the same apology he speaks of Christians, how they went to pray, as an enemy doth to besiege a town, and take it by storm—*coimus in coetum et congregationem, ut ad Deum quasi manufactuâ præcationibus ambiamus orantes*. And

then he adds, *hæc vis Deo grata est*—this holy violence we offer to God in prayer is very pleasing to him. Surely, if it were not, he would neither help the Christian so in the work, nor reward him for it when it is done. Whereas he doth both. He helped Jacob to overcome: ‘By his strength he had power with God,’ Hosea 12:3. That is, not by his own, but by the strength he had from God. And then he puts honour upon him for the victory, ‘Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed,’ Gen. 32:28. It were easy here to expatiate into a large history of the great exploits which prayer is renowned for in holy writ. James 5:17; Isa. 37; Dan 2:18; II Sam. 15:31; Est. 4:16; Acts 12:5; John 11:41; Jonah 2:2; Joshua 10:12, 14; II Kings 20:10; Ps. 106:23; Eze. 22:30. This is the key that hath opened and again shut heaven. It hath *vanquished mighty armies*, and unlocked such *secrets* as passed the skill of the very devil himself to find out. It hath strangled *desperate plots* in the very womb wherein they were conceived, and made those engines of cruelty prepared against the saints recoil upon the inventors of them; so that they have inherited the gallows which they did set up for others. At the knock of prayer, prison doors have opened, the grave hath *delivered up its dead*; and the sea’s leviathan, not able to digest his prey, hath been made to vomit it up again. It hath stopped the sun’s chariot in the heavens, yea made it go back. And that which surpasseth all, it hath *taken hold of the Almighty*, when on his full march against persons and people, and hath put him into a merciful retreat. Indeed, by the power prayer hath with God, it comes to prevail over all the rest.

He that hath a key to God’s heart cannot be shut out, or stopped at the creature’s door. Now prayer moves God and overcomes him, not by causing any change in the divine will, and making God to take up new thoughts of doing that for his people which he did not before intend. No, God is immutable, and what good he doth in time for his people he purposed before any time was. But prayer is said to more than overcome God; because he then gives, what from eternity he purposed to give upon their praying to him. For when God decreed what he would do for his saints, he also purposed that they should pray for the same. ‘I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them,’ Eze. 36:37. Prayer’s midwifery shall be used to deliver the mercies God purposeth and promiseth. Hezekiah understood this when he calls the prophet to the church’s labour, and bids because ‘the children’—that is, deliverance—stuck in her birth, that he should therefore ‘lift up a prayer,’ Isa. 37:3, 4. And when Daniel had found the full reckoning of the promise—how long it had to go with the deliverance promised for their return from captivity—perceiving it hastened, he therefore falls hard to prayer, knowing God’s purpose to give doth not discharge us from our duty to ‘ask,’ Dan. 9:3.

*[Why Christians are to pray for what God  
hath purposed and promised to give.]*

*Question.* But why doth God impose this upon the saints, that they should pray for what he hath purposed and promised to give? *First.* That they may be conformable to Christ. *Second.* That he may give the good things of the promise with safety to his honour. *Third.* To show the great delight he takes in his saints’ prayers.

*Answer First.* That they may be conformable to Christ. The design of God is to make every saint like Christ. This was resolved from eternity Rom. 8:29. Now, as the limner looks on the person whose picture he would take, and draws his lines to answer him with the nearest similitude that may be; so doth God look on Christ as the archetype to which he will conform the saint, in suffering, in grace, and in glory: yet so that Christ hath the pre-eminence in all. Every saint must suffer because Christ suffered: Christ must not have a delicate body under a crucified head. Yet never any suffered, or could, what he endured. Christ is holy, and therefore shall every saint be, but in an inferior degree. An image cut in clay cannot be so exact as that which is engraved on gold. Now, as in other things, so in this our conformity to Christ appears—that as the promises made to him were performed on his prayer to his Father, so promises made to his saints are given to them in the same way of prayer. ‘Ask of me,’ saith God to his Son, ‘and I shall give thee,’ Ps. 2:8. And the apostle tells us, ‘Ye have not because ye ask not.’ God had promised support to Christ in all his conflicts: ‘Behold

my servant, whom I uphold,' Isa. 42:1. Yet he prays 'with strong crying and tears,' when his feet stood within the shadow of death. A seed is promised to him, and victory over his enemies; yet, for both these, he is at prayer now in heaven. Christ towards us acts as a king, but towards his Father as a priest. All he speaks to God is on his knee by prayer and intercession. In like manner the saints. The promise makes them kings over their lusts, conquerors over their enemies; but it makes them priests towards God, by prayer humbly to sue out those great things given in the promise.

*Answer Second.* That God may give *the good things of the promise with safety to his honour*. Secure God but his glory, and the saint may have what he will. The very life of God is bound up in his glory. The creature's honour is not intrinsic to his being. A prince is a man when his crown and kingdom are gone. But God cannot be a God, except he be glorious; neither can he be glorious, unless he be holy, just, merciful, and faithful, &c. Now, that this his glory may be seen and displayed, is the great end he propounds both in making and ordering of the world: 'The Lord hath made all things for himself,' Prov. 16:4. If there were any one occurrence in the world which could no way be reducible to the glory of God, it would make the being of a deity to be questioned. But the all-wise God hath so made, and doth so order, all his creatures with their actions, that the manifestation of his glory is the result of all. Indeed, he forceth it from some, and takes it by distress, as princes do their taxes from disobedient subjects. Thus the very wrath of his enemies shall praise him, Ps. 76:10. But he expects the saints should be active instruments to glorify him, and, like loyal loving subjects, pay him the tribute of his praise freely, with acclamations of joy and gratitude; which, that they may do, he issueth out his mercies in such a way as may best suit with this their duty. And that is to give the good things he hath purposed and promised to them upon their humble address in prayer to him. Now two ways the glory of God is secured by this means.

1. The saint, *in the very duty of prayer*—when he performs it in a qualified manner—*doth highly glorify God*. Prayer, as it is *medium gratiæ*—a channel of grace, for the conveying and deriving blessings from God, the fountain, into the cistern of our bosoms; so it is *medium cultus*—a means of worship, whereby we are to do homage to God, and give him the glory of his deity. By this we give him '*the glory of his power*.' Prayer is a humble appeal from our impotency to God's omnipotence. None begs that at another's door which he can pleasure himself with at home. And if we thought not God able, we would go to another, not to him. We give him *the glory of his sovereignty* and dominion and acknowledge that he is not only able to procure for us what we ask, but can give us a right to, and the blessing of, what he gives. Therefore Christ closeth his prayer with, 'Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,' &c., as a reason why we direct our prayers to God; because he alone is the sovereign Lord that can invest us in, and give us title to, any enjoyment. So that it is high treason against the crown and dignity of God, when we wither attempt to possess ourselves of any enjoyments without praying to him; or when we pray religiously to any other besides him. By the first we usurp his sovereignty ourselves, in their language, 'We are lords; we will come no more unto thee,' Jer. 2:31. And by the second we give away his kingdom and sovereignty to another. This was the devil's drift when he would have had Christ fall down and worship him, that thereby he might acknowledge him to have the rule of the world. Again, by prayer give him *the glory of his free mercy*. Men demand a debt, but beg an alms. When we pray we renounce merit. See them opposed, 'Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but I would make supplication to my judge,' Job 9:15. We might show the same in all the other attributes. But this taste from a few may suffice. And as God, essentially considered, receives by prayer an acknowledgement of his deity; so every person in the sacred Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in prayer are honoured. By directing our prayers to God the Father, we honour him as the source and fountain of all grace and mercy. We honour the Son in presenting our prayers in his name to the Father, thereby acknowledging him the purchaser of the mercies we beg. And the Holy Ghost, he receives the honour of that assistance which we acknowledge to receive from him for the duty of prayer. For as we pray *to the Father through the Son*, so by the *help* of the Spirit.

2. As God is honoured in the very act and exercise of his duty duly qualified, so *by it the Christian is deeply engaged, and also sweetly disposed, to praise God for, and glorify him with, the mercies he obtains by prayer*.

(1.) Prayer *engageth to praise God because of his mercies*. In prayer we do not only beg mercy of God, but vow praise to God for the mercies we beg. Prayers are called 'vows,' 'Thou, O God, hast heard my vows;' Ps. 61:5; that is, my prayers, in which I solemnly vowed praise for the deliverance I begged. It is no prayer where no vow is included. We must not think to bind God and leave ourselves free. God ties himself in the promise to help us; but the condition of the obligation on our part, is, that we will glorify him. And upon no other terms doth God give us leave to ask any mercy at his hands. 'Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me,' Ps. 50:15. Now, what a strong tie doth this lay upon the praying Christian's heart, to use the mercies he receives holily, and to wear with thankfulness what he wins by prayer! The Christian who would be loath to be taken in a lie to man, will much more fear to be found a liar to God. 'Surely they are my people,' saith God; 'children that will not lie; so he was their Saviour,' Isa. 63:8.

(2.) Prayer is *a means to dispose the heart to praise*. Prayer and praise, like the symbolical qualities in the elements, are soon resolved each into the other. When David begins a psalm with prayer, he commonly ends it with praise. From whence things have their original, thither they return. From the sea the riverwater comes, and no mountains can hinder, but back again to the sea it will go. That spirit which leads the soul out of itself to God for supply, will direct it to the same God with his praise. We do not use to borrow money of one man and pay it to another. If God hath been thy 'strength,' surely thou wilt make him thy 'song.' The thief comes not to thank a man for what he steals out of his yard. And I as little wonder that they do not glorify God for or with his mercies, who did not ask his leave by prayer for them. What men do by themselves they ascribe to themselves. Mercies ill got are commonly as ill spent: because they are not sanctified to them, and so become fuel to feed their lusts. Hence it is, the more enjoyments they have the more proud and unthankful they are. But by prayer the Christian's enjoyments are sanctified, and the flatulency of them, which puffs up others into pride, is corrected; and the same mercies received by prayer, become nourishment to the saints' graces, that putrefy and turn to noisome lusts in the prayerless sinner.

*Answer Third.* God will have his people pray for what he hath purposed and promised, *to show the great delight he takes in their prayers*. As a father, though he can send to his son who lives abroad the money he hath promised for his maintenance, yet let him not have it except he comes over at set times for it. And why? Not to trouble his son, but delight himself in his son's company. God takes such content in the company of his praying saints, that to prevent all strangeness on their part, he orders it so that they cannot neglect a duty but they shall lose something by it. 'Ye have not, because ye ask not.' And the more they abound in prayer the more they shall with blessings. The oftener Joash had 'smote upon the ground,' the fuller his victory over Syria had been. As the arrows of prayer are that we shoot to heaven, so will the returns of mercy from thence be. Yet must it not be imputed to any loathness in God to give, that he makes them pray often and long before the mercy comes, but rather to the content he takes in our prayers. He doth all this on a design to draw out the graces of his Spirit in his children, the voice and language of which in prayer makes most sweet melody in the ear of God. The truth is, we are in this too like musicians playing under our window; they play while the money is thrown out to them, and then their pipes are put up. And were our wants so supplied by the answer of one prayer, that we did not suddenly need a new recruit, we would be gone, and God should not hear of us in haste.




## USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Reproof to prayerless souls,  
with the dismal state of such.]*

*Use First.* A word to those who live in the total neglect of this duty, that are prayerless creatures. Such ruins of mankind there are to be found, who pass their wretched days like so many swine; they never look up to heaven till God lays them on their back; nor are heard to cry in prayer till this knife is at their throat. What shall I say to these giants and sons of the earth, that have renounced their allegiance to the God of heaven!—these kine of Bashan, who, like so many metamorphosed Nebuchadnezzars, have lost the heart of a man, and live like as very brutes, as the beasts themselves, who, while they feed, take no notice of him that clothes the field with grass for them! Can I hope they will hear man who will not acknowledge the God of heaven by praying to him? Surely your case is deplored. What! not pray? Can you do less than by this homage to own God for your Maker? O less for your own souls, than to beg their life of God, whose hand of justice is lift up against you? Are you resolved thus to throw yourselves into the devil's mouth, without so much as striking one stroke for your defence? If God had required a greater matter at your hands than this, the salvation of your souls would have deserved it. And will you stick at this?

God does not put us to the cost of laying down the price of our ransom; no, not so much as to pay our prison fees. Only, he bids thee pray, and he will pay: 'Your heart shall live that seek God,' Ps. 69:32. O, what salt and vinegar will this pour into thy wounds, when in hell thy conscience shall fly in thy face, and tell thee thou hadst not been there if thou wouldst in time have humbled thy soul before God, and sought his favour in that way which cost Christ his blood to procure. Either thou must be dispossessed of this dumb devil, or undoubtedly it will be thy damnation! And who dies with less pity than that malefactor that stouts it before the judge, and will not so much as down on his knees, or open his mouth to cry for mercy, though the judge on purpose stays to pronounce the sentence and break up the court, to see whether his stomach will fall, and his proud spirit stoop to ask his life at his hands? You know how angry Pilate was when Christ was silent: 'Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?' John 19:10, though, alas! poor creature, as Christ told him, he could do nothing for or against him; and therefore Christ neither feared him, nor ought him so much service as to bestow a word upon him. The warrant for Christ's death was sealed in heaven, and he, with the rest of Christ's enraged enemies, were but God's servants to do the execution according to the determinate counsel of God. But how much more reason hath the great God to be provoked by this irreligion, and say, 'Wilt thou not speak to me? pray to me? Dost thou not know I have the power to save or damn? to deliver thee to the tormentor, or keep thee out of his hands?' Or, dost thou look that God is bound to save thee whether pray or not pray? If he doth, I promise you he shall do more for thee than for others; yea, than for his own Son, who made strong cries and supplications to be saved by him. God hath laid the method of salvation and think not that he will alter it, and so make a blot in the counsel of his will, for thy pleasure. What he hath written he hath written, and it shall not be reversed. Yea, though others should be so kind as out of pity to thy soul to pray for thee, yet if thou beest thyself a prayerless creature, thou shalt die the death. If they were Noah, Samuel, and Daniel, that stood up to beg thy life they should not be heard for thee. Proxy prayers in this case will not prevail. And therefore, when the Israelites came a begging to Samuel for his prayers—which, good man, he easily promised; indeed, durst not have forgot them in that, though they had not remembered him of it—mark what caveat he annexeth, 'Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart,' 1 Sam. 12:24. As if he had said, 'Do not set me to do for you {that} which you will not do for yourselves.' It is not all the interest my prayers have in heaven {that} will keep the wrath of God from falling on you, if you be wicked and atheistical; therefore 'fear the Lord, and serve him.' That is, pray and obey him.

Fear oft denotes the worship of God, Gen. 31:53. God is called 'the fear of Isaac;' *i.e.* the God whom he feared and worshipped. So, 'Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? Jer. 10:7, that is,

worship thee, rather than the stocks and stones; because the worshipping of God results from our reverence and fear we have of him. Christ 'was heard in that he feared him,' Heb. 5:7—; that is, his religious fear, expressed in those his strong cries which he groaned forth to God in his agony. And therefore, so long as you are prayerless, you live without the fear of God. And what will not such a wretch dare to do? Even anything that Satan shall command him, though it be to go to a wizard. When Saul had given over inquiring after God, we hear him by and by knocking at the devil's door, and asking counsel of a witch. Oh! take heed of living so near the tempter! If Satan might have his wish, surely it would be this—that the creature might live prayerless; for by this he should do the greatest spite possible to God; in that he makes the creature set him at nought in all his attributes, and have the greatest advantage against the sinner himself. Now he hath thee as sure as the thief hath the traveller, when he hath thrown him into a ditch fast bound, and stopped his mouth, that he cannot cry to others for help. In a word, thou art free booty for Satan, who may now satisfy his lust upon thee. He that prayeth invites God into his further acquaintance, and soon shall have it; as we see in Paul, who had Ananias sent from God to him. But he that lives in the neglect of this duty, gives the devil fuller possession of him. Thou art the man of all others most fit for him to make an atheist of. I should not wonder that the devil persuades thee there is no God, who already livest in such defiance against him as cannot but make the belief of a deity dreadful to thy thoughts. Herod was soon persuaded to cut off John's head, because, when he was alive, he so troubled and nettled his conscience. And it is to be feared thou wilt easily be drawn to attempt the stifling all thoughts of a deity, from whom thy criminous conscience expects to hear nothing that can please thee. Yea, it is probable thou hast too much of the atheist in thee already, or else thou durst not deny God that part of natural worship which they that know him least give unto him. I am sure the Scripture lays this brat of irreligion at the door of atheism, Ps. 14:1: 'The fool' there would fain persuade himself 'there is no God,' and when he hath got so far the mastery of his conscience as to blot God out of his creed, he then soon leaves him out of his paternoster, ver. 2.

*Question.* But, it may be, some will ask me whether I think that any do, where the gospel is preached, neglect prayer on this account of atheism?

*Answer.* Truly I do; and which is more, I think there are worse atheists to be found under the meridian light of the gospel, than in the darkest nook in America, where yet this day never broke. As weeds grow rankest in richest grounds, and fruits ripest in hottest climates; so do sins grow to the greatest height where the gospel-sun climbs highest. 'Who is blind, but my servant?...and blind as the Lord's servant?' Isa. 42:19. Who such atheists as those that have their eyes put out by the light of the gospel? The poor Indian's little knowledge of a God is for want of light; which may be cured, when it is brought to them. But if a judiciary atheism—as that in gospel times and places commonly is—falls upon a soul for rebelling against the light, this is incurable. Here the very visive faculty is perished, and the eye bored out.

*[Exhortation to saints to abound in prayer.]*

*Use Second.* To the *saints*. Be you provoked to *ply this oar more diligently than ever*. If this be neglected, a universal decay of all your graces follows. When the ports and havens of a kingdom are blocked up, that the merchant can not go forth, there follows a damp on all the inland trade, so that an enemy needs not strike a stroke, but only stand still to see them eat up one another. The psalmist tells of a stream which 'makes glad the city of God,' Ps. 46:4. The promise is this stream, upon which the saints have all their livelihood brought up to their very doors. If this be kept open, Satan cannot much distress them; which then is done, when they can send out their prayers on this stream to heaven. But if once this trade be stopped, then they are hard put to it. It is observed of our neighbours the Netherlands, that whereas other nations used to be made poor by war, they have grown rich with it; because, with their wars, they have enlarged their trade and traffic abroad. And if thou, Christian, wouldst thrive by all thy temptations, thou must take the same course. Whatever thou dost, starve not thy trade with heaven. God hath—to make thee more diligent in this

duty—so ordered things, that all the treasure of the promise is to be conveyed to thee in this bottom of prayer. This is like the merchant's ship, it 'bringeth her food from afar,' Prov. 31:14. If thy mercies were of the growth of thy own country, thou mightest spare a voyage to heaven. But alas! poor creature, when thou art best laid in, and thy storehouse fullest, if no foreign supplies should come unto thee from heaven, how soon wouldst thou be brought, with the poor widow, to eat thy last cake and die! It was not her little meal in her barrel, nor oil at the bottom of her cruse, but God's blessing multiplying them, that make them hold out so long. So, not thy present grace, strength, or comfort, but God's feeding these with a new spring, that thou must live upon. Now cease praying, and the oil of grace will cease running: 'Ye have not, because ye ask not.' And when the store is spent the city must yield. As thou wouldst not therefore fall into Satan's hands, lose not thy interest in God, thy best ally, for want of preserving a good correspondence with him at the throne of grace.

Now, for the better pursuit of this exhortation, some counsel would not be amiss in order to thy driving this trade of prayer more successfully. Satan hath received so many shameful overthrows by the saints' prayers, that he trembles at the force of this great ordnance of heaven. This is the voice, the mighty voice of God in his saints, which shakes those mountains of pride, divides the flames of fiery temptations, and makes them cast forth their abortive counsels to their shame and disappointment. 'O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness,' II Sam. 15:31. This one prayer made both Ahithophel a fool, and him that set him on work also—defeating the wisdom both of man and devil. Satan hath such an impression of dread upon him—from the remembrance of what he hath suffered from the hands of prayer—that he will turn every stone, and try every way, to obstruct thee in it. 'What do we,' said the Pharisees concerning Christ, 'for this man doeth many miracles?...if we let him thus alone, the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.' Satan cannot deny but great wonders have been wrought by prayer. As the spirit of prayer goes up, so his kingdom goes down. It is of the royal seed. He can no more stand before it than falling Haman before rising Mordecai. And therefore, seeing this is like to do thee such great service against him, it behooves thee the more to defend it from his stratagems. Because the great artillery of an army is so useful to it, and formidable to the enemy, therefore it hath a strong guard set about it.

### BRANCH THIRD.

[*Satan's* DESIGNS AGAINST PRAYER.]

Now Satan's designs against prayer are of three kinds. FIRST. If he can, he will *keep thee from prayer*. If that be not feasible, SECOND. He will strive to *interrupt thee in prayer*. And, THIRD. If that plot takes not, he will labour to *hinder the success and return of thy prayer*.

[*Satan strives to* KEEP FROM PRAYER.]

FIRST DESIGN. Satan's first design upon the Christian will be to *keep him from prayer*. To effect this he wants not his stratagems; many objections that he will start, and discouragements he will throw in thy way to this duty; hoping that if thou stumblest not at one, yet he may make thee fall by another, and be sick of thy enterprise before thou settest upon it. And, which is worst, thou wilt find a party in thy own bosom too ready to listen to what he saith, yea, to take up his arguments and maintain the dispute against thy engaging in this work. We shall pick up a few among many, and put an answer into thy mouth against he comes.

*Satan keeps from prayer by charging  
the Christian with hypocrisy.]*

*First Stratagem.* 'What! thou pray! If thou dost, thou wilt but *play the hypocrite*; and better not

pray at all, than never the better!’ Nay, possibly thy own misgiving heart may suggest the same, or at least so far credit his charge, as to make thee waver in thy thoughts what thou shouldst do—pray or not. Now, to arm thee against this, consider,

1. Thou art *but afraid thou shouldst play the hypocrite, if [you] pray*; but thou wilt certainly prove thyself an atheist if thou dost not. And that is it which he would have. I hope thou art wiser than to neglect a known duty upon a jealousy thou hast of miscarrying in it; to lie down in a known sin—yea, so broad a one as brands him for an atheist that continues in it—for fear of meeting a lion, may be but a bugbear, in the way of thy obedience to an indispensable command.

2. Thou art in the less danger of playing the hypocrite, *because of thy fear*. Some bodily diseases indeed are caught with a fear and fancy. He is most like to have the plague or pox that fears most he shall have them. But none are so safe from sin as they that fear the falling into it most. The truth is, I would desire no better argument to prove thee sincere than this—to fear thy hypocrisy. Believe it, if this be the great trouble of thy soul, the devil hath more reason to fear thy sincerity than thou thy hypocrisy. And in all likelihood this it is that makes him to scare thee from prayer—because thou scare him so much by thy praying. If thou wert a hypocrite, as he pretends, himself would invite thee to it; yea, make a lane for thee, rather than that thou shouldst not come to the work; and when thou art risen from thy knees, he would thank thee for thy pains, because he knows God would not. The hypocrite does him more service than God. You do not believe, sure, that the devil was any great enemy to Jezebel’s fasting. Nay, I doubt not but he put it into her head, that she might thereby mock both God and man. Her fast was the devil’s feast. But,

3. If thou findest more cause to fear thy playing the hypocrite than I who am a stranger to thy heart have reason to do—who indeed can know so well how thy own heart beats as thyself?—I say, if thou fearest this be the sin which is most likely to make a breach upon thee in thy duty, do as Moses, who slew the Egyptian to rescue the Israelite—*destroy the sin, that thou mayest rescue thy soul from the neglect of a duty*. Thou hast a very fair advantage, by the intelligence God graciously gives thee whence thy danger is most likely to come, of falling on thy enemy, and taking the fuller revenge on him, before thou settest about the work of prayer. Get but thy heart into a hatred of this odious sin, and fixed resolution against it, and, with God’s blessing, it shall neither be able to hurt thee, nor hinder thy prayer from finding welcome with God.

*[Satan keeps from prayer by undervaluing  
the Christian’s gift for it.]*

*Second Stratagem.* ‘O but,’ saith Satan, ‘thou hast *no gifts for prayer*. Leave that for them that can perform this duty after a better fashion.’

What meanest thou by ‘gifts?’ If a rowling, flowing tongue which some have, whereby they are able on a sudden, with a long-continued discourse, to run over all the heads of prayer in a clear method, and clothe every petition with apt and moving expressions, we will suppose thou hast not this gift. But, God forbid that want of this should keep thee from praying, or make thee go the less comfortably to the duty. The want of these, show only thou hast not so good a head, but doth not the least hinder thy heart to be as gracious as theirs. And better of the two, that the defect should be found in thy head than in thy heart. Thy invention indeed in prayer by this will be more barren, but thy heart may be as fruitful over the few broken disjointed sentences that by piecemeal fall from thee, as theirs with their eloquent oration. Thy language will not be so trim and gaudy but thy soul and spirit may be as sound yea more upright, than many of those will be found who charm the ears of those that join with them by the music their words make. It is possible a man may have a rotten body under a gorgeous suit; and *sub hâc purpurâ linguæ pannosam conscientiam*—under the bravery of language a poor ragged conscience. Who had not rather be the healthful man in plain clothes, than unsound and diseased under rich apparel?—sincere with mean gifts, rather than rotten-hearted with raised parts. We do not count him the best patriot in the parliament—house that plays the orator, and makes more rhetorical speeches than others, but he that takes with the best side, and whose vote is sure not to be wanting to carry on a righteous cause.

It is not the rhetoric of the tongue, but the hearty ‘amen’ which the sincere soul seals every holy request withal, that God values; and this thy honest heart will help thee to do, which his head cannot do for him that wants his sincerity. It is not the fairness of the hand that gives the force to the bond, but the person whose hand and seal it is. If it could, a scrivener might make all the country his debtors. Gifts may make a fair writing—which the hypocrite can do—but faith and sincerity make a valid prayer; and this alone can lay claim to the good things of the promise. In a word, sincere soul—for so I take thee to be—and if such, though thou hast not these praying gifts as others, yet thou hast as much interest in Christ, the ‘unspeakable gift,’ II Cor. 9:15, as any of them all. And, for thy everlasting encouragement, know, it is not those gifts in them, but this gift of God to thee and all believers, which is the key that must open God’s heart, if any mercy be got thence. Yea, this gift must sanctify their glistening gifts, as the altar did the gold upon it, or else they will be an abomination to the Lord.

[Satan keeps from prayer,  
through present indisposition to it.]

*Third Stratagem.* Satan and the flesh too have their *dilatory excuses to take thee off this duty, when thy stated usual time comes about for the performance of it.* Dost thou never, Christian, when thou art addressing thyself to the throne of grace, hear Satan and thy flesh whispering in thine ear, ‘Christian, what art thou going to do? This is not a fit time for thy praying. Stay for a more convenient season.’ Here the devil seems modest. He saith not, Pray not at all, but ‘*not now*’—not dissolve, but ‘*adjourn*’ the court for a fitter time.

*Answer.* Now beware, Christian, thy foot is near a snare. If thou takest the devil’s counsel, and waitest for his convenient season, may be it will prove like Felix’s ‘convenient season’ for calling Paul to a further hearing; which, for aught we find, never came about. When the flesh or Satan beg time of thee, it is to steal time from thee. They put thee off duty at one time, on a design to shut thee out at last from this duty at any time. The devil is a cunning sophist; he knows a modest beggar may sooner obtain the little he asks, than he that saucily asks that which carries more unreasonableness in the request. Jephthah, who yielded to his daughter’s desire for a few months reprieve, would, it is like, not have heard her had she begged a full release from her father’s vow. A gracious soul is under a vow to call upon God. He knows such a motion would be flung back with the saint’s abhorrency upon his face, should he at the first dash bid him never pray more, and wholly leave his acquaintance with God. Therefore he would seem very willing he should pray. ‘Aye! by all means,’ saith he, ‘I would not have you turn your back on your best friend; but now is not so fit a season.’

[TWO PLEAS Satan hath to cheat the  
Christians of their seasons of prayer.]

1. The Christian’s present indisposition to prayer. 2. Some worldly business that then stays to be despatched.

1. *Plea.* The Christian’s *present indisposition to pray.* ‘Stay, Christian,’ saith the tempter, ‘till thou art in a better temper for duty, and thou wilt pray to more purpose. Better not write that scribble—leave the work undone, than go about it when thy hand is out.’ Now there is a double indisposition, which both Satan and the flesh make use of to colour their pretence with.

(1.) *Indisposition of body.* Some distemper lies on at present on that, and Scripture, say these, tells thee God loves mercy rather than sacrifice. And it cannot be denied but the Scripture will reach as far as the body, for God’s commands are not cruel to it.

*Answer.* But, to help thee out of this snare, tell me plainly, *how great is this distemper of thy body?* Haply thou art not so ill but thou canst go about thy worldly business, though with some groans and complaints in the same. But when thou shouldst pray, then thy head aches and shoots more than before. Art thou well enough to go into thy shop, and not to pray in thy closet? Canst thou waddle so far as to the market, and not pray at home? Canst thou overcome thy distemper so far as to

traffic with the world, and not to trade with heaven? Surely all is not right. God is but little beholden to thee. May not God say, I deserve thy company as well as the world? But, suppose thou beest right-down sick, and quite laid up from meddling in thy worldly employments; yet, will this excuse thee from visiting the throne of grace? God takes thee out of the shop to show thee the way into the closet. He knocks thee off thy worldly trade, that thou mayest follow thy heavenly the more close. Thou art not, indeed, able to pray in a continued discourse as in health. Neither doth God expect it. Here that Scripture, which the devil would have thee abuse, is pat, and suitable to thy present state: God loves mercy rather than sacrifice. Yet now, if ever, is the time for thee to shoot those *jacula præcatoria*—darts of ejaculatory prayer to God. When our body breathes shortest, it breathes quickest and oftenest. Though thou canst not pray long, yet thou mayest pray much in these pathetical sallies of thy soul to heaven. The Christian should have his quiver full of these arrows, which, though short, go with a force. Christ never prayed more earnestly than in his agony; which prayer was of this nature, 'O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt,' Matt. 26:39. And after a little pause—for nature to take some breath, by reason of that unspeakable burden which then lay upon it—he shoots the same dart again to heaven thrice, one after another, ver. 44. In a word, Christian, though thou canst not pray as thou wert wont, yet thou canst desire others to pray for thee and with thee. We are bid to send for the elders, yea and beg prayers of others too. So pitiful is God to us, that when, through our own weakness, we are disabled from delivering our own conceptions in prayer, that then we may bring forth as Bilhah on others' knees. When we cannot go ourselves as we were wont to the work, we may be carried on the shoulders of their prayers, and fly on the wings of their faith to heaven.

(2.) *Indisposition of heart.* O but, secondly, thou mayest say, It is not the sickness of thy body, but the *deadness of thy heart*, and indisposition of thy soul, that keeps thee from duty. Thou wouldst fain have that in a better frame, and then thou wouldst not be long a stranger to it.

*Answer (a).* Let me ask thee, Christian, what thou hast found—in the observation of thy own heart—to be the fruit that hath grown from such put-offs and excuses;—*hath neglect of duty at one time fitted thee for it at another?* I believe not. Sloth is not cured with sleep, nor laziness with idleness. If our leg be numb, we walk, and so it wears off. Satan knows if thou playest the truant to-day thou wilt be more loath to go to school tomorrow. Give the flesh a little scope and liberty by thus unlacing thyself, and it will endure less to be straitened afterwards. There is something to do to bridle a wanton beast, when hath got the bit once out of his mouth. The spouse's coat sat very easy on her back, and unwilling no doubt she was to be stripped; but when once, by a wile of Satan, she was persuaded to put it off, how loath was she then to get it on again! And therefore, whenever you are turning from this or any other duty merely upon this account, consider well what is like to follow. One of these two will come of it. Either thou wilt see thy sin, and return with shame and sorrow for thy neglect. And is it not less trouble to pray now than upon such terms afterwards? A heathen could say, 'He would not sin to buy repentance.' And shouldst not thou have more wisdom to know which is a bad bargain for thy soul than he? Or, if not that, it will follow, secondly, that this neglect will beget another, and that a third, and so thou wilt run further in arrears with thy conscience, till at last thou givest over all thoughts of renewing thy acquaintance with God because thou hast discontinued it so long.

*Answer (b).* Examine from whence this present indisposition comes, and probably thou wilt find reason to charge it either upon some *sinful miscarriage in thy Christian course, or on thy neglect of those preparatory means through which thou art to pass into the performance of this duty.*

[1.] See whether thou hast not been *tampering with some sin knowingly.* There is an antipathy betwixt sinning and praying, partly from guilt, which makes the soul shy of coming into God's sight, because conscious of a fault. The child that hath misspent the day in play abroad, steals to bed at night, or plays least in sight, for fear of a chiding, or worse, from his father. And also there is this antipathy between those two lines of acting, as the same doth roil and disorder the heart. Sin and prayer are such contraries, that it is impossible at one stride to step from one to another. It is an ill time when the fountain is stopped or muddied, to go to draw water thence. If the workman's tools be blunt or gapped, no work can be well done till a new edge be set on them. It is the devil's policy

thus to disturb and unfit the Christian for duty that he may leave it undone. And therefore, let thy first care be to keep the fountain of thy heart clear all the day long, as remembering that from it those holy affections which in prayer thou art to pour forth to God must be drawn. Look thou lendest not any power of thy soul to be Satan's instrument in sin's coarse foul work, lest thou find it out of case when thou art to use it in this spiritual service. A good servant will not have her dishes or pots foul when they should be used, but stand clean and bright upon the shelf, to be ready against they are called for. And so is the true Christian characterized. 'If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work,' II Tim. 2:21.

But again, if thou findest guilt to be contracted and thence a fear to come so nigh God, as this duty will bring thee, yea an estrangement also upon thy heart from this work, thy best way is to speedily to renew thy repentance, and so thy faith both for pardoning mercy and purging grace. New breaches are made up better than long quarrels; green wounds healed easier than old sores; spots washed out sooner when newly got than when ingrained by long continuance. Ply thee to the throne of grace. Water the earth, if thou canst, with thy tears, and fill heaven with sorrowful sighs for thy sin; but by no means shift off the duty on this pretence; for that is not the way to mend the matter, but make it worse. Jonah did ill to consult his credit rather than the exaltation of God's mercy; and how he should come honourably off with this embassage, than how the name of the great God his Master that sent him might be magnified. But he did worse than these sinful thoughts stirred in him—which he should have humbled himself for—made him run away from his Master's work also. Thus, Christian, it is ill done of thee to make a breach in thy holy course by tampering with any sin; but thou wilt commit a greater if thou turnest thy back on God also in that ordinance where thou shouldst humble thyself for thy former sin. Can one sin be a good argument for committing another? Thou hast fallen into sin in the day; wilt thou not therefore pray at night? Surely it were better to beg of God forgiveness of this, and more grace, that thou mayest not do the like or worse to-morrow. Neglect of duty is not the way to help thee out of the pit thou art in, nor keep thee from falling into another. Take heed thou runnest not thyself further into temptation. Now is the time for the devil to set upon thee, when this weapon is out of thy hand. The best thou canst look for is a storm from God to bring back thee, his runaway servant, to thy work again. And the sooner it comes, the more merciful he is to thee.

[2.] If, upon thy faithful inquiry, thou findest not thy heart reproach thee to have indisposed thyself for duty by any known sin in the course of thy life, and yet thy heart continues lumpish and unfit for prayer, then probably thou wilt take thyself *tardy in thy actual preparation to the duty*. Hast thou therefore solemnly endeavoured, by suitable meditations, to blow the coal of thy habitual grace? which though not quenched by any gross sin, yet may be deadened, and covered with some ashes, by thy being over-busy in thy worldly employments. The well is seldom so full that water will, at first pumping, flow forth. Neither is the heart commonly so spiritual after our best care in our worldly converse—much less when we somewhat overdo therein—to pour itself into God's bosom freely, without some labour to raise and elevate it. Yea, oft the springs of grace lie so low, that only pumping will not fetch the heart up to a praying frame, but arguments must be poured into the soul—like so many pails of water into the pump—before the affections rise. Hence are those soliloquies and discourses, which we find holy men use with their own hearts to bring them into a gracious temper, suitable for communion with God in ordinances. 'Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,' Ps. 103:1, 2. It seems David either found or feared his heart would not be in so good a frame as he desired, that he redoubles his charge. He found sure his heart somewhat drowsy, which made him thus rub his eyes, and rouse up himself, now going to God in this duty. Sometimes calling and exciting the heart will not do, but the heart must be chid, and taken up roundly. So David was fain to deal with himself at another time. 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?' Ps. 42:11. Heavy birds must take a run before they can get upon the wing. It is harder to get a great bell up, than to ring it when it is raised. And so it is with our hearts. Harder work we shall find it to prepare them for duty, than to perform it when they are got into some order.

Now, hast thou endeavoured this? If not, how canst thou make this a pretence to waive the duty because thou art indisposed, when thou hast not used the means to have thy clog taken off? This is as if one should excuse himself for not coming to the feast unto which he was invited, because forsooth he was not dressed, when indeed he never went about to make ready. But if thou canst answer to the former question, and in some uprightness say that thou hast not neglected preparatory means, but yet thy indisposition and deadness of heart remains, then we present you with another consideration. Though it be not so ordinary, yet it is possible, that a Christian may walk on those coals of meditation, which at one time would set his soul all on fire, and put his graces into a flame, yet at another he may find little warmth from them. We will suppose this to be thy case. Therefore,

*Answer (c).* Consider that God may, and doth, sometimes *conceal his enlivening presence, till the soul be engaged in the work.* And would it not grieve thee to lose such an opportunity? How oft hast thou found thyself at the entrance into a duty becalmed, as a ship which at first setting sail hath hardly wind to swell its sails—while under the shore and shadow of the trees—but meets a fresh gale of wind when got into the open sea? Yea, didst thou never launch out to duty as the apostles to sea, with the wind on thy teeth, as if the Spirit of God, instead of helping thee on, meant to drive thee back, and yet hast found Christ walking to thee before the duty was done, and a prosperous voyage made of it at last? Abraham saw not the ram which God had provided for his sacrifice till he was in the mount.

In the mount of prayer God is seen; even when the Christian does oft go up the hill towards duty with a heavy heart, because he can as yet have no sight of him. Turn not therefore back; but on with courage. He may be nearer than thou thinkest on. ‘In that same hour,’ saith Christ, ‘it shall be give unto you,’ Matt. 10:19. ‘In the day,’ said David, ‘when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul,’ Ps. 138:3. It is no more than the promise gives us security for: ‘The way of the Lord is strength.’ Just as it is with a man, who at first going out on a journey feels a lassitude and feebleness in his limbs; but the farther he goes, the more strength he gathers, as if there arose strength out of the ground he walks on. Truly the saints find this in God’s way: ‘I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law. This I had, because I kept thy precepts,’ Ps. 119:55, 56. His meaning is, by doing his best endeavour to keep them, he got this by the hand, to be able to keep them better, and he thinks himself so well paid in for this his pains, that he glories in it—‘This I had.’ So the saint hath this for praying—he gets his heart in tune to pray better.

We may observe those children in Scripture which came of barren wombs were the greatest comforts to their parents when they had them. Witness Isaac, Samuel, and John. The greater deadness and barrenness thy heart, to thy own sense, lay under, and the less hope thou hadst to get out of the indisposition, the more joyful will the quickening presence of God be to thee. The assistance that thus surpriseth thee beyond thy expectation will be a true Isaac—a child of joy and laughter. And a double reason is obvious why God doth thus. You see it in the *great delight the Lord takes in pure obedience*. ‘To obey is better than sacrifice,’ 1 Sam. 15:22. To pray in obedience is better than barely to pray. This is the jewel in the ring of prayer. Now, to pray in pure obedience is to set upon the duty when there is no assistance visible or encouragement sensible—to go to duty not because God puts forth his hand to lead me, but because he holds forth his precept to command me. As when a general commands his army to march, if then the soldiers should stand upon terms, and refuse to go except they have better clothes, their pay in hand, or the like, and then they will march; this would not show them an obedient disciplined army. But if, at the reading of their orders, they presently break up their quarters, and set forth, though it be midnight when the command come, and they without money in their purse, clothes on their back—leaving the whole care of themselves for these things to their general, and they only attend how they may best fulfil his command—these may be said to march in obedience. Thus, when a soul, after a faithful use of means, finds his heart dead and dull, yet in obedience to the command kneels down—though the sense of his inability is so great that he questions whether he shall have power to speak one word to God as he ought, yet had rather be dumb and dutiful, than disobedient in running away from his



charge —here is an obedient soul, and he may hope to meet God in his way with that which he cannot carry with him—as the lepers, who, when they went, in obedience to Christ's command, to 'show themselves to the priest,' were cured by the way, though they saw nothing of it when they set forth.

Another fetch that Satan hath to make the Christian put off the duty of prayer as unseasonable at present, is—

2. *Plea.* Some *worldly business or other that then is to be despatched*; and therefore suggests such thoughts as these to divert him:—'I have no leisure now to pray; this business is to be done, and that necessary occasion calls for my attendance. I will therefore adjourn the performance till I can come with more freedom and leisure.'

Now to arm thee, Christian, against such dilatory pretences, I shall lay down a few directions.

[FIVE DIRECTIONS *to preserve against interference with seasons of prayer.*]

(1.) Take heed of *overcharging thyself with worldly business*, which then is done when thou graspest more thereof than will consist with thy heavenly trade and Christian calling. God allows thee to give to the world that which is the world's, but he will not suffer thee to pay the world that which is due to him; rob Mary to lend to Martha, steal from thy closet to pay to thy kitchen. Thy particular calling is intended by God to be a help to thy general. It will therefore be thy sin to make that an encumbrance which is given as an advantage. And that which is itself a sin cannot be a plea for the neglect of a duty. that servant would mend a matter but little, who excuseth his not doing a business his master commanded, by telling him he had drunk too much when he should have gone about it. Nor will thy apology for passing thy time of prayer be better, that sayest thou hadst so much to do in the world that thou couldst not find time to pray in.

(2.) Labour to *time thy seasons for prayer with discretion in the things of the world*. If we have two businesses to despatch in the same day, we contrive, if possible, that they may not interfere. And certainly a holy providence to forecast how we may reconcile daily the demands of our closet and shop, our devotions and worldly employments, by laying out each its portion of time, would ordinarily prevent much disorder and confusion in our walking. The prophet speaks of 'the liberal man devising liberal things.' We could not easily want time to pray in, if our hearts would but persuade our heads to devise and study how our other affairs might be disposed of without prejudice to our devotions. That cloth which a bungler thinks too little for a garment, a good workman can make one of it, and leave some for another use also. O there is a great deal of art in cutting out time with little loss.

(3.) Be sure thou *keepest a right notion of prayer in thy thoughts*. Some look upon every minute of time spent in the closet lost in the shop. And no wonder such are easily kept from prayer upon any pretended business, who think it a prejudice to their other affairs. But I hope, Christian, thou art better taught. Does the husbandman mow the less for whetting his scythe? Doth a good grace before meat spoil the dinner? No. Nor doth prayer hinder the Christian either in his employments or enjoyments, but expedites the one and sanctifies the other. All agree that to the despatch of a business—as to the winding of a skein of silk—nothing conduceth more than to begin at the right end of it. And to be sure the right end of any business is to begin with God, and engage him to help us. 'In all thy ways acknowledge God,' and 'lean not unto thine own understanding,' Prov. 3:5, 6.

(4.) The more *straits and difficulties thou conquerest to keep up thy communion with God, the more kindly it is taken of God*. No more friend is more welcome to us than he who breaks through many occasions to give us a visit. There is little cost, and so little love, in an idle man's visit—he that comes to see us because he hath nothing else to do. Mary was Christ's favourite, who trode the world under her feet, that she might sit at his feet. And the Bethshemites, who in their zeal—I confess their case is extraordinary—came out of their very harvest-field, when they were reaping, to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, 1 Sam. 6:13.

(5.) Be *faithful and impartial in considering the importance and necessity of that business which is*

*propounded as an apology for not performing this duty at thy usual season.* It cannot be denied but such a necessary occasion may emerge and fall out, for which the Christian may, without sin, adjourn the solemn performance of his devotions to another more fit time. Who doubts but a Christian may, when he riseth, go to quench his neighbour's house on fire, though by this he be kept out of his closet, and detained from offering to God that solemn morning sacrifice of praise and prayer he was wont? Yea, though the occasion be not extraordinary, if it be,

(a) About that which is *lawful in itself*.

(b) Of *importance*.

(c) *Necessarily then to be despatched*. And,

(d) If it *surpriseth us*, and we do not bring it upon ourselves by our own fault, then the duty of prayer may without sin be adjourned for a fitter time.

But let us take heed of stamping a pretended necessity on things and actions, only to gratify our lazy hearts with a handsome excuse, whereby we may both save the pains of performing a duty, and also escape a chiding from our conscience for the non-performance of it. Of all fools he is the worst, that is witty to put a cheat on himself, and especially on his soul. Such a one must expect that the less his conscience barks at present, the more it will bite when it shall be unmuzzled.

Again, if the occasion be, as is said, important and necessary, whereby thou art called off from the solemn performance of this duty at present, then *lift up thy heart in an ejaculatory prayer to God, to guide and guard thee*. This is the short dagger thou art to use for thy defence against temptation, when thou hast not time to draw the long sword of solemn prayer. Thus thou mayst pray in any place, company, or employment. A short parenthesis interrupts not the sense of discourse, but gives an elegancy to it. And a short ejaculation to heaven will not interrupt any business thou art about, but advantage it much.

Again, be careful to recover this loss which thy worldly business hath put thee to in thy communion with God, *by more abounding in the duty upon thy next opportunity*. The tradesman who is kept from his dinner on the market-day, goes the sooner to his supper, and eats the freer meal at night. If you be hindered of your rest one night by business, you will take it up the next. O that we were as wise for our souls—what we are prevented of at one tie, to recover with advantage at another, by a double enlargement of our hearts in our prayers and meditations!

*[Satan discourages from prayer because  
of THE GREATNESS OF THE REQUESTS.]*

*Fourth Stratagem.* Satan discourages sometimes the Christian, when on his way to this duty, *from the greatness of those requests which he hath to put up to the throne of grace*. Thou art going to pray, Christian, will he say, and will nothing serve thee less than pardon of sin, love and favour of God, with eternal life, &c.? Surely thou art too free of another's purse, and too kind to thyself, if thou thinkest to be welcome at God's door with so bold an errand. This is a boon reserved for some few favourites, and darest thou think so well of thyself that thou art one of them?

Now to arm thee, Christian, against this, that thou mayest neither be kept from the duty, nor go misgivingly to it upon this account, the greatness of thy request, ponder upon these five considerations, which will amount to a full answer to this cavil. 1. Oppose the greatness of that God thou art going to make thy address unto, against the greatness of thy request. 2. Oppose the promise to thy fears. 3. The valuable consideration on which they are made. 4. The greatness of the request cannot hinder, because they are most welcome that ask most. 5. God exceeds his people's asking.

*[Fivefold answer to Satan's discouragement to  
prayer from the greatness of the request.]*

*Answer 1.* Oppose the greatness of that God thou art going to make thy address unto, against the greatness of thy request. We are bid to 'ascribe greatness to our God,' Deut. 32:3. And if ever, especially when kneeling down to pray. Wert thou to put up thy request to some puny prince, or petty

creature, thou hadst reason to consider whether thy pitcher were not too great that thou wouldst have filled. Possibly thou mayest ask such a one more at one clap than he is worth. 'Help, my lord, O king,' said the woman in the famine of Samaria, yet she had no relief: 'If the Lord do not help thee, whence shall I help thee?' II Kings 6:26, 27. Or possibly, if he hath power, he may want a heart to part with so much as will serve thy turn. There are many of Nabal's name in the world—such churls, who think every bit of bread lost that they eat not themselves; yea, some who grudge their own belly its necessary food. Wert thou at the door of such as those, what couldst thou expect but cold welcome? But remember he is a great God, great in power. Thou canst not overask. Thou mayest draw thine arrow to the head, and yet not overshoot the power of God. Even when thou hast drawn thy desires to the highest pitch, he shall be above thee; 'for he is able to do exceedingly above what we can ask or think.'

Wouldst thou have *thy sins pardoned*? Yes, if they were not too great, thou sayest. But can God at once discount such a sum, and discharge so vast a debt, that hath been gathering many years by a full trade of constant sinning, with so great a stock of means and mercies as I have had; and thereby the unhappy advantage of making the greater return? Yes, he is able 'abundantly to pardon,' without any wrong to himself or control from any other. The sovereign power of life and death being in his hands, he is accountable to none;—as not for acts of justice, so neither of mercy. 'It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? Rom. 8:33, 34. If, indeed, a man forgive a wrong done unto him, thou canst not think thyself therefore acquitted by God; his wrath may still chide on thee. Man cannot give away God's right. Were a man so kind as to forgive a thief that robbed him, yet it is not in his power to discharge him of the penalty of the law. But if the prince, who is the lawgiver, will do it, none can gainsay. If God will pass an act of mercy, thou art free indeed; for the power lies in his hands.

Is it any *masterly lust*, from whose tyranny thou wouldst beg deliverance? The God thou prayest to is able to break open thy prison door, and make thee, a poor captive, go out free. He can give these thine enemies as dust to thy sword, and as driven stubble to thy bow; yea, destroy them with a cast of his eye: 'The Lord looked unto the Egyptians...and troubled their host,' Ex. 14:24. His very look was as heavy as a millstone about their necks. Presently they sank, horse and rider, like lead to the bottom of the sea. And sin and Satan are no more before God than were Pharaoh and his host.

In a word, is it *comfort* thou wouldst ask if it might be had? O, know he is a Creator thou prayest to! Though thy heart were as void of comfort as the chaos was of light, yet can he with a word cause a new heaven of joy to arise out of thy confused soul, and make in one moment to step out of darkness into light. Neither is his mercy less than his power. O, launch therefore into this bankless, bottomless sea, by thy faith! Behold the wonders of God in these depths, and do not stand reasoning thyself into unbelief by any uncomely comparisons between God and the narrow-hearted creature. 'He is God and not man.' None of these defects are to be found in his mercy which we impotent creatures find in ourselves. The paleness we see sometimes is not in the sun, but from the clouds that interpose. The stars do not blink nor twinkle, as is thought; but we—because of their vast distance, and our weak organ—cannot behold them with a fixed eye. Nor have the jealousies and fears entertained by tempted souls, to the disparagement of the mercy of God, any foundation in the divine nature, but are mere *entia rationis*—bugbears, which, through the darkness of their troubled spirits, and distemperature of a melancholy fancy, Satan hath the advantage of affrighting them with. O, beware therefore thou dost not disfigure the sweet lovely face of God's mercy—which smile alike upon every poor, penitent, praying soul—while thou fanciest God to have a cast of this his eye, and to look more favourably upon one than another, lest by this you do betray the glorious name of God to be rent in pieces by your cruel unbelief! If you once come to wrap up God in your hard thoughts as slow to hear—hard to be wrought on with your prayers and tears; truly then Satan may easily persuade you to commit any sin against him, because you expect no mercy from him.

*Answer 2.* Oppose *the promise* to thy fears. There is no mercy thou canst desire but is promised beforehand unto the prayer of faith. The mercy thou wouldst have is already voted in heaven, and

the grant passed; only God stays for thy coming over to the throne of grace, there to lay thy claim to the promise before he issueth it forth. The mercy lies in the womb of the promise, but stays for thy prayer of faith to obstetricate, and give it a fair deliverance. 'The children are come to the birth,' said Hezekiah—the promise is big—wherefore lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left, Isa. 37. That is, if anything will help, it must be that. What can a petitioner desire more in his address to a prince for some great favour, than to be assured not only a prince is of a gracious merciful nature, but also that he hath obliged himself to give that which he hath in his thoughts to desire? And shall only the promises of God be counted light and little worth? Have you not heard of such a promise: 'Ask, that your joy may be full?' Did ever a vain word drop from the lips of truth? Doth he make an order one day, and reverse it another? Are his words yea and nay? and not rather 'yea and amen' for ever? II Cor. 1:20. Beggars use to be quick-sighted. Benhadad's servants saw light at a little hole; and gathered from a few kind words which dropped from Ahab's mouth, that there was mercy raked up in his heart towards their master, which they soon blew up. Joab saw David's bowels working towards Absalom through the casement of his countenance, and therefore lets down the widow's parable as a bucket to draw out that mercy which lay in his heart like water in a deep well. How much more encouragement hast thou, Christian, to plead with thy God, who art not put to guess at God's thoughts, but hast the assurance of plain promises for thy good speed?

O what fools, and how slow of heart are we to believe the good word of God! If Moses supposed his brethren would have understood, by the kind visit he gave them, and his friendly office in rescuing one single Israelite from his oppressor's hand, that God would by him deliver them all; how much more may God expect that his people should understand his purposes of love towards them, when he exposeth his heart to so open a view of their faith by his promise, and hath sealed the truth thereof with so many examples to whom already full payment hath been made of the same? And do we yet read them, as once the eunuch that sweet promise, Isa. 53, and understand not the meaning of them? Do we yet sit so near our comfort, as Hagar by the well, and our eyes held not to see it? Can we yet walk over the promises as barren ground, when, with a little digging into them, we might find a treasure to pay all our debts and supply all our wants?

*Answer 3.* Oppose to thy fears not only the greatness of the promises, but also *the valuable consideration upon which they are made*. Christ pays for what thou prayest. Thou, indeed, beggest alms, but Christ demands that same as debt. God is merciful to thee, but just to him. And therefore, Christian, though it becomes thee to sink thyself beneath the least mercy in thy own thoughts, yet it behooves thee to be tender of Christ's credit, whose merit is far above the greatest mercy thou canst beg as thou art beneath the least. The Father will give you little thanks for casting any dishonourable reflection upon his Son, on whom himself hath heaped so much glory; yea, with whose honour his own is so interwoven, that whoever dishonours the Son dishonours the Father that sent him. Now there are three privileges purchased for every believer; and none of them can be lost by us without dishonour to him.

(1.) He hath purchased a *liberty* to pray. It had been death to come on such an errand to God till he had by his blood paved a way and procured a safe conduct, Heb. 10:17.

(2.) An *ability* to pray as he purchased the Spirit for us; called therefore 'the Spirit of promise.'

(3.) The safe *return* of our prayers. 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,' John 16:23. Indeed, it is his business now in heaven to own our cause there in open court, and to present his blood as ready money to be laid down for all his saints beg, that no demur be made to their requests. So that, either thou must blot this article of Christ's intercession out of thy creed, or else put thyself to shame for questioning thy entertainment with God when thou hast so good a friend at court to speak for thee.

*Answer 4.* The greatness of thy request cannot hinder thy speeding, because thou art *most welcome that ask most*. Who are the persons frowned on at the throne of grace but those who lay out the strength of their desires, and bestow their greatest importunity for mercies of least weight and worth? 'And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds,' Hosea 7:14. Mark! the Lord did not account that they had prayed at all for all their loud cry; and why? but because he disdained their low and drossy spirit in crying loudest for that which they deserved

least, as the following words will resolve us, 'They assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me,' they would have a good crop with a full vintage; and these scraps should serve them, so as not to trouble God for any more. God, his love and favour, are quite left out of the story. May they but have their bellies crammed they have all their wish, and leave the other for those that like them better. O how God abhors these prostrate souls and carnal prayers! When men 'tithe mint and cummin' in their prayers, but neglect the weightier things of the promises, such are an interest in Christ, forgiveness of sin, a new heart, grace here and glory hereafter! Or, when they aim at low and base ends in praying for these things that in themselves are noble and high! And therefore fear not the greatness of thy request. God had rather give thee heaven than earth. He can more willingly bestow himself on thee that art in love with him, than a crust of bread on another that regards him not. The greater the mercy is thou askest, the greater the rent and revenue wilt thou pay him for it. The less he gives the less he receives. By low requests thou wrongest two at once. Thou art a thief to thyself, in wanting what thou mayest have for asking—in bringing a little vessel when thou mightest have a great one filled. Neither art thou so good a friend to thy God as thou shouldst; for the less grace thou hast from him, the less glory thou wilt return unto him. The reflex beams are proportionable to the lightsome body they come from. When grace is weak, the reflection it makes of praise and glory to God can be but weak and dark.

*Answer 5.* God is so free and redundant in communicating his mercy, that he *exceeds his people's modesty in asking*. He gives them commonly their prayers with an overplus more than they have faith or face to ask; as Naaman, when Gehazi asked one talent, would need force two upon him. Abraham asked a child of God when he wanted an heir in whom he might live when dead. Now God promises him a son, and more than so, a numerous offspring; yea, more still, such an offspring, that in his offspring 'all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.' Jacob, he desired but God's pass, under the protection of which he might go and return safely, with food and raiment enough to keep him alive, Gen. 28:20. Well, this he shall have. But God thinks it not enough; and therefore sends him home with two bands, who went out a poor fugitive with little besides his pilgrim's staff. Solomon prays for wisdom, and God throws in wealth and honour, II Chr. 1:10. The woman of Canaan begs a crumb—as much as we would cast to a dog—and Christ gives her a child's portion. She came to have her sick child made well, and with it she hath the life of her own soul given her. Yea, Christ puts the key of his treasure into her own hand, and leaves her as it were to serve herself: 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt,' Matt. 15:28.

[*Satan strives to INTERRUPT FROM PRAYER.*]

SECOND DESIGN. A second design Satan hath against the Christian is, to *interrupt him in the act of prayer*, when he can by no means keep him from it. It is hard to steal a prayer and the devil not know what thou art going about. He watches thy motions, Christian, and is at thy heels wherever thou turnest. If thou art about any evil action, he is at thy elbow to jog thee on, or before thee to remove every stone out of the way, that the bowl may go the more smoothly on, and thou mayest not be sick of the enterprise by the rubs thou meetest in the way. Ahab had but a plot hatching in his thoughts of going up to Ramoth-Gilead, and presently Satan hath his knights of the post whom he sends to bid him go up and prosper. David himself had but some proud thoughts stirring him up to number the people; Satan takes the advantage, and works with the humour now moving, whereby it soon ripened into that sore which God lanced with so sharp a judgement as the loss of seventy thousand men. Now he is as skilful and ready at hand to disturb a holy action as to promote a wicked.

When the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord, Satan forgets not to be among them. He is no recusant, scruples not to be present when you worship God; indeed he is first there and last thence. Sometimes thou shalt find him injecting motions of his own, sometimes wire-drawing thy own. When he sees a vain thought, a sin sprung by thy wanton fancy, he will help thee to pursue the chase. To be sure, he will be at one end of every inordinate motion of thy heart; either the father to beget, or the nurse to bring them up. These are so many and diverse, that we

may as well tell the atoms we see in a sunbeam, as number and sort this miscellaneous heap of roving thoughts which are incident to the Christian in prayer. Sometimes he will inject such as are sinful, proud, filthy, yea blasphemous thoughts. Not that he hopes to find entertainment in the Christian's heart for such guests—much less to make a settlement of them there with the gracious soul's consent; but to make a hurly-burly and confusion in his spirit, whereby—as upon some sudden scare in our assemblies—the holy exercise he is now about may be hindered. Sometimes he will prompt thoughts holy in themselves but impertinent, which, at another time, himself would oppose with all his might, but now presents them, because most likely to find welcome, and fit enough to serve his present purpose, being, though good fruit, yet brought forth in a bad season. I believe none that have any acquaintance with this duty, and their hearts in it, are altogether strangers to Satan's slights of this nature. Now he hath a double plot; one levelled against God himself, another against the Christian thereby.

*[The double plot of Satan in interrupting prayer.]*

*First Plot.* In interrupting prayer Satan hath a plot *against God*. The devil knows very well that not the least part of his tribute of honour is paid by the Christian upon his knees in this solemn act of divine worship, to intercept which is both his great ambition and endeavour. Nay, he despairs not—if his design takes—to make the Christian dishonour him most, where God looks his name should be above all sanctified. Indeed, those have the unhappy opportunity of casting the greatest indignities on God who are admitted to stand nearest to him. Should he who hath the honour to set the crown on his prince's head, bring it in a filthy case, and so clap it on—or, instead of the king's own royal crown bring some ridiculous one of straw, or such like stuff contrived on purpose to make laughter—what greater scorn could such a one possibly invent to throw upon his prince? The attributes of God are his royal diadem, and it is no small honour that the great God puts upon the Christian, by admitting him as it were to set this crown upon his head, which he doth when in prayer he gives him the glory of his majesty and holiness, power and mercy, truth and faithfulness, &c., with such humble adoration, and holy ravishment of affection, as may comport with the indefinite perfections of his deity.

But if our present thoughts in prayer be not of God, or not suitable to God and these his glorious excellencies, we pollute his name, and not honour it. We mock him, not worship him. In a word, we pull off his crown as much as in us lies, rather than set it on. Now doth not thy heart tremble, Christian, in thy bosom, to think thou should be Satan's instrument to offer such an indignity as this unto thy God and King? Thou art, if a saint, the temple of the Holy Ghost; prayer, the spiritual sacrifice which from the altar of a humble heart thou art to offer; wilt thou now suffer Satan to sit in this temple of God, and exalt himself there—by any vain, much less vile, thoughts—above God himself, whom thou art worshipping? Suppose, while a prince is at dinner, a company of impudent ruffians should rush into the room through the negligence of the prince's servants that are waiting on him, and they should throw the dishes, one this way, another that way, would not these servants deserve a severe rebuke that looked no better to the door? Ordinances of worship are God's table, the sacrifices under the law called God's food and bread. When the saint is praying the King of heaven sits at his table, Song 1:12. The dishes served up are the graces of his Spirit in the saint. Now wandering thoughts, they come in and turn the table as it were upside down; they spill the spikenard which thou wouldst pour forth. How ill may thy God take it that thou lookest no better to the door of thy heart!

*Second Plot.* In interrupting prayer Satan hath a plot *against thee, Christian*.

1. If he can get thee to sport with these, or sluggishly yield to them without making any vigorous resistance, *that prayer, he knows, will neither do him hurt nor thyself good*. Dost [thou] think God will welcome that prayer to heaven which hath not thy heart to bear it company thither? And how can thy heart go with it when thou hast sent it another way? It were a vain thing to expect that ship should make a prosperous voyage which is set adrift to sea to be carried whither every wave it meets will drive it, without any pilot to steer it to a certain haven, or such a one that hath no skill or

care to hold the helm with a steady hand. Such are the prayers that come from a roving heart. Will God hear thee when thou mockest him? And if this be not to mock him, what is? Like children that give a knock at a door and then run away to their play again, thus thou rearest up thy voice to God, and then art gone in thy roving thoughts to hold chat with the world or worse, forgetting whom thou spakest last to. Is not this to play bo-peep with God? *Magnam injuriam Deo facio, cum precor, ut meas preces exaudiat, quas ego qui fundo, non exaudio; deprecor illum, ut mihi intendat, ego vero, nec mihi, nec mihi, intendo.* Thus the holy man complains of himself how injurious and unworthy of God his carriage was in prayer—‘I would have God,’ saith he, ‘hear my prayer which myself doth not, when I put it up; I would have God’s ear attentive to me, when I neither mind God nor myself when I pray.’

2. He disturbs thee in praying, that he may make thee *weary of praying*. Indeed, he is not likely to miss his mark if thou lettest these vermin go on to breed in thy heart; for these will rob thee of the sweetness of the duty; and when the marrow is once out, thou wilt easily be persuaded to throw the bone away. *Omnis vita gustu ducitur*—he is in danger to forsake his meat who hath lost his relish of it. Prayer is a tedious work to him that hath no pleasure in performing of it; and weariness *in* it stands next door to being weary *of* it.

3. Thou provokest the Spirit of God—that alone can carry you through the work—to *withdraw his assistance*. Who will help him that minds not what he does? You know what Joab said to David when he indulged his inordinate passion for the loss of Absalom, ‘If thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee,’ II Sam. 19:7. Truly, either thou must speedily rouse thyself out of thy sloth and non-attendance, or else the Spirit will be gone; and he departed, it will be worse with thee than ever. Who hast thou then to help thee in thy work? And thou wilt find it harder to bring him back, than to keep him from going. The necessary infirmities which cleave to thy imperfect state, if protested against, shall not drive him away; but if thou lettest them nestle in thy heart, he takes it as thy giving him warning to be gone. An affront done to an ambassador by the baser sort of people as he walks in the street—while resident in a foreign state—may be passed over; but when such shall find countenance from the prince, it then makes a breach. Take heed, therefore, of showing favour to such disturbers of the league betwixt God and thy soul. Thy heart, which should be a house of prayer, Christ will not endure to have it a place of merchandise. Either thou must whip these buyers and sellers out, or the Spirit will go. We read of an ‘abomination of desolation standing in the holy place,’ Matt. 24:15, which some interpret to be the Roman ensigns there displayed when Jerusalem was taken. This abomination ushered desolation. What dost thou, by thy roving thoughts, but set up an abomination in the temple of thy heart? O! down with these, as thou wouldst not be left desolate, and wholly void of God’s gracious presence with thee.

*Question.* But, it may be, now you will ask, ‘What counsel can you give to arm us against both these incursions of Satan and babbings of our own vain hearts in prayer? How can we keep either our hearts in, or these out?’

{*Answer.*} Impossible, indeed, it may be wholly to prevent them, they come so suddenly and secretly—even as lightning in at the window. We may as well keep the wind out of our house—which gets in at every crevice, though the doors be shut—as wholly free our hearts from their disturbance. Yet this will not disoblige us from our utmost care and endeavour to hinder the prevalency of them. Humours, while rousing here and there, do not endanger us so much as when they gather to a head, and settle in some joint and part of the body. I have read of some eastern parts of the world, where such multitudes of locusts and caterpillars are seen, that they almost darken the air as they fly, and devour every green thing where they light. The inhabitants, therefore, when they perceive this army hovering over them, by making fires in their fields, keep them from lighting with the smoke that ascends therefrom. Thou canst not hinder these roving thoughts from flying now and then over thy head, but surely thou mayest do something that may prevent their settling. Towards which good work take these directions, which I shall endeavour to suit to these several causes from whence they proceed. The wanderings in prayer may be referred to four causes. *First.* The natural vanity and levity of our minds. *Second.* A dead and inactive heart in him that prayeth. *Third.* Encumbrance of worldly cares. *Fourth.* Non-observance of the heart in

the act of prayer.

[*Four causes of wandering thoughts in prayer.*]

*First Cause.* The first cause, and indeed original of all other, is *the natural vanity and levity of our minds*, which are as inconsistent as quicksilver, that hath, they say, *principium motus, sed non quietis*—the principle of motion, but not of rest. They are as unstable as water, which fluid element—as we see in a little of it poured on the ground—diffuseth itself hither and thither, and so is soon drunk up and lost. Thus do our vain minds scatter themselves into impertinencies; but never so much as when we are conversant about spiritual duties. Then, above all, we discover the lightness of our spirits. And this is not the least part of that evil which followed man's degeneracy, who by his fall wounded both head and heart. Now, though there be a cure in part made by the grace of God as to both these in a saint, yet there still remains a craze in his soul, whereby he is not able to dwell long upon spiritual things without some dissipation of his thoughts, as innocent Adam could—who, before his fall, might have walked through the whole world, and not have had one thought of his heart misplaced, or turned from its right point by the diversity of objects he met, they being all to the eye of his soul a clear medium, through which it passed to terminate itself in God, as the air is now to our bodily eye, through which it pierceth, and stays not till it comes at the body of the sun. But, alas! it is with us as with one that hath had his skull broke by some dangerous fall, who, when recovered, finds his brain so weakened that, when he goes about any serious business, he cannot intend much, or persist long, but is off and on, out and in. Such vagaries and cross steps do our hearts take in duty. And this gives Satan advantage enough to work upon. If the ship be light for want of ballast, and a strong gust of wind arises too, O how hard then is it to make it sail trim, or keep from toppling over! A vain heart, and a strong temptation together, makes sad work, when God stands by and gives Satan leave to practice upon it. Be therefore careful to take in thy ballast before thou putttest to sea. Labour to poise thy heart before thou goest to pray. Which, that thou mayest do, improve the following directions.

[*DIRECTIONS against levity in prayer.*]

1. *Direction.* Innure thyself to *holy thoughts in thy ordinary course*. The best way to keep vessels from leaking—when we would use them for some special occasion—is to let them stand full. A vain heart out of prayer will be little better in prayer. The more familiar thou makest holy thoughts and savoury discourse to thee in thy constant walking, the more seasoned thou wilt find thy heart for this duty. A scholar, by often rubbing up his notions when alone, and talking of them with his colleagues, makes them his own; so that, when he is put upon any exercise, they are at hand, and come fresh into his head. Whereas another, for want of this filling, wants matter for his thoughts to feed on, which makes him straggle into many impertinencies before he can hit of that which suits his occasion. The carnal liberty which we give our hearts in our ordinary walking, makes our thoughts more unruly and unsuitable for duties of worship. For such thoughts and words leave a tincture upon the spirit, and so hinder the soul's taking a better colour when it returns into the presence of God. Walk in the company of sinful thoughts all the day, and thou wilt hardly shut the door upon them when thou goest into thy closet. Thou hast taught them to be bold; they will now plead acquaintance with thee, and crowd in after thee; like little children, who, if you play with them, and carry them much in your arms, will cry after you when you would be rid of their company.

2. *Direction.* Possess thy heart with a *reverential awe of God's majesty and holiness*. This, if anything, will 'gird up the loins of thy mind' strait, and make thee *hoc agere*—mind what thou art about. Darest thou toy and trifle with the divine majesty in a duty of his worship! carry thyself childishly before the living God! to look with one eye upon him, as it were, and with the other upon a lust! to speak one word to God, and chat two with the world! Does not thy heart tremble at this? *Sic ora*, saith Bernard, *quasi assumptus et præsensus ante faciem ejus in excelso throno, ubi millia millium ministrant ei*—so pray as if thou wert taken up and presented before God sitting on his royal throne



on high, with millions of millions of his glorious servitors ministering to him in heaven. Certainly the face of such a court would awe thee. If thou wert but at the bar before a judge, and hadst a glass of a quarter of an hour's length turned up—being all the time thou hadst allowed thee to improve for the begging of thy life, now forfeited and condemned—wouldst thou spare any of this little time to gaze about the court, to see what clothes this man had on, and what lace another wears? God shame us for our folly in misspending our praying seasons. Is it not thy life thou art begging at God's hand; and that a better, I trow, than the malefactor sues for of his mortal judge? And dost thou know whether thou shalt have so long as a quarter of an hour allowed thee when thou art kneeling down? And yet wilt thou scribble and dash it out to no purpose upon impertinencies? If thou dost, why no better? Why no closer and compact in thy thoughts? Will God judge us for 'every idle word' that is spoken in our shop and house, at our work, yea sport and recreation? And shall thy idle words in prayer not be accounted for? And are not those idle words that come from a lazy heart, a sleepy heart, that minds not what it says? What procured Nadab and Abihu so sudden and strange an death? Was it not their strange incense? And is not this strange praying, when thy mind is a stranger to what thy lips utter? Behave thyself thus to thy prince if thou darest. Let thy hand reach a petition to him, and thine eye look or thy tongue talk to another; would he not command this clown, or rather madman, to be taken from before him? 'Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence?' 1 Sam. 21:15, said Achish when David behaved himself discomposedly. O! could you but look through the keyhole, and see how glorious angels in heaven serve their Maker, who are said to 'behold the face of God continually,' surely thou wouldst tremble to think of thy slightly performing this duty.

3. *Direction.* Go not in thy own strength to this duty, but *commit thyself by faith to the conduct of the Spirit of God.* God hath promised to prepare, or establish, as the word is, the heart. Indeed, then the heart is prepared when established and fixed. A shaking hand may soon write a right line as our loose hearts keep themselves steady in duty. Shouldst thou, with Job, make a covenant with thine eye, and resolve to bung up thine ear from all by-discourse, how long, thinkest thou, shouldst thou be true to thine own self, who hast so little command of thine own thoughts? Thy best way were to put thyself out of thine own hands, and lay thy weight on him that is able to bear thee better than thy own legs. Pray with David, 'Uphold me with thy free spirit,' Ps. 51:12. The vine leaning on a wall preserves itself and its fruit, whose own weight else, without this help, would soon lay it in the dirt.

*Second Cause.* A second cause of these wandering roving thoughts in prayer, is *a dead and unactive heart in him that prayeth.* If the affections be once down, then the Christian is as a city whose wall is broken down. No keeping then the thoughts in, or Satan out. The soul is an active creature. Either it must be employed by us, or it will employ us, though to little purpose. Like our poor, find them work and they keep at home. But let them want for it, and you have them roving and begging all the country over. The affections are as the master-workmen, which set our thoughts on work. Love entertains the soul with pleasant and delightful thoughts on its beloved object. Grief commands in the soul to muse with sorrowful thoughts on its ail and trouble. So that, Christian, as long as thy heart bleeds in the sense of sin, they will have no leisure, when thou art confessing sin, to rove and wander. If thy desires be lively, and flame forth in thy petitions, with a holy zeal for the graces and mercies prayed for, this will be as 'a wall of fire' to keep thy thoughts at home.

The lazy prayer is the roving prayer. When Israel talked of travelling three days' journey in the wilderness, Pharaoh said, 'Ye are idle, ye are idle; therefore ye say, Let us go.' As if he had said, 'Surely they have little to do, or else they would not think of gadding.' And therefore, to cure them of this, he commanded more work to be given, Ex. 5. We may truly say thus of our wandering hearts, 'They are idle.' We pray, but our affections are dead and dull. The heart hath little to do in the duty for the setting of its thoughts on work—only to speak or read a few words, which is so easy a task that a man may do it and spare whole troops of his thoughts to be employed elsewhere at the same time. But now, when the affections are up, melting into sorrow in the confession of sin, sallying forth with holy panting and breathing in its supplications, truly this fixeth the thoughts. The soul intended can no more be in two places together than the body. And as these holy affections

will prevent the soul's wandering disposition, so also make it more difficult for Satan to throw in his injections. Flies will not so readily light on a pot seething hot on the fire as when it stands cold in the window. Baalzebub is one of the devil's names—that is, the god as a fly—an allusion to the idolatrous sacrifices, where flies were so busy. This fly will not so readily light on thy sacrifice when flaming from the altar of thy heart with zeal.

Now, to preserve thy affections in prayer warm and lively, let it be thy care to chase and stir up the natural heat that is undoubtedly in thee, if a Christian, by the serious consideration of thy sins, wants, and mercies. While thou art pondering on these, thine eye will affect thine heart. They will, as Abishag did to David, by laying them in thy bosom, bring thy soul to a kindly heat in those affections which thou art to act in the several parts of prayer. Thy sins reviewed, and heightened with their aggravations, will make the springs of godly sorrow to rise in thy heart. Canst thou choose but mourn when thou shalt read thy several indictments to thy guilty soul, now called to hold up its hand at the bar of thy conscience? Canst thou hear how the holy law of God hath been violated, his Spirit grieved, and his Son murdered by thy bloody hands, and this when he hath been treating thee mercifully, and not mourn? Surely, should a man walk over a field after a bloody battle hath been fought, and there see the bodies, though of his enemies, lying weltering in their blood, his heart could not but then relent, though in the heat of battle his fury shut out all thoughts of pity. But what if he should spy a father or a dear friend dead upon the place, of the wounds which his unnatural hand had given, would not his bowels turn? Yes, surely, if he carried the heart of a man in his bosom. Thou mayest guess, Christian, by this, what help such a mediation would afford toward the breaking of thy heart for thy sins. Certainly it would make thee throw away that unhappy dagger which was the instrument to give those deep stabs to the heart of Christ—and this is the best mourning of all. Again, thy wants well weighed would give wings to thy desires. If once thou wert possessed with the true state of thy affairs—how necessary it is for thee to have supplies from heaven, or to starve and die. And so in the rest, &c.

*Third Cause.* A third cause of roving thoughts, is *encumbrance of worldly cares*. It is no wonder that man can enjoy no privacy with God in a duty, who hath so many from the world rapping at his door to speak with him when he is speaking with God. *Periclitatur pietas in negotiis*—religion never goes in more danger than when in a crowd of worldly business. If such a one prays, it is not long before something comes in his head to take him off. 'Isaac went out to meditate,...and behold the camels.' The world is soon in such a one's sight. He puts forth one hand to heaven in a spiritual thought, but soon pulls it back, and a worldly one steps before it, and so makes a breach upon his duty. 'A dream,' Solomon tells us, 'cometh through a multitude of business.' And so do dreaming prayers. They are made up of heterogeneous independent thoughts. The shop, barn, warehouse are unfit places for prayer—I mean the shop in the heart, and the barn in the heart. I have read of one who was said to be a walking library, because he left not his learning with his books in his study, but carried it about with him wherever he went, in his memory and judgment, that had digested all he read, and so made it his own. And have we not too many walking shops and barns, who carry them to bed and board, church and closet? And how can such pray with a united heart, who have so many sharers in their thoughts? *O anima sancta sola esto, anne nescis verecundum habes Sponsum!*—O, holy soul, get thee alone, if thou wouldst have Christ give thee his loves. Knowest thou not thou hast a modest husband? Indeed he gives the soul not his embraces in a crowd, nor the kisses of his lips in the market. Jacob sends away his company to the other side of the river, and then God gave him one of the sweetest meetings he had in all his life. Let him now pray even a whole night if he will, and welcome. Now, Christian, for thy help against these—

[DIRECTIONS against the encumbrance  
of worldly cares in prayer.]

1. *Direction.* Labour to *keep thy distance to the world*, and that sovereignty which God hath given thee over in its profits and pleasures, or whatever else may prove a snare to thee. While the father and master know their place and keep their distance, so long will servants and children will keep

theirs, by being dutiful and officious. But, when they forget this—the father grows fond of the one, and the master too familiar with the other—then they begin to lose their authority, and the other to grow saucy and under no command. Bid them go, and it may be they will not stir. Set them a task, and they will bid you do it yourself. Truly thus it fares with the Christian. All the creatures are his servants. And so long as he keeps his heart at a holy distance from hem, and maintains his lordship over them, not laying them in his bosom which God hath put under his feet, Ps. 8, all is well. He marches to the duties of God's worship in a goodly order. He can be private with God, and these not be bold to crowd in to disturb him. But when we grow fond of, and too familiar with, them, alas! how are we pestered with them! We read of no undutifulness of Hagar towards her mistress while a servant; but when Sarah gives her into Abraham's bosom, and admits her to share with herself in conjugal privileges, truly then she begins to jostle with her mistress, and carries herself saucily to her. Yea, and Abraham himself, who would not have stuck to have put her away before, yet now he hath taken her into his bed, can hardly persuade his heart to yield to it, till God joins with Sarah in the business, bidding him 'hearken unto his wife.'

Thus, Christian, use the world as a servant—which it was made for—and you may go to prayer, as Abraham up the mount, leaving his servants below. Thou shalt find they will not have that power to disturb thee. But, let either profits or pleasures share with Christ in thy conjugal affection, and thou wilt find thy heart loath to send this Hagar away, though at the request of Christ himself, when he is calling thee into communion with himself. Either use the world as if thou usedst it not, or you will pray as if you prayed not. The smoke and sparks that rise from a furnace are carried that way the wind lies. If thy heart be to the world, thou canst not then keep thy thoughts from driving thither. Then, and not till then, will thy prayer ascend like a pillar of incense, when there is a holy calmness on thy spirit, and this boisterous wind of inordinate affections to the world be laid. I must not take thee off from diligence in thy worldly calling; this never spoils a good prayer, only watch thy heart that thou prostitute it not to the wanton embraces of it. That is the pure metall'd sword or knife which bends this way and that way, but returns to its straightness again, and stands not bent. That heart is of the right make, and hath heaven's stamp upon it, which can stoop and bend to the lowest action of his worldly calling, but then returns to his fitness for communion with God, and his heart stands not bent to the creature, but in a direct line to God and his worship.

2. *Direction.* *Strengthen thy faith on the providence of God for the things of this life.* A distrustful heart is ever thoughtful. Whatever he is doing, his thoughts will be on that he fears he shall lose. When the merchant's adventure is insured—that whatever comes he cannot lose much—his heart then is at rest, he can eat his bread with quiet, and sleep without dreaming of shipwrecks and pirates. While another, whose estate is at sea, and fears what will become of it, O how is this poor man haunted wherever he is going, whatever he is doing, with disquieting thoughts! If he hears the wind but a little loud, he cannot sleep for fear of his ship at sea. Truly thus a soul by faith rolled on the promise will find a happy deliverance from that disturbance which another is pestered with in prayer. Wherefore God in particular directs us to lay this burden from our shoulders on his, when we go to pray, that no by-thoughts arising from these our cares may disturb us. 'Be careful for nothing, but...let your requests be made known unto God,' Php. 4:6. As if he had said, 'Leave me to take care of your work, and mind you to do mine. If things go amiss in your estates, names, families, I will take the blame, and give you leave to say God was not careful enough of you.' When the males of Israel went to worship God at Jerusalem, that they might not carry distracted minds with them—from the fear of their families left naked behind without a man to fight for them if an enemy should come—God takes the special care of their families in their absence, Ex. 34:24. If we have but a faithful servant, who we believe will look to our business as carefully as our own selves, this makes us go forth with a free and quiet spirit, and not trouble ourselves what is done at home when we are abroad. O then, let us be ashamed if our faith on God's providence be not much more able to ease us of the burden of distracting cares.

*Fourth Cause.* These wandering thoughts are occasioned by the Christian's *non-observance of his heart in the act of prayer.* Let him be at never so much cost of preparatory pains before duty, yet if he

doth not watch himself narrowly in the duty itself, his heart will give him the slip, and run into a thousand vanities and impertinencies. The mind of man is a nimble creature; in one moment you shall have it in heaven, and in the very next you shall find it on the earth. Like Philip, who being joined to the eunuch's chariot, on a sudden was carried out of his sight, and found at Azotus, a place far distant thence; thus our hearts are soon gone away from the duty in hand, and taken a vagary to the furthest part of the world in their wild imagination. Yea—which is worse—sometimes the mind is off and gadding, but the Christian goes on with his lip-labour and takes no notice that his thoughts are gone astray; as Joseph and Mary were gone a day's journey before they missed their child, who stayed behind with other company. Thus the Christian loses his heart in duty, and goes on with a careless formality, that sometimes the prayer is almost done before he observes his heart's seat to be empty, or considers that his soul and spirit hath not borne him company all the way; who, had he but at the first stepping aside of his thoughts been aware, might have recovered and rescued them out of the hands of those vanities which stole them, as David did his wives and children from the Amalekites, without any great trouble or loss. And therefore, Christian, keep thy heart with all diligence; observe whether it doth its part in the duty, or be as a string that sounds not in the concert. As you do with your children, so you had need do with your childish mind. Haply they wait on you to church, but when you are set, if not awed by your eye, they are gone, and may be playing all sermon time in the fields, and you miss them not; to prevent which, you set them before you that you may see their carriage and their behaviour. If thou didst thus pray, observing and watching thy thoughts, where, and what about, thou wouldst find more composure in thy spirit than thou dost.

Nay, do not only observe thy thoughts *in* duty, but call them to review *after* duty. Many go from prayer too much like boys from school, that think no more of their lesson till they return again—leave praying, and all thoughts how they behaved themselves in prayer, together. For shame do not thus. If thou neglectest to take account of thyself, consider that thou must give an account both of it and this thy neglect after it before thy betters. God himself will have the full hearing thereof. He sets not any about a work, of which he means not to take cognizance how it was done. And were it not better that the audit should be in thy more private court, than thou be called to give up thy account at his dreadful tribunal? Resolve therefore to commune with thy heart upon this point; and the sooner thou goest about it the better it is like to be done, because then the circumstances of the action will be freshest in thy memory. Go not then out of thy closet till thou hast examined thy heart. If thy thoughts in prayer shall be found to have been in any measure free and entire, thy affections warm and lively, matter of joy will arise to thee, and thanksgiving to God that thou hast escaped the hands of so many rovers and freebooters that lay in wait to make prize of thee. But, take heed thou applaudest not thyself for thine own care and circumspection. Alas! thou wert not thine own keeper. He that lent his ear to thy prayer gave thee thy heart to pray, and also keep it up in duty. Say rather with David, 'Who am I, that I should be able to offer so willingly?' If thy heart upon the review be found to have played the truant, take shame, that thou beest not put to shame before the Lord. O blush to think thou shouldst be so unfaithful to God and thine own soul, yea so foolish, to run up and down on every idle errand which Satan sends thee, and in the meanwhile neglect thy own work of so great an importance! The spouse's complaint may fit thy mouth: 'They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.'

He is an unwise messenger who, being sent to market to provide food, is drawn by every idle companion to spend both his time and money in vain, and at night comes home without bread for the hungry family. O! Christian, was not thy errand to the throne of grace to get new supplies from heaven for thy poor soul? And doth it not grieve thee to think that now thy soul must pinch, for thy playing away thy praying time and talent, which, as market money, was put into thy hand to procure a new store? Yea, that thou hast been injurious to thy God by taking his name in vain? Thou appearedst in a praying posture; thy hand voice were lift up to heaven, as if thou meantest to pray; but—like him who said he would go into the vineyard, and did not—thou hast turned a contrary way, and set thy thoughts to work in another field. Will not this affect thy heart? Yes, surely, and afflict it also. And this affliction of thy spirit will be a sovereign means to excite thy care for the future. The

faults which are unobserved are also uncorrected in the scholar's exercise, and so not like to be mended in the next. Wandering thoughts in prayer are like vagrants. No such way to rid the country of one, and the heart of the other, as by giving both the law—the lash, I mean.

*Question.* O! but, saith the Christian, I have used this means, and yet, to the grief of my heart, I am still pestered with them.

*Answer.* Take a few consolatory words to ease thy aching heart, that groans under the burden of these thy wandering thoughts.

*[Consolatory thoughts for the Christian too  
much downcast through wanderings in prayer.]*

1. *Thought.* The affliction of thy spirit for them *speaks more comfort to thee, than the presence of them discomfort.* That thou art annoyed with such troublesome guests is no more than the best of saints have found and acknowledged. Wherefore did David pray that God would 'unite his heart to fear his name,' but that he found it gadding? What means Paul by his complaint, 'When I would do good, evil is present with me,' but that he had not yet got the full mastery of his unruly thoughts? Thou seest it is no new disease thou art troubled with, but such as is common, not only to the sons of men, but the children of God—a spot that may be seen on a saint's coat. But thy being afflicted for them, speaks one of these two things—and both of them have comfort in their mouth for thee. It proves that they are either Satan's injections, and not the birth of thine own heart; or, if they stream from thy own heart, yet the Spirit of God is the indweller, and these but intruders.

(1.) The moan thou makest for being yoked to such company is a sign they are *rather sent in by Satan, than called in by thee*—his injections, rather than the suggestions of thy own heart. Our own thoughts commonly are more taking with and pleasurable to us. The mother does not more love the fruit of her own body, than we do the product of our minds. Hence our 'own ways,' words, and thoughts are called our 'pleasure,' Isa. 58:13, and therefore they may be possibly shot from his bow—thy heart being so affrighted at them, and wounded for them. Or,

(2.) If they prove the offspring of thine own mind, yet thy afflicted soul shows that *the Spirit and grace of God is the indweller*, and these but intruders and involuntary motions, such as in thy deliberate thoughts thou abhorrest. Were they, as I may so say, of thy own house and family, thou wouldst not show this zeal to shut the door upon them, or shriek out when they come in upon thee. The wife does not cry out when husband, children, or servants come into the room, but when thieves and cutthroats, from whom she looks for nothing but cruelty. It seems they are neither of thine acquaintance, nor likest thou their company, by thy behaviour before them. Be not therefore over-troubled; for Satan, if he can but disquiet thy mind with false fears, he hath one part of his errand done for which he sends them. These wicked thoughts are upon no other terms with thee than holy thoughts are in the wicked. As those profit not them, because not entertained; so, for the same reason, shall not these hurt thee.

2. *Thought.* Know these be *the necessary infirmities of thy imperfect state*; and, so long as thou art faithful to resist and mourn for them, they rather move God's pity to thee than wrath against thee. It is one thing for a child, employed by his father, willingly or negligently to spoil the work he sets him about; and another, when through natural weakness he fails in the exact doing of it. Should a master bid his servant give him a cup of wine, and he should willingly throw both glass and wine on the ground, he might expect his master's just displeasure. But if, through some unsteadiness—it may be palsy in his hand—he should, notwithstanding all his care, spill some of it in the bringing, an ingenuous master will rather pity him for his disease, than be angry for the wine that is lost. And did God ever give his servants occasion to think him a hard master? Hath he not promised, 'that he will spare us as a father his child that serves him?' From whence come all the apologies which he makes for his people's failings if not from his merciful heart, interpreting them candidly to proceed rather from their want of skill than will, power, or desire? 'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' Zech. 3:2, is Christ's answer in the behalf of Joshua, whom Satan accused for his filthy garments. 'The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,' Matt. 26:41, was his favourable gloss for his

disciples' drowsiness in prayer.

3. *Thought.* Believers' prayers *pass a refining before they come into God's hands*. Did he indeed read them with their impertinences, and take our blotted copy out of our hand, we could not fear too much what the issue might be. But they come under the corrector's hand. Our Lord Jesus hath the inspection of them, who sets right all our broken requests and misplaced petitions. He washes out our blots with his blood. His mediation is the fine searce<sup>31</sup> through which our prayers are bolted. All that is coarse and heterogeneous he severs from the pure. What is of his own Spirit's breathing he presents, and what our fleshly part added he hides, that it shall not prejudice us or our prayers. This was the sweet gospel truth wrapped up in the priest's bearing the sins of their holy offerings, Ex. 28:38.

4. *Thought.* Though the presence of these be a great affliction to thee, yet *God will make them of singular use to thee*. (1.) To humble thee, and take all glorying from thee, that thou shalt not pride thyself in thy other assistances, which thou wouldst be prone to do if thy prayer had not this lame foot to humble thee. (2.) To keep thee wakeful and circumspect in thy Christian course. By thy disturbance from these thou seest the war is not yet quite done. The Canaanite is yet in the land. Though not master of the field, he is yet skulking in his holes and fastnesses, out of which he comes like an adder in the path, that by these sudden surprises and nibbling at thy heel he may make thee, like the rider, fall backward, and so steal a victory unawares of thee, whom he despairs to overcome in a pitched battle by sins more deliberate. And truly, if he dare be so bold as to set upon thee when in communion with God—so nigh thy rock and castle—doth it not behoove thee, Christian, to look about thee, that he gets no greater advantage of thee when thou art at further distance from him in thy worldly employments? (3.) God will make thee by these more merciful to, and less censorious of, thy brethren of greater failings.

5. *Thought.* In thy faithful conflict with them thou mayest *promise thyself, at last, victory over them*. But expect this gradually to be done; not at once, nor hastily, to be delivered into thy hands, as God said of Israel's enemies. Therefore, maintain the fight: faint not at their stubborn resistance; pray, and mourn that thou canst pray no better; mourn and fight again; fight and believe them down, though sometimes they get thee under their feet. God made a promise to Noah after the flood, in which he gave him a sovereignty over the creatures. 'The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth,' Gen. 9:2. But we see many beasts are fierce, savage, and cruel to mankind. Yet thus it is fulfilled—that none are so fierce and unruly but, by man's art and industry, they have been and still are taken and tamed, as the apostle hath it, James 3:7. Thus God hath given his saints by promise, a sovereignty over sin and Satan; he will subdue both under your feet. The dread of the saints shall fall on the proudest devil, and his foot shall be set on the neck of the fiercest lust. Yet this will cost hot work before the one or other be effected.

[*Satan strives to HINDER THE SUCCESS OF PRAYER.*]

THIRD DESIGN. The third and last design that Satan hath against the saint in this great undertaking of prayer, is to *hinder his success therein*. He will have thee, Christian, if he can, one way or other, outwards or homewards; and it comes all to one whether the ship be taken as it goes forth or as it returns home. Nay, of the two it is the greater loss to be defeated of our expectations when we look for our prayers to come richly fraught with mercies from heaven. Now, two ways he labours to hinder the success of prayer.

*First.* He endeavours to hinder the welcome of their prayers with God, that they may be cast as a petition out of court which God will not look on.

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<sup>31</sup> **SEARCE**, v. t. sers. To shift; to bolt; to separate the fine part of meal from the coarse.

[Little used.]

**SEARCE**, n. sers. A sieve; a bolter. [Little used.]

*Second.* If he cannot prevail in this, then he plays an after-game, and will so handle the matter, if possible, that though the prayers have a welcome with God, and find gracious reception in heaven, yet that this be not believed by the saint on earth, but that he gives them up for lost and looks no more after them. Now though this be not a total and final miscarriage of the prayer, yet the devil hath hereby a great advantage, depriving him of the present comfort and benefit which his fight might pay him in before a return is made of his prayer.

*[Satan would hinder the success of the saints' prayers,  
by getting them to be such as would be unwelcome  
with God.]*

*First way of Hinderance.* Satan endeavours to hinder the welcome of the saints' prayers with God, that they may be cast as a petition out of court which God will not look on. He labours to hinder even the *entertainment* of our prayers in heaven. Now our prayers may several ways be stopped at heaven's door, and denied that gracious access which God useth to give. I speak now of saints' prayers. As for the prayers of the wicked, there is one law for them all—to be cast over the bar and the door shut upon them. The tree must be good before the fruit it bears can be sweet on God's palate. Now the stoppage which the saint's prayer meets withal, springs not from any unwillingness in God to give out his mercy, or any dislike to have beggars at his door. *Adeo placet Deo dare, ut propter hoc omnia creavit, volebat enim habere quæ et quibus dare*—God is so delighted with acts of mercy, that therefore he made the world, and all in it, that he might have suitors to beg and alms to give those suitors. But from ourselves we put the stones into the lock, which hinders the turning of prayer's key in it, and so indeed we shut the door of mercy upon ourselves. The devil himself could not immediately hinder a saint's welcome. He hath not such command of God's ear, did we not put words into his mouth, and help him to a charge against us. The lies which he, as a false accuser carries to God, shall not prejudice us in God's thoughts or make our prayers less acceptable; but if the accusation be true, God will hear it, though he be a wicked spirit that tells the tale, and we his dear children of whom it is told. A father, when he hears of some wicked prank his child hath played, will chide and frown on him, though it be an enemy that told him of it. Now, to instance what miscarriages in a saint hinder their audience at the throne of grace. 1. When the thing prayed for is not according to the will of God. 2. When the end the saint aims at is not levelled right. 3. When with his prayer he joins not a diligent use of the means. 4. When some secret grudge is lodged in his heart against his brother. 5. When there is a want of faith.

*[MISCARRIAGES in a praying saint which  
hinder his audience in heaven.]*

1. *Miscarriage.* When the thing prayed for is not according to the will of God. We have not a liberty to pray at random for what we will. The throne of grace is not set up that we may come and there vent our sudden distempered passions before God, or make any saucy motion to him that comes in our head. Truly then God would have work enough. If we had promised to sign all our petitions without any regard to the subject-matter of them, he should too oft set his hand against himself, and pass that away which would be little for his glory to give. Herod was too lavish when he gave his minion leave to ask what she would, even to half of his kingdom. And he paid dearly for it; he gave her that head which was more worth than his whole kingdom—for the cutting off his head lost him his crown. No, we have to do with a wise God, who, to stop the mouth of all such bold beggars, that would ask what unbeseems us to desire, or him to give, hath given a law of prayer, and stinted us to the matter thereof: 'When ye pray, say, Our Father,' &c. That is, learn here what you may pray for in faith to receive. 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us,' 1 John 5:14.

Faith, without a promise, is like a foot without any firm ground to stand upon. It was well Luther interpreted himself, when he said, *fiat voluntas mea*—my will be done—*mea, Domine, quia tua*—my will, Lord, because thine. Now, the promise contains this will of God. Be sure thou gatherest all thy

flowers of prayer out of this garden, and thou canst not do amiss. But take heed of mingling with them any wild gourd of thine own. Remember the check our Lord gave his disciples when venting their vindictive passion in their prayer: 'Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?...And he said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,' Luke 9:54, 55. They had here an example to countenance their act. But that *heroicus impetus*, and extraordinary spirit by which Elijah and other of the prophets were acted, is not our standing rule for prayer. *That* came in them from the Spirit of God, which in us may proceed from the spirit of the devil, which is implied in our Saviour's question, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.' As if he had said, 'You little think who stirred you up. You had your coal, not from God's altar, but from Satan's furnace.'

O! let us beware that we be not the devil's messengers in going to God upon his errand; which we do when we pray against the rule or without a warrant. Belch not out thy unruly passions of anger there, presently to have thine enemies confounded—the disciples' case; nor vent thy intemperate sorrow through impatience—as Job in the paroxysm of his trouble begs of God to take away his life in all haste. Take counsel of the word, and 'let not thy lip be hasty to utter a matter before the Lord.' Daniel's method was the right, Dan. 9:2. First, he goes to the Scripture and searches what the mind of God was concerning the time when he had promised his people a return out of their captivity, which having found, and learned thereby how to lay his plea, then away he goes to besiege the throne of grace. 'And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer,' &c., ver. 3. Art thou sick or poor?—in want of any temporal mercy? Go and inquire upon what terms these are promised, that thy faith may not jet beyond the foundation of the promise by a peremptory and absolute desire of them, for then thy building will fall, and thou be put to shame, because thou askest more than God ever promised.

2. *Miscarriage*. Though the subject-matter of a saint's prayer be bottomed on the word, yet if *the end he aims at be not levelled right*, this is a second door at which his prayer will be stopped, though it pass the former. 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.' Take, I confess, a Christian in his right temper, and he levels at the glory of God. Yet as a needle is touched with a lodestone may, being shaken, be removed from its beloved point, to which nature hath espoused it, though trembling till it again recovers it; so, a gracious soul may, in a particular act and request, vary from this end, being jogged by Satan, yea disturbed by an enemy nearer home, his own unmortified corruption. Truly he is a rare archer that ever hits the white. Do you not think it possible for a saint, in distress of body and spirit, to pray for health in the one, and comfort in the other, with too selfish a respect had to his own ease and quiet? Yes sure, and to pray for gifts and assistance in some eminent service, with an eye asquint to his own credit and applause, to pray for a child with too inordinate a desire that the honour of his house may be built up in him—I know none so seasoned with grace as not to be subject to such warpings of spirit. And this may be understood as the sense, in part, of that expression: 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me, but verily the Lord hath heard me,' Ps. 66:18. For, to desire our own health, peace, and reputation, be not an iniquity —when contained in the banks that God hath set —yet, when they overflow, and are to such a height lift up as to overtop the glory of God, yea to stand but in a level with it, they are a great abomination. That which in the first or second degree is wholesome food, would be rank poison in the fourth or fifth.

Therefore, Christian, catechise thyself before thou prayest, O my soul, what sends thee on this errand? Know but thy own mind, what thou prayest for, and thou mayest soon know God's mind how thou shalt speed. Secure God his glory, and thou mayest carry away the mercy with thee. Had Adonijah asked Abishag out of love to her person, and not rather out of love to the crown, it is like Solomon would not have denied the banns between them; but this wise prince observed his drift, to make her but a step to his getting into the throne, which he ambitiously thirsted for, and therefore his request was denied with so much disdain. Look that, when thy petition is loyal, there be not treason in thy end and aim. If there be, he will find it out.

*Question*. When shall I know that I aim at God or self in prayer?

*Answer*. This will commonly appear by the *posture of our heart when God delays or denies the thing we pray for*. A soul that can acquiesce, and patiently bear a delay or denial—I speak now of such



mercies as are of an inferior nature, not necessary to salvation, and so not absolutely promised—gives a hopeful testimony that the glory of God weighs more in his thoughts than his own private interest and accommodation. A selfish heart is both peremptory and hasty. It must have the thing it cries for, and that quickly too, or else it faints and chides, falls down in a swoon, or breaks out into murmuring complaints, not sparing to fall foul on the promises and attributes of God himself. ‘Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not?’ Isa. 58:3. Now, from whence come both these, but from an overvaluing of ourselves? —which makes us clash with God’s glory, that may be more advanced by these delays and denials, than if we had the thing we so earnestly desire. God was more glorified in denying Christ himself his life, than if he had let that bitter cup pass without his tasting of it, which Christ, understanding fully, resigned himself thereunto, saying, ‘Father, glorify thy name; not my will, but thy will be done,’ John 12:28<sup>32</sup>. As if he had said, I would not save my life to lose thee the least of thy glory. This is the copy we should all write after. Indeed, if our distempered hearts be so wilful and hasty as not to be content with what, and that when it pleaseth God also, he should not love us in gratifying such desires, for thereby he would but nourish such distemper, which is better cured by starving than feeding it.

3. *Miscarriage*. The Christian’s prayer may miscarry when, *with his prayer, he joins not a diligent use of the means*. We must not think to lie upon God, as some lazy people do on their rich kindred; to be always begging of him, but not putting forth our hand to work in the use of means. God hath appointed prayer as a help to our diligence, not as a cloak for our sloth. Idle beggars are welcome neither to God’s door nor man’s. What! wilt thou lift up thy hands to God in prayer, and then put them in thy pocket? Doth not God forbid our charity to him that worketh not? ‘We commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat,’ II Thes. 3:10. And will he encourage that idleness in thee which he would have punished by us? It is a good gloss of Bernard upon that of Jeremiah, ‘Let us lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens,’ Lam. 3:41—*qui orat et laborat, ille cor levat ad Deum cum manibus*—he that prayeth, and is diligent in the use of means, is the person that lifts up his heart with his hands to God. Look therefore, Christian, thou minglest thy sweat with thy tears, thy labour with thy prayers. If thy prayer doth not set thee on work, neither will it set thy God at work for thee. Is it a lust thou art praying against? And dost thou sit down idle to see whether it will now die alone? Will that prayer slay one lust that lets another—thy sloth, I mean —live under its nose? As God will not save thy soul, so neither will he destroy thy sin, unless thy hand also be put to the work. See how God raised Joshua from off the earth, where he lay praying and mourning for Israel’s defeat, Joshua 7:10, 11: ‘Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned,’ &c.; ver. 12, ‘Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies,’ &c.; ver. 13, ‘Up, sanctify the people.’

O how oft may God rouse us up from our knees, and say, ‘Why lie ye here with your lazy prayers? You have sinned in not taking my counsel and obeying my orders. I bade you watch as well as pray; why do you not one as well as the other? My command obliges you to flee from the snare that Satan lays for you, as well as pray against it: therefore it is you cannot stand before your lusts.’ Moses durst not go to God with a prayer in behalf of sinning Israel till he had shown his zeal for God against their sin, and then he goes and speeds; see Ex. 32:25, compared with ver. 31. Dost thou think to walk loosely all day, yielding thyself, and betraying the glory of the God, into the hands of thy lust, and then mend all with a prayer at night? Alas! thy cowardice and sloth will get to heaven before thy prayer, and put thee to shame when thou comest on such an errand.

4. *Miscarriage*. The saint’s prayer may miscarry from *some secret grudge that is lodged in his heart against his brother*. Anger and wrath are strange fire to put to our incense. It is a law writ upon every gate of God’s house—every ordinance, I mean—at which we are to enter into communion with God, that we must ‘love our brethren.’ When we go to hear the word, what is the caveat, but that we should ‘lay aside all malice, envy, and evil-speaking, and as new-born babes, desire the

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<sup>32</sup>Note: The actual quotation in the text appears to be a blending of John 12:28, and Matt. 26:39, 42. — SDB

sincere milk of the word?' The gospel will not speak peace to a wrathful spirit. Anger and malice, like a salt corroding humour in the stomach, makes us puke and cast up the milk of the word, that it cannot stay with us for nourishment. Is it the gospel supper thou sittest at? This is a love-feast, and though it may be eaten with the bitter herbs of sin's sorrow, yet not with the sour leaven of wrath and malice. 'When ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you,' &c., I Cor. 11:18. Now mark what follows, 'this is not the Lord's supper,' ver. 20. Christ will not communicate with a wrangling jangling company. When such guests come, he riseth from his own table, as David's children did from Absalom's upon the murder of their brother Amnon, II Sam. 13:29. And for prayer, you know the law thereof, 'Lift up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,' I Tim. 2:8—implying, that it is impossible to pray in faith and wrath. *Duobus modis oratio impeditur, si ad huc homo mala committit aut si committenti in se ex toto corde non dimittit*—our prayer may be hindered two ways—by lying in any sin we commit against God; or, in wrath, by not forgiving our brother's committed against us. Those two in our Lord's prayer cannot be divorced—'forgive us, as we forgive.' This is that *ferrum in vulnere*—iron in the wound, as the same father hath it, which makes our prayers as ineffectual to us, as the plaster is to the wound in which the bullet still remains.

Now, the reason why God is so curious in this point, in because himself is so gracious; and being 'love,' can bid none welcome that are not 'in love.' The heathens had such a notion that the gods would not like the sacrifice and service of any but such as were like themselves. And therefore to the sacrifices of Hercules none were to be admitted that were dwarfs. To the sacrifice of Bacchus, a merry god, none that were sad and pensive, as not suiting their genius. An excellent truth may be drawn from this their folly. He that would like and please God must be like to God. Now our God is a God of peace, our heavenly Father merciful; and therefore to him none can have friendly access but those that are children of peace, and merciful as their Father is. O! watch then thy heart, that Satan's fireballs—which upon every little occasion he will be throwing in at thy window—take not hold of thy spirit, to kindle any heart-burning in thee against thy brother. If at any time thou seest the least smoke, or smell the least scent of this fire in thy bosom, sleep not till thou hast quenched it. Be more careful to lay this fire in thy heart aside, when thou goest to bed, than the other that is on thy hearth. How canst thou by prayer commit thyself into God's hands that night wherein thou carriest a spark thereof smothered in thy breast? *Irasci, hominis, iram non preficere, Christiani est* (Jerome)—as a frail man thou canst not hinder but such a spark may light on thee, yet if thou wilt prove thyself a Christian, thou must quench it. Nay more, if thou wilt show thyself a Christian, and have thy prayer find God's ear or heart open to it, thou must do thy utmost to quench it in thy brother's heart as well as thy own. It is not enough that thou carriest peace in thy heart to him, except thou endeavourest that he may be at peace with thee also. 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee,' Matt. 5:23.

Hierome brings in the Christian here expostulating his cause with God, why he will not hear his prayer: *Domine, quare non vis suscipere munus meum? quid ad me attinet? non est in me a potestate, si frater meus habet aliquid contra me*—'What is it to me, Lord, that my brother is offended with me? I cannot help that; wilt thou not receive my gift for his fault?' To whom he brings God thus answering—*Et quid dicis male serve? Intelligo animum tuum? Nihil habes? Amas eum? Quare ergo salvari eum non vis? Vade, roga eum, ne ille contra te habeat ut salvari possit*—'What is it, naughty servant, that thou sayest? I understand thy meaning. What is it to thee? Hast thou nothing against him? Dost thou love him? Wherefore then wouldst not thou save his soul? Go and beg of him to be at peace with thee, that thy brother's soul may be saved.' I speak the more of this particular, being sensible of what an hour, or rather age, of temptation we live in, by reason of the sad differences of judgment among Christians, which have distilled upon their affections so great a distaste one to another as exulcerates them into wrath and bitterness; yea, a wonderful cure it will be, if it can be prevented from ending in an irrecoverable consumption of love among a great part of this generation—especially considering what malignity is dropped into these church-contentions by those national divisions also that have fallen in with them, and which drew so sad a sword among us, as for many years could find no other sheath but the bowels of this then miserable nation. O what grudges, animosities, and heart-burnings have these two produced! The sword, blessed be God! is at last

got into its scabbard of peace; but have we not cause to wish it had been cleaner wiped when put up, and not such an implacable spirit of revenge and malice to be found remaining among many of us, as, alas! is too common to be met with everywhere? The storm without us is over, blessed be God! but is it not too high within some of our breasts? The flood of national calamities is assuaged; but now the tide is down and gone, is there not a deal of this filth—to name no other—uncharitable jealousies, bitterness, wrath, and revenge, left behind upon our hearts? Enough to breed another plague and judgment among us if a flood of national repentance does not wash away what the sea of war and other confusions have cast up! But, if this were all the mischief they are like to do us, our case is sad enough; they will *hinder our prayers*. For God will not accept such sacrifices as are kindled with the fire of wrath.

5. *Miscarriage*. The Christian's prayer may miscarry *for want of faith*. Prayer is the bow, the promise is the arrow, and faith the hand which draws the bow, and sends this arrow with the heart's message to heaven. The bow without the arrow is of no use, and the arrow without the bow as little worth; and both without the strength of the hand, to no purpose. Neither the promise without prayer, nor prayer without the promise, nor both without faith, avails the Christian anything. So that what was said of the Israelites, that they 'could not enter Canaan because of unbelief,' the same may be said of many of our prayers, they cannot enter heaven with acceptance, because they are not put up in faith. Now faith may be considered with a respect to the person praying, or to the prayer put up.

[What it is to pray in faith.]

*First Requisite*. The person must be a *believer*. But this is not enough.

*Second Requisite*. There must be an *act of faith exerted in the prayer*, as well as the habit of faith dwelling in the person. 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them,' Mark 11:24. If the thing be not to be found in the promise that we desire, it is a sin to pray for it; if it be, it is a sin not to believe, when we pray for it, and that no small one, because thereby we both profane and ordinance and asperse the name of the great God.

*Question*. But what is it to pray in faith?

*Answer 1. Negatively*. It is not to believe that the very thing *in specie*—or in its proper kind, that we pray for, shall be always given. Christ prayed in faith and was heard, Heb. 5. He believed not the thing in kind to be given neither was it; yet his prayer was answered. Therefore, be sure thou learnest the right method of acting thy faith in prayer, which must be taken from the nature of the promise thou puttest in suit. As water receives its figure—round or square—from the vessel it is poured into; so our faith is to be shaped by the promise. If that be absolute—as things necessary to salvation are—then thy faith may expect the very thing promised; if otherwise, then thou art not to limit thy faith to the thing itself, but expect money or moneyworth; health, or as good as health; deliverance, or better than deliverance. An absolute faith on a conditional promise—without an immediate revelation, which we must not look for—is fancy, not faith. To commit a sin, not act a grace, this is to be free on God's purse without a grant; for we put more in the conclusion of our faith than is in the premises of the promise; and this is as bad divinity as logic.

*Answer 2. Positively*. To pray in faith is to *ask of God, in the name of Christ, what he hath promised, relying on his power and truth for performance*, without binding him up to time, manner, or means.

(1.) We must ask *what God hath promised*, or else we choose for ourselves and not beg; we subject God's will to ours, and not ours to his; we forge a bond and then claim it as debt, which is a horrible presumption! He that is his own promiser must be his own paymaster.

(2.) To pray in faith is required that we pray *in Christ's name*. As there can be no faith but on a promise, so no promise can be claimed but in his name, because they are all both made to him and performed for him. They are made to him, the covenant being struck with him: 'In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began,' Titus 1:2. And there was none then existing but Christ to whom the promise could be made. So that, as the child claims his estate in right of his father that purchased it; so we come to our right in the promise, as heirs of and

co-heirs with Christ. And as the promise was made to him, so it is performed for him, because his blood shed was the condition of the obligation upon which God acknowledged the debt to Christ, and bound himself to perform all the articles of the covenant to his heirs' orderly claiming them at his hands in his name. It is not therefore enough boldly to urge God with a promise: 'Pardon, Lord, for thou hast promised it; grace and glory, for thou hast promised them;' but we must, if we mean to lay our plea legally—I mean according to the law of faith—plead for these under the protection of his name. Thus Daniel, that holy man, laid the stress of his prayer on Christ: 'Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake,' Dan. 9:17.

(3.) To this praying in faith is required a *relying on God, through Christ, for a gracious answer*. Let the former be done, and the creature fail in this, he prays not in faith, but takes the name of God and Christ in vain. This act of relying is the taking hold on God in prayer, Isa. 64. When mariners in a storm cast out their anchor, and it comes home again without taking hold on the firm ground, so as to stay the ship and bear it up against the violence of the waves, it gives them no help. So neither doth a handless prayer that takes no hold on God. Therefore you shall find that when a Christian speeds well in prayer, his happy success is attributed, not to naked prayer, but as clothed and empowered with this act of recumbency upon God. 'They cried unto the Lord,' II Chr. 13:14. Now see, 'The children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers,' ver. 18. He doth but lie in prayer that doth not rely on God after praying. What he seems to give with one hand to God he takes from him with another, which is no better than a mocking of God. By praying we pretend to expect good from him; by not relying we blot this out and declare we look for no such matter.

Now this reliance of the soul hath a twofold way whereby it fastens on God like the anchor's double hook.

(a.) It takes hold on the *power of God*. Thus Christ in his agony 'offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death,' Heb. 5:7. In prayer we open our case to God, declare how sinful, weak, shiftless creatures we are, and then we commit our cause to God. Now as none will put that to another's keeping which he thinks safe in his own hands; so neither will any deliver it to another whose ability he is not first persuaded to effect that which himself is unable to do. See Eliphaz's counsel to Job, 'I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause,' Job 5:8. As if he had said, 'If I were in your case I will tell you what course I would take, I would not look this way or that, but speedily haste me to the throne of grace, and when once I had told God my very heart, I would trouble myself no more, but commit my cause to him, and discharge my heart of the burden of all its troublesome thoughts.' But under what notion would he do all this? The next words will tell us, 'Unto God would I commit my cause, which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.' First he would bottom his faith on God as able to do great things; and then, leaving his request lodged in the arms of such power, he doubted not but he should cast all care away and enjoy the serenity of his mind whatever his condition was. Indeed, this is the first stone faith lays in her building. And an error in the foundation will make the whole house stand weak. Be sure, therefore, thou layest this bottom stone with thy greatest care. O how unbecoming is it to have a great God, and a little faith on this great God!—a strong God, and a weak faith on his almighty power! Unbelief here ravisheth and offereth violence to the very light of nature, for 'his eternal power and Godhead' are known by 'the visible things' of the creation, Rom 1:20. What is not he able to do that could make so goodly a fabric without materials, tools, or workmen? *Crucifige illud verbum potest ne?*—obliterate that word 'Is he able?' Away with the question which so grates the ears of the Almighty: Can he pardon? Can he purge? What cannot he do that can do what he will?

(b.) It takes hold on the *faithfulness of God* to perform the promise. We are directed, in committing ourselves to him, to eye his faithfulness: 'as unto a faithful Creator,' I Peter 4:19. The saints' faith hath been remarkable in staying themselves on this, while yet the mercy they prayed for lay asleep in its causes: 'Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed,' Ps. 65:1. See, he stands with his instrument strung and tuned, ready to strike up and

bring God in with the music of his praise when he shall come with an answer to his prayer, not the least doubting but that he shall use it upon that joyful occasion; for he speaks without ifs and ands—'Unto thee shall the vow be performed, O thou that hearest prayer!' And yet that good day was not come; for even then he cries out, 'Iniquities prevail against me!' So, 'I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor,' Ps. 140:12. Why? how comes he so confident? 'Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name,' ver. 13. As if he had said, 'Thou hast a name for a gracious and faithful God in thy promise, and this thou wilt never suffer to be blotted by failing thy word.' Christian, thou mayest venture all thou art worth on the public faith of heaven. 'His words are pure as silver tried seven times in a furnace.' He that will not suffer a liar or covenant-breaker to set foot on his holy hill, will much less suffer any one thought of falseness or unfaithfulness to enter into his own most holy heart.

*Question.* But how may I know when I thus act faith in prayer?

*[Four rules whereby to know if we  
act faith in prayer or no.]*

(1.) *Rule.* We may know if we have acted faith *by the serenity and composure of our spirits after prayer.* Faith may live in a storm, but it will not suffer a storm to live in it. As faith rises, so the blustering wind of discontented troublesome thoughts go down. In the same proportion that there is faith in the heart there is peace also. They are joined together, 'quietness and confidence,' Isa. 30:15: 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' Therefore called 'peace in believing,' Rom. 15:13. Even where it is weakest it will not let the unquietness of the heart pass without a chiding. 'Why art thou disquieted, O my soul! trust still in God,' Ps. 42:5, 11. What! soul no sooner off thy knees, but clamorous! Hast not thou made thy moan to a God able to help thee, and will not that ease thee? Faith disburdens the soul in prayer of that which oppresses it; whereas the unbelieving soul still carries about it the cause of its trouble, because it had not strength to cast forth its sorrows, and roul its cares upon God in the duty. Christian, dost thou carry away the same burden on thy back from prayer which thou didst bring to it? surely thou didst want faith to lift it off thy shoulder. Had faith been there, and that been active and lively, it would have bestowed this elsewhere, and brought thee away with a light heart: as Hannah, who rose from praying 'to eat, and her countenance was no more sad;' and as Christ, who kneeled down with as sorrowful a heart as ever any, but comes off with a holy courage, to go and meet his approaching death, and his bloody enemies now on the way to attack him. 'Rise,' saith he to his disciples, 'let us be going, behold he is at hand that doth betray me,' Matt. 26:46. May it not put us to the blush to think that we could come less satisfied from God's presence than we do sometimes from a sorry man's? If you were poor, and had a rich friend that bids you send your children to him, and he will provide for them; would not this ease your mind of all your cares and distracting thoughts concerning their maintenance? And doth not God promise more that this comes to when he bids us 'be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God?'

(2.) *Rule.* Dost thou *continue praying even when God continues to deny?* An unbelieving heart may have some mettle at hand, but will be sure to jade in a long journey. Faith will throw in the net of prayer again and again, as long as God commands and the promise encourageth. The greyhound hunts by sight, when he cannot see his game he gives over running; but the true hound by scent, he hunts over hedge and ditch though he sees not the hare he pursues all the day long. An unbelieving heart, may be, drawn out, upon some visible probabilities and sensible hopes of a mercy coming, to pray, but when these are out of sight his heart fails him; but faith keeps the scent of the promise and gives not over the chase.

(3.) *Rule.* Dost thou *stint God, or canst thou trust him to answer thy prayer in his own way without thy prescription?* When we deal with a man whose ability or faithfulness we have in doubt, then we labour to make sure of him by tying him up to our terms. But if we stand assured of their power and truth, we leave them to themselves. Thus the patient sends for the physician, desires his help, but

leaves him to write his own bill. The merchant sends over his goods to his factor, and relies on him to make such returns as his wisdom tells him will come to the best market. Thus the believing soul, when he hath opened his heart to God in prayer, resigns himself to the goodness, wisdom, and faithfulness of God to return an answer: 'Remember me, O my God,' said Nehemiah, 'concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy,' Neh. 13:22. See here, this good man makes bold to be God's remembrancer, but dares not be his counsellor or prescriber. He remits the shaping of the answer to 'the greatness of his mercy.' Hence it follows, that whatever way God cometh in, the believing soul bids him welcome.

Doth he pray for health, and miss of that? yet he blesseth God for support under sickness. Doth he pray for his children, and they notwithstanding prove a cross? yet he finds an answer another way, and satisfies himself with it. After many a prayer that David had put up no doubt for his family, we find him entertaining an answer to those prayers with a composed spirit, though they came not in at the fore door, but having mercy in the letter: 'Though my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant,' &c.; and this, he tells us, is 'all his desire,' II Sam. 23:5. Indeed, a believer cannot miss his desires, 'He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him,' Ps. 145:19. Because they disown those desires which clash with God's will. Who could pray more fervently for their children than Job did for his? He was with God for them every day; but, after all his religious care of them, he meets with heavy tidings, and hears them to be made a sacrifice by death for whom he had offered up so many sacrifices to God; yet he doth not foolishly charge God, or say it was in vain that he prayed: no, that ointment was not lost the savour whereof was poured into his own soul, from the posture of which we might read a gracious answer, in the supporting grace that enabled him to love and bless God over the gravestone of his slain children.

(4.) *Rule.* By the soul's comporting itself towards the *means used for obtaining the mercy prayed for.*

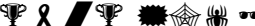
(a.) If thou prayedst in faith, it will set thee to use *other means besides prayer*. Mark how the apostle joins these together, 'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer,' Rom. 12:11, 12. As faith useth her wings of prayer to fly to heaven; so she useth her feet of duty and obedience, with which she walks and bestirs herself on earth.

(b.) Faith will make thee, as use means, so to be *choice of the means thou usest for the obtaining what thou bespeakest of God in prayer*. Faith is a working grace, but it will be set on work by none but God. Am I in God's way, saith faith? Is this the means he hath appointed? If it be not, away he turns from it, disdainful to work with any of the devil's tools. God can never answer my prayer, saith the believer, without the help of my sin. If riches be good for me, I need not be at the cost to purchase them with a lie or a cheat. If health be a mercy, he can send me it, though I advise not with the devil's doctors. If joy and comfort, there is no need to take down the devil's music. If times be evil, he can hide me without running under the skirt of this great man and that by base flattery and dissimulation. When Ezra had committed himself and his company to God—now on their march towards Jerusalem—by a solemn day of fasting and prayer, and had made a holy boast of his God, what he would do for them that seek him, he thought it unbecoming his professed faith, and also dishonourable to his God, whom he had so magnified in the hearing of the Persian king, to beg armed troops for a convoy to them in their way, lest his faith should be brought into suspicion for an empty bravado and groundless confidence: 'I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him;' Ezra 8:22.

(c.) If thou actest faith in prayer, thy faith will not only make thee choice of the means thou usest, but *curious and careful in using the means that God chooseth for thee*. Thou wilt be afraid lest it should stand in God's light, by stealing thy confidence in him to trust in it. Faith will teach thee to use means as God's ordinance, but rely on God to bless it. While faith's hand is on the plow, her eye is to heaven. *Annus non ager facit fructum*—the influences of heaven, not the tillage of the husband, make it a fruitful year. Sometimes the physician appoints a powder to be taken in wine or beer. Now it is not the beer or wine that does the cure, but the powder, which they are only used to

(d.) If thou actest faith in prayer, as thou wilt be careful to improve means when God provides them, so thou wilt *not suspend thy faith when God denies them*. The believing soul dares not trust to the means when he hath them, therefore he dares not distrust God when he wants them. Faith knows, though God useth means, yet he needs none. The sun and showers are the means he useth for the growth of the grass and herbs; yet he made these to grow out of the earth before there was sun or rain, Gen. 1:11. Ploughing and sowing are the ordinary means whereby man is provided with bread; but he fed Israel with bread without their pains and husbandry. Ships [are] the means to waft us over the seas; but God carried Israel through the Red Sea without ship or boat. May be times are hard, and thou art poor; thy charge is great, and thy comings in little; with the widow in the prophet, thou art making the last cake of the little meal that is left. To reason and sense thou must either beg, steal, or die. Canst thou now, upon praying to thy God, wait upon his promise which tells thee, 'verily, thou shalt be fed,' Ps. 37:3; and on his providence, which records his care of the sparrows on purpose to assure us he will much more provide for his children? Or, at least, dost thou chide thy heart for its distrustful fears after praying, charging it to hope in God, to whom thou hast made thy moan? Truly, if thy heart hath not some hold on God after duty to stay it, more than before in this thy strait; either thou hast no faith, or if thou hast faith, thou didst not act it in that prayer. True faith will either expel these dejections of heart, or at least protest against them.

*Second Way of Hinderance.* Now we come to the second stratagem that Satan useth to hinder the success of the Christian's prayer, which I called a partial hinderance or miscarriage thereof, when the prayer itself is not lost—which comes to pass only when it finds not acceptance with God—but *when the Christian doth not believe on earth that his prayer is heard in heaven, though indeed it is.* By his questioning thereof, however, he loseth the revenue of that present peace which otherwise would be paid unto him from the expectation of its certain return with a joyful answer. As a merchant that gives his ship for castaway, when indeed it is safe and richly laden (only stays for a fair wind); he not knowing or believing this, puts himself to as much trouble and sorrow as if it were in truth as he feared. Fancy and imagination, even when without ground and reason, are able to produce real effects and sad consequences in the minds of men. The false news of Joseph's death caused as much sorrow to old Jacob, yea more, than if he had seen him laid out, and had followed him to the grave. The jailer, from a fear his prisoners were gone, and he accountable for them, had foredone himself, by falling on his own sword, if Paul had not seasonably cried out, 'Do thyself no harm, for we are all here.'

And truly our unbelieving fears have no less power upon our hearts. They rob the Christian of the joy of his life—and man is but a sour piece of clay when that is gone. It is not praying, but believing prayer heard, that will make a glad heart and a cheerful countenance. Hannah often prayed; she was acquainted with the work many years, yet never had the burden of her spirit taken off till she had faith she should speed. Yea, moreover, they [unbelieving fears] weaken the spirit of prayer. He that expects little from prayer, will not be much in prayer. That trade is best tended which it is hoped will pay a man best for his pains in it. ‘Who is there among you,’ saith God, ‘that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought,’ Mal. 1:10. The husbandman throws his seed freely, because he sows in hope; and his precious seed on his fattest soil, because there he looks to find it again with the greatest increase. This made David like praying work so well that he will never leave it: ‘I have prayed, and the Lord hath heard, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.’ As a merchant, finding his sweet gain come trouling in, converts his whole estate into stock; so David devotes himself wholly to prayer: ‘For my love they are my adversaries,’ , Ps. 109:4, ‘but I was prayer.’ This was the only weapon I lift

up for my defence against all their darts. Whereas, unbelief betrays the soul unto many uncomely thoughts of God, which reflect sadly upon his name, so as to weaken his reputation in the creature's thoughts, and bring him either to a disuse of this duty, or hopeless performance of it, and this Satan loves alive. When a merchant thinks his goods miscarry, he grows presently jealous of his factor, questioning his care, faithfulness, or ability to despatch his business. Such whisperings we shall hear, if we listen to our unbelieving hearts sometimes, when our prayers make not so short an quick a voyage as we desire. It was a high charge that Job brought against God—though he lived to see he had little reason to do it; yea, afterward charged himself for charging God—'I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thouregardest me not,' Job 30:20. This holy man was now as deep in God's books, and as great a favourite with him, as ever; yet so far had Satan wound into him, as to make him listen to those false reports which he brought unto him of God—taking the advantage of his present cloudy providence to colour his calumnies, insomuch that he began to give credit unto this liar. Now if this may become a stone of offence to Job, how much more mayest thou fear dashing thy foot against it? Let it be thy care to countermine Satan in this his spiteful plot against God and thee. Surely it should not be a little matter that makes thee throw up thy prayers, and give away so rich an adventure as thou hast swimming in this bottom. Esau hath the brand of a 'profane person,' for so cheaply parting with his inheritance. If thou beest a believer, thou art an heir of promise, and, amongst promises, this is not the least—that what thou askest in Christ's name, believing, thou shalt receive. Now, it is too like Esau's profaneness to part with this piece of thy heritage—which thou canst not do without impeaching the faithfulness of God that gave thee an estate in the promise.

We highly commend Job for his heroic resolution at another time: 'God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me,' Job 27:5. How much more shouldst thou say to Satan, 'God forbid that I should justify thee, thou wicked fiend, or thy false charge against my God; I will hold fast his integrity and faithfulness till I die.' Surely Daniel, who ventured his life rather than not pray, would have parted with a thousand lives rather than have given his prayers for lost, and thereby have blotted the good name of God, whose faithfulness stands bound to return every prayer of faith with a gracious answer into the saint's bosom.

But, the more to fortify you against this design of Satan, let us inquire into a few of those arguments with which Satan—abusing the Christian's credulity—leads him into this temptation, if not absolutely to conclude, yet unbelieving to dispute and question it in his heart, whether his prayer be heard or no. I shall reduce them to three heads. *First.* The first argument by which he scruples the Christian, and nourishes his unbelieving fears, is taken from those sinful infirmities that cleave to his person and prayer. *Second.* Another argument is taken from the deportment of God to him in and after prayer. *Third.* The last is taken from the common providence of God, that dispenseth the same things to the wicked without praying, which the saints receive praying.

[SATAN'S ARGUMENTS *to make the believer doubt whether his prayer is heard.*]

*Argument 1.* The first argument by which Satan would make the Christian out of love with himself and his duty, is taken from *those sinful infirmities cleaving to both—his person and prayer alike.* Thereby he would quash the saint's hope of any favourable reception that his prayer hath found in heaven. What! thy stammering prayers make music in God's ear! Will the Lord foul his fingers with thy besmeared duties? If thou wert a Samuel or Daniel, and couldst claim thy place among those worthies that are renowned for the eminent service they have done God in their generation, then thou mightest hope to have the ear of God to thy suit; but thou, alas! art a puny stripling, a froward child, in whom there is more sin than grace to be found, and dost thou think to be heard? Truly, though this argument weighs little, having no countenance from the tenor of the covenant, whose privileges are not impropriated to a few favourites, more eminent in grace than their brethren, but stand open to the whole family—it being 'a common salvation,' and 'like precious faith,' that all the saints partake of; yet it is the great bugbear with which many of them are scared.



A word or two therefore to arm thee against this argument. Only this premised—which I must take for granted—that these sinful infirmities are lamented and not cockered by thee—that *that* indeed would turn infirmity into presumption; as also that thou neglectest not to apply the most effectual means for their cure—though, as in hereditary diseases, all the physic thou takest will not here perfectly rid thee of them: this granted, for thy comfort know thy prayers are not so offensive to God as to thyself. Thy prayers pass such a refining in Christ's mediation, that their ill scent is taken away.

Doth thy scruple arise from the sinful failings of thy daily conversation and Christian course? To remove this, observe how the Spirit of God, when he instanceth in Elias as a person whose prayers are exceedingly prevalent with God, doth not describe him by the transcendency of his grace above others, but by his infirmities like unto them: 'Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not,' James 5:17. As if God should say, Were I so curious in my scrutiny, as you fear, Elias's prayer would have been stopped, for he was not without his infirmities. How many failings do we find in David's unseemly carriage before Achish, for which he was turned out of the king's presence under the notion of a madman? Yet his prayer at that time, when he betrayed so many unbelieving fears, found favour with God. 'I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears,' Ps. 34:4. Read the title, and you shall find it, 'A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.'

Are they the sinful infirmities which escape thee in the duty of prayer? Canst thou find more in any prayer thou puttest up, than were in the disciples', for one so short?—where they exercised so little faith that Christ calls it 'no faith,' Mark 4:40. 'Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?' Yea, they pray to Christ, and chide him in the same breath, 'Master, carest thou not that we perish?' Yet Christ could find sincerity hid, like Saul, in this stuff of their infirmities, and granted their request. It is true he rebuked them, but it is as true that he rebuked the wind also. God's promise for hearing of prayer shall not be made void by the saint's weakness in prayer. Yea, for thy further comfort, know, that the less power these have to shake or disturb thy spirit in expecting a gracious answer, the more kindly God will take it at thy hand. 'Abraham,' it is said, 'believed, not considering his own body, or the deadness of Sarah's womb;' and for this was highly commended, because he thereby did signally glorify the power of God, to which he believed their bodily indisposition should not be any obstacle. Truly thus it will be highly pleasing to God, if thou canst rely—staggering not at thy spiritual indispositions, and that deadness of thy heart which rises up as a great objection in thy thoughts against the success of thy prayer; for by this thou givest Christ both the honour of his death, by which he purchased this free access for thy weak prayers to the throne of grace, and also of his intercession, which clarifies them from all their sinful mixtures.

*Argument 2.* Satan draws his argument from *God's deportment to the soul in and after prayer*. In this argument there are three things he commonly insists upon—by them to create trouble to the Christian's thoughts. (1.) His *silence*, which he would have the Christian interpret to be God's slighting or disregarding of him and his prayer. (2.) His *frowns*, from which he would have him conclude neither he nor his duty are accepted. (3.) His *not giving the mercy in kind*; and this he tells the Christian amounts to a denial.

*[What in God's deportment to a Christian  
after prayer Satan falsifies.]*

(1.) *His silence after prayer.* As wicked men sometimes sin, and God keeps silence, which makes them bold to think God approves of them and their way; so, sometimes a gracious soul prays, and God holds his peace here also; and the poor soul begins to fear that neither his person nor his duty are approved of God. Now Satan, knowing what thoughts are like to rise in the Christian's own heart, falls in and joins issue with the Christian's bosom enemy, labouring to confirm him in these his unbelieving fears.

To disentangle and help thee out of this brier, take these directions:—

(a.) Learn to *distinguish betwixt God's hearing and his answering the saint's prayer*. Every faithful prayer is heard, and makes an acceptable report in God's ear as soon as it is shot; but God doth not always speedily answer it. The father, at the reading of his son's letter—which comes haply on some begging errand—likes the motion; his heart closeth with it, and a grant is there passed; but he takes his own time to send his despatch, and let his son know this. Princes have their books of remembrance, wherein they write the names of their favourites whom they intend to prefer, haply some years before their gracious purpose opens itself to them. Mordecai's name stood in Ahasuerus' book some while before his honour was conferred. Thus God records the names of his saints and their prayers. 'The Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name,' Mal. 3:16. But they hear not of God in his providential answer, haply, a long time after. Abraham prays for a child, and is heard, but how many years interpose before he hath him in his arms? Truly so many that he goes into Hagar—partly by his wife's counsel and his own weakness—to obtain that with a by-blow for which God himself had undertaken.

Take heed, Christian, thou beest not led into this temptation, to question whether God hears thee, because thou hearest not from him presently. Be patient, and thou shalt find, the longer a mercy goes before its delivery, the more perfect it will come forth at last. God gave a speedy answer to Abraham for his son Ishmael, 'O that Ishmael might live!' 'I have heard thee,' saith God concerning Ishmael, Gen. 17:20. Indeed he flourished and spread into a great nation before Isaac's stem almost budded. What a small number was the family of Jacob at their going down into Egypt! but when the date of God's bond was near expiring, and the time of the promise drew nigh, then God paid interest for his stay. None gain more at the throne of grace than those who trade for time, and can forbear the payment of a mercy longest.

(b.) Consider, when thou findest the deepest silence in God's providence concerning the thing prayed for, *then thou hast a loud answer in the promise*. Say not therefore, 'Who shall ascend to heaven, to bring thee intelligence whether thy prayer hath got safe thither, and had favourable audience in God's ear?' God himself hath saved thee this labour: the promise will satisfy thee, which assures thee that if it be duly qualified it cannot find the heart of God shut against it. 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' James 5:16. So assured have the saints been of this, that they, before any inkling from providence hath been heard—to bring them the news of a mercy coming—have taken up joy upon the credit of the naked promise, and feasted themselves with the hopes of what they expected, but had not yet received at the cost and charge of God's faithfulness, with which the promise is sealed, 'In God I will praise his word,' Ps. 56:4. Mark the phrase. He had not as yet the desired mercy, only a word of promise that it should come. Now, considering the power and truth of God the promiser, he is as merry as if he were put in possession of it, and pays his praises before God performs the promise.

(2.) The second thing which Satan gathers from God's deportment towards the Christian, thereby to bring the hearing of his prayer into question in his anxious thoughts, is, *his frowns against the Christian*. It cannot be denied but sometimes a dear saint of God may go away from duty with an aching heart, by reason of the sad impressions of an angry God left upon his spirit. And when thus it fares with the Christian, Satan's time is come, he thinks, to lead him into this temptation, by persuading him he may read what entertainment his prayer had at God's hands in the language of his countenance and his carriage towards him. If God, saith he, had heard thy prayer, would he handle thee thus? No sure; he would rather have taken thee up into his arms, and kissed thee with the kisses of his mouth, than thus trample thee under his feet. Thou shouldst have had darts of love shot from his pitiful eye, to imitate the purposes of his grace, and not arrows headed with his wrath, to stick in thy soul, and thus drink up thy very spirits. Can these be the wounds of a friend?—this the deportment that means thee well? This was the temptation which ruffled Job's thoughts, and embittered his spirit, Job 9:17. He could not believe God answered his prayer, 'because he broke with his tempest.' As if God's mercy came always in the still voice, and never in the whirlwind! Now in this case take this double word of COUNSEL.

*Counsel (a).* Inquire whether this tempest comes to find *any Jonah in thy ship*; whether it takes

thee sinning, or soaking in any past sin unrepented; or whether thy conscience, diligently listened to, doth witness that thou art sincere in thy course, though compassed with many failings. If it overtakes thee in a runaway voyage, with Jonah, or rambling course with the prodigal from thy father's house, then indeed thou hast reason to question, yea it is beyond all question, that an acceptable prayer in this posture cannot drop from thy lips. What! run from God, and then send to him thy prayers! This is to desire mercy to spend upon thy lust. But if, upon thy faithful search, thou findest this storm overtakes thee in the way of duty and exercise of thy sincerity, like the tempest that met the disciples at sea—when at Christ's command they launched forth—then be not discouraged. For it is ordinary with God to put on the disguise of an angry countenance, and to use rough language, when his heart is resolved upon ways of mercy, and mediates love to his people. Jacob, you know, wrestled hard and long before victory inclined to his side. And the woman of Canaan was kicked away like a dog with harsh language, who at last was owned of Christ for a dear child, and sent away to her heart's content. Sincerity needs fear no ill from God. This very consideration kept Job's head as another time above water, Job 16:12. There we find God taking him by the neck, shaking him as it were to pieces, and setting him up for his mark. But, ver. 17, this upheld his troubled spirit—that all this befell him walking in obedience—'Not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure.' Wherefore he rears up his confidence, 'Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God,' ver. 19, 20. The holy man was not, for all this, scared from the throne of grace, but still looked on God, though with tears in his eyes, expecting good news at last after so much bed. And we have warrant to do the same. 'If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God,' 1 John 3:21. And this brings me to the second word of counsel I have to give thee.

*Counsel (b).* Inquire whether under these frowns from God there be yet a *spirit of prayer working in thee*. Haply thou canst not deny but that thy heart is rather stirred up from these to lament after the Lord with more restless sighs and groans, to pray with more feeling and fervency, than driven away from duty. The spirit of prayer upheld in thee may assure of these two things:—

[1.] That the cloud of anger which seems to sit on God's brow is *not in his heart*. It is but a thin veil, through which thy faith might see the working of his bowels towards thee. The presence of the Spirit of God at work thus in a soul cannot stand with his real anger. If his wrath were up, this in thee would be down. Thou shouldst have him soon calling back this his ambassador of peace, at least suspending and withdrawing his assistance. When that sad breach was made between God and David in the matter of Uriah, David's heart was presently out of tune; his 'right hand had forgot its cunning,' and the spirit of prayer had received a sad damp in his heart. Where is the psalm to be found that was penned by David in that interregnum, as I may so say, of his grace? I do not say he did never pray all the time he lay soaking in that sin; but those prayers were not fit to be joined with the holy breathings of that spirit which acted him before his fall and after his recovery. And therefore, good man, when by repentance he came to himself, like one recovering out of a dangerous sickness—which had for a time taken away his senses—he begins to feel himself weak, and how much the Spirit of grace was by his sin enfeebled in him, which makes him so vehemently beg that God would 'renew a right spirit in him,' and 'not take his Holy Spirit from him,' Ps. 51:10, 11. The Spirit is so choice and peculiar a mercy, that if thou canst find lively actings of his grace in thee—and where are they more sensibly felt than in prayer, helping the soul to sighs and groans which cannot be uttered?—thou canst not in reason think God is not friends with thee, though it were at present as dark as midnight with thy soul.

[2.] It may assure thee that *his ear is open to thy cry when his face is hid from thine eye*. For, consider but who this Spirit is that thus helps thee in prayer, and furnisheth thee with all thy spiritual ammunition with which thou so pliest and batterest the throne of grace. Is he not one that knows the mind of God? and that would not have a hand in that petition which should not be welcome to heaven? Having therefore this assistance from the Spirit, doubt not thy acceptance with the Father. In a word, the Spirit that helps thee to thy groans and sighs in prayer is no other than that God thou prayest to; and will God deny himself? This I conceive part, if not the principal part, of the scripture's meaning, 'I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain,' Isa. 45:19. That is,

whenever I stir up a soul to pray, and empower him with my Spirit to perform it feelingly, fervently, and after a holy manner, it is always to purpose. God never said thus to any, 'Seek ye me in vain.'

(3.) The third thing from which Satan takes his advantage to breed scruples in the Christian's mind concerning the acceptance of his prayer, is the *denial of mercy in kind* which is prayed for. We are prone enough to have such thoughts ourselves, and Satan will not be wanting to feed any bad humour that is stirring in us. Or, if our hearts seem pacified with this dealing of God, he hath his ways and wiles to conjure up this evil spirit of discontent and unbelief. On this errand he sent Job's wife, to make him think and speak evil of God: 'Dost thou still retain thy integrity?' As if she had said, 'What! art thou at thy old work?—still praying and praising God? Dost thou not see how much he regards thee, or thy serving of him? What hast thou got by all thy devotion? Is not thy estate gone?—thy children slain and buried in one grave, and thyself left a poor loathsome cripple? —thy life serving for nothing but to make thee feel thy present misery and feed on thy past crosses?'

Indeed, it requires a good insight into the nature of the promises, and the divers ways God takes to fulfil them, to enable us to spell an answer out of a denial of the thing we pray for. Yet, such a 'good understanding have all they that do his commandments,' Ps. 111:10. They can clear God and justify his faithfulness in all his dealings, though, when he comes to answer their prayers, he chooseth not to enter in at that door which they set open in their own thoughts and hopes for him, nor treads in the very steps of their express desires. The whole psalm contains a testimony given to the faithfulness of God in his providential works, at which, though a carnal cursory eye—from the mysteries hid therein—is scandalized and takes offence, yet the gracious soul, by his more curious observance of and inquiry into them, finds a sweet harmony between them and the promise, and therefore concludes, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.' They, having a key to God's character, can read the hand of his providence, and so are able to praise him —knowing him faithful—when others are ready to curse him.

But, to help thee out or keep thee from falling into this temptation, thou art in the first place to consider *what mercy it is that God denies thee*. Is it not of that sort of blessings which are not necessary unto thy happiness as a saint? Such all temporal mercies are. The kingdom of God consists not in meat and drink. Thou wilt find an absolute denial for no other; he hath bid us take no denial for his love and favour, grace and glory: 'Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore,' Ps. 105:4—that is, be not put off for these, but live and die at God's door till he brings this alms to thee. Well, we will take this for granted it is a temporal mercy thou art denied. Now, when thou art tempted to question the love of God, or acceptance of thy prayer, let me desire thee to weigh this THREEFOLD CONSIDERATION.

*Consideration (a).* Consider how *ill God may take this at thy hand*; and that in a double respect. [1.] That thou dost *suspect his love on so slight and trivial a matter as the temporal enjoyments of this life are*, which he thinks are not worth enough to be put into the promise any otherwise than they are subservient to the spiritual and eternal blessings of the covenant: 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you,' Matt. 6:33—that is, as you need them. He casts them into the other more grand blessings, as a tradesman would do thread or paper, or a skein of silk, into a parcel of rich commodities that a customer buys of him. Suppose a child should ask his father for money to buy some toy or trifle that pleaseth his green head, but the father denies him the thing. If, now, the child should go and make proclamation in the open street, to the disgrace of his father, that his father did neither love nor regard him—though he wants neither food nor raiment—would this be well taken at the child's hand? This thou dost, Christian, in this case, though thou thinkest not so much; and hath not thy heavenly Father more reason to question thy love for taking away his good name, than thou to suspect his for his denial? But again, [2.] He may take it ill that thou hast *aspersed his wisdom*. Is there no way but this for the wise God to show his love and answer thy prayer? Cannot he deny health and give patience?—take away thy estate and turn it into contentation?—teaching thee to be abased, and to bless God thou art made low. He that will make thee so happy in heaven, where few of this world's enjoyments shall be seen, cannot he make thy life comfortable on earth without some of them?

*Consideration (b).* Consider *how thou prayedst when thou didst meet with this denial*. Didst thou pray peremptorily and absolutely, or conditionally, with submission to the will of God? If peremptorily, thou wert beside the rule, and art the cause why thy prayer came back without its errand. God will not hear, or bear, commanding prayers. He that must have a temporal mercy, *if* he gets it, he may have a spiritual curse, but is sure to have a temporal cross. So Delilah proved to Samson, who would not take his parents' counsel, but must have her whatever comes of it: 'Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well,' Judges 14:3. But he paid dearly for his choice. May be such an employment pleaseth thee well. Thy carnal heart is in love with it; and that sets thee praying inordinately for it. Alas! poor creature, if thou hadst it, what wouldst thou do with it? Thou wouldst fondly lay thy head in its lap and let it rock thy grace asleep, and then betray thee into the hand of some sin and judgment! But, if thou sayest that thou prayedst with a submissive spirit, on condition it liked God as well as thyself; if so, why then dost thou now recant thy prayer, seeing God hath declared his will that it is not good for thee to have thy desire? Wilt thou not be determined by him to whom thou didst refer thyself? Hast thou not reason to think that God takes the best way for thee? There is never a prayer put up but God doth, as it were, weigh and ponder it, and then his love sets his wisdom on work to make such a return as may be most for his own glory and his child's good. Now, it being the product of such infinite wisdom and love, thou oughtest to acquiesce in it, yea to praise God for it. Thus did David in a great strait, 'O my God, I cry in the daytime, and thou hearest not,' Ps. 22:2. Well, what hears God from him now he hears nothing from God (as to the deliverance prayed for)? No murmuring nor cavilling at God's proceedings —nay, he hears the quite contrary; for he justifies and praises God, 'But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel,' ver. 3.

*Consideration (c).* Observe whether thou canst not *gather something from the manner of God's denying the thing prayed for, which may sweeten it to thee*. Haply thou shalt find he denies thee, but it is with a smiling countenance, and ushers it in with some expression of grace and favour that may assure thee his denial proceeds not from displeasure. As you would do with a dear friend, who, may be, comes to borrow a sum of money of you—lend it you dare not, because you see plainly it is not for his good. But, in giving him the denial, lest he should misinterpret it, as proceeding from want of love and respect, you therefore preface it in with some kind of language of your hearty affection to him, as that you love him, and therefore deny him, and shall be ready to do for him more than that comes too. Thus God sometimes wraps up his denials in such sweet sugared intimations of his love as prevent all jealousies from arising in the hearts of his people. When David was denied to build a temple for God, as was in his heart to do, God gave him a large testimony of his affection, how highly he accepted his good-will therein. Though he should not build a temple for him, yet his desire was so kindly taken that God would build a house for him that should last forever.

Thus, sometimes a faithful minister prays earnestly that God would bless his labours to the converting of his people, and is denied; yet intimations of God's love to his person are dropped, with a promise that, however, 'his reward is with the Lord.' So that his prayer, though denied as to them, is returned with peace into his own bosom. Another prays passionately, 'O that I might see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, and that truth and peace might flourish in his days!' This, may be, is not granted, because his desire antedates the period which God hath fixed in his purpose for the fulfilling of his promise to his church: but he withal manifests his love to him, and expreseth how highly he resents<sup>33</sup> his love to the church. Thus God did by Daniel, to whom an angel was sent to let him know what kind entertainment his prayer had, and that he was a man 'greatly beloved of God,' Dan. 9:21. So in temporal mercies. Haply thou art pleading with God for deliverance out of this trouble and that affliction, and it is denied thee, but a message [is] with the denial that

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<sup>33</sup>NOTE: — Could it be that this is a typo here and that what was meant was the word respects? or, represents? or, presents? While that would not clear up the entire tenor of this paragraph, which seems fraught with problems, it would help to alleviate them to a certain extent. — SDB

recompenseth it double. May be some sweet illapses of his love he drops into thy bosom, or assurance of seasonable succours that shall be sent in to enable thee to charge through them with faith and victory. So God dealt by Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' I hope now thou wilt not say thy prayer is lost. When Saul sought his father's asses, was he not shrewdly hurt to find a kingdom instead of them? The holy women that went to the sepulchre to anoint the body of Jesus with their spices, did not lose their labour though they found him risen. Were they, thinkest thou, sorry for that? What are all the enjoyments of the world to the spiritual mercies and comfort of the promises which thou findest in thy attendance on God? Not so much as the dead body of our risen Saviour. Thou findest not some dead creature-comfort, but thou meetest with embraces from a living God.

*Argument 3.* The third and last thing that Satan abuseth the Christian with, to make him doubtful of the acceptance of his prayer, and also to question, when a mercy is given in after prayer, whether it comes as a gracious answer to it or no, *is taken from the common providence of God, that dispenseth the same things to the wicked without praying which the saints receive praying.* Now, with Satan, how knowest thou that thy mercies come to thee as an answer to thy prayer, and not at the door of common providence with them? For the extricating thee out of this snare thou must know, that we are not to expect the extraordinary ways to determine this, but must satisfy ourselves with what light the word of God affords, which is able to resolve, not only this, but all our cases of conscience. It is true that God doth sometimes cast in some such circumstances as bring an evidence with them that the mercy flies to us on the wings of prayer. As when, upon Abraham's servant's praying at the well for God's gracious conduct and help to despatch his master's business prosperously, that Rebecca should presently come forth, and, by her kind carriage and invitation, so fitly answer the mould of his prayer, even as the lock doth the key made for it. Here heaven declared to his very sense, that his prayer found the right way to heaven. When, upon prayer, the mercy is thus cast in strangely and suddenly without the concurrence of second causes—yea, when they all lie under a visible sentence of death, and the thing is put beyond the activity of their sphere to work—here there is no rival to stand in competition with prayer. Thus, when the apostles healed the sick upon a short prayer darted up to heaven—not so much as a doctor's advice asked in the cure. When Peter knocked at the door where the church was praying for him, what but prayer bound his keeper's senses so fast in the chains of sleep, and made those with which Peter was bound to fall off without any kind hand to help, but heaven's? What made the iron gate so officious to open to him that had no key in his hand to unlock it? Surely we must confess, prayer opened heaven door, and heaven, at the church's prayer, opened the prison door.

Yet it is *as* true, that more commonly mercies that are won by prayer come not with this pomp and observation. But, as converting grace oft steals into the hearts of some with less terror and noise of humiliation than it doth into others; so, truly, do answers in prayer—and that more commonly—come with more silence, and in the ordinary road by the concurring help of second causes. As, the Christian praying for the temporal provisions of this life, God answers his prayer by blessing his diligence in his calling. The sick Christian praying, hath his food and physic thoroughly sanctified, and so recovers. Now, though God hath left himself at liberty, either to send his mercies by secondary hands, or, when he pleaseth, to be the messenger himself, and bring them in an extraordinary way with his immediate hand; yet hath he *not* left us at liberty to leave the ordinary road, and neglect the means, under a pretence of expecting extraordinary ways to have our desires. Now as to this ordinary way of giving in mercies in answer to prayer, these two things are to be inquired for:—

(1.) Inquire *whether thou who didst put up the prayer beest in a covenant state.* When God gives a mercy in answer to prayer, he is said to 'remember his covenant,' Ps. 105:34 compared with ver. 8, and to be 'mindful of his covenant,' Ps. 111:5. His eye is first on the person, taking notice who he is, whether his child or no, and then his ear is open to his cry: 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry,' Ps. 34:15. 'Who art thou, my son?' said Isaac to Jacob, before he gave him the blessing. If God sees thou art not his child—and his eyes are not dim, like old Isaac's, that he can be deceived—thy prayer is not accepted. Indeed, neither canst thou, in that

state, pray in a gospel sense, nor God graciously bid thy prayer welcome; for the spirit of prayer is a covenant grace, and interest in the mediation of Christ a covenant privilege, without both which no prayer is accepted. God hears not any that have not his Spirit to pray in them, and his Son to pray for them; and none have these but such as are in a covenant state.

(2.) Inquire *what thy frame of heart was in the duty of prayer, and also after its performance*. Thy not being in a covenant state will prove thy prayer was not heard, and consequently that the mercy received came not as a gracious answer to it; but thy being in a covenant state is an insufficient ground for thee to conclude that this particular prayer that now thou puttest up is accepted, because there may intervene something to hinder the present benefit of this privilege which is annexed to thy covenant state. For, though thy state be good, yet thy present frame and behaviour may be naught. Thou mayest, though a child of God, be under fresh guilt and defilement as yet unrepented of. Now in this case God can shut his door upon his own child. Thou hast indeed *jus in re*, but not *aptitudinem ad rem*—as a saint, thou hast a right to all the promises of the covenant, and to this, of having God's ear open to thy prayers among the rest; but as thou art a saint under guilt, or the defilement of any sin that thou hast not yet repented of, thou art not fit to enjoy what thou hast a right to as a saint. God doth not disinherit thee indeed, but he sequesters the promise from thee, and the rents of it shall not be paid to thee, till thou renewest thy repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus for the pardon of it. Thy God will choose a fitter time than this is to signify his love to thee. The leper under the law was to stand off while purified; and so will thy God turn his back of thy prayer, till thou beest cleansed of thy sin.

Again, suppose thou art a saint, and hast not thus defiled thyself with any gross sin, yet thy graces might not be exercised in the duty of prayer; haply thou didst pray, but no faith or fervency were exerted in it. There may be grace in the heart, but none in the duty; and such a prayer shall not speed. The promise is to the saint acting his faith and fervency in prayer. 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' James 5:16. 'Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart,' Jer. 29:13.

Lastly, Though thou wert stirred up in prayer, yet may be thy heart was not raised up to rely on God after prayer for the answer. Then we pray in faith when we so take hold of God by faith in prayer, as to wait and stay ourselves on God for a return of mercy from him. Now by putting all these together, thou mayest come to the resolution of the question in hand. If thou beest in a covenant state, and liest not in any known sin unrepented of—if thou prayest fervently, and actest faith on God, so as to stay thy soul upon God for an answer, though accompanied with many weaknesses and staggerings—truly thou mayest, without presumption, conclude the mercy which finds thee in this orderly manner waiting upon God comes in a gracious answer to thy prayer. We do not fear to break open a letter when we find our name in the superscription directing it to us. Search the promises, and thou shalt find them directed by name to thee who prayest thus.

## DIRECTION XI.—SECOND GENERAL PART.

[HOW TO PERFORM THE DUTY COMMANDED—A DIRECTORY FOR PRAYER.]

*'Praying always with all prayer and supplication,' &c. (Eph. 6:18).*

**H**aving despatched the duty of prayer in general, we now come to give an account of the several branches in the exhortation; which together make up an excellent DIRECTORY to the Christian for his better performing of this duty. Indeed, the apostle here not only teacheth the Christian how to pray, but the minister how to preach, in that he doth not nakedly tell them what is their duty—and so leave them to their

own skill in the management of it; but that he may facilitate the duty unto them, he annexeth such directions, and so rules their copy for them, that they shall not easily miscarry in the performance thereof. That preacher that presseth a duty—though with never so much zeal—but doth not chalk out the way how it is to be done, is like one that brings a man to a door that is locked, and bids him go into the house; but gives him no key to open it. Or, that sends a company to sea, but lends them no chart by which they should steer their course. But to come to the directions. They are six. **FIRST.** The *time* for prayer—‘*praying always.*’ **SECOND.** The *kinds or sorts* of prayer—‘*with all prayer and supplication.*’ **THIRD.** The *inward principle* of prayer from which it may flow—‘*in the Spirit.*’ **FOURTH.** The *guard* to be set about the duty of prayer—‘*watching thereunto.*’ **FIFTH.** The unwearied constancy to be exercised in the duty—‘*with all perseverance.*’ **SIXTH.** The *comprehensiveness* of the duty or persons for whom we are to pray—‘*for all saints.*’

We shall begin with the first.

#### DIVISION FIRST.—THE TIME FOR PRAYER.

‘*Praying always.*’

We shall begin with the first direction, which points to the time of performing the duty of prayer—‘*always.*’ This word ‘always’ hath a threefold importance. **FIRST.** To pray ‘always’ is as much as if he had said, ‘*pray in everything,*’ according to that of the same apostle in another epistle—‘In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.’ **SECOND.** To pray ‘always’ may import as much as to *pray in all conditions.* **THIRD.** To pray ‘always’ is to *pray daily.*

[THREEFOLD IMPORT of the expression  
‘*praying always.*’]

That he may give me life and wealth:  
I will *myself* prepare the equal soul.

**FIRST.** To pray always is to pray *in everything.* Prayer is a catholic duty, with which, like a girdle, we are to compass in all our affairs. It is to be as bread and salt on our table; whatever else we have to our meal, these are not forgot to be set on: whatever we do, or would have, prayer is necessary, be it small or great. Not as the heathen, who prayed for some things to their gods, and not for other. If poor, they prayed for riches; if sick, for health; but as for the good things of the mind, such as patience, contentment, and other virtues, they thought they could carve well enough in these for themselves, without troubling their gods to help them. The poet it seems was of this mind—

*Hoc satis est orare Jovem, qui donat et aufert.  
Det vitam, det opes; animum mî æquum ipse  
parabo—*

It is enough,  
To pray of Jove who gives and takes away

O how proud is ignorance! let God give the less, and man will do the greater.

But their folly is not so much to wondered at, as the irreligion of many among ourselves, who profess to know the true God, and have the light of his word to direct them what worship to give him. Some are so brutish in their knowledge, that they hardly pray to God for anything others for everything. May be they look upon pardon of sin, and salvation of their souls—as fruit on the top branches of a tree—out of the reach of their own arm, and therefore now and then put up some slighty prayers to God for them. But as for temporals, which seem to hang lower, they think they can pluck them by their own industry, without setting up the ladder of prayer to come at them. They that should see some—how busy they are in laying their plots, and how seldom in prayer—could not but think they expected their safety from their own policy, and not God’s providence. Or, should they observe how hard they work in their shop, and



how seldom and lazy they are at prayer for God's blessing on their labour in their closet, they must conclude these men promise themselves their estates more from their own labour than the divine bounty.

In a word, it is some great occasion that must bring them upon their knees before God in prayer. May be, when they have an extraordinary enterprise in hand, wherein they look for strong opposition or great difficulty, in such a case God shall have them knocking at his door—for now they are at their wits' end and know not how to turn them; but the more ordinary and common actions of their lives they think they can please their master at their pleasures, and so pass by God's door without bespeaking his presence or assistance. Thus, one runs into his shop, and another into the field, and takes no notice that God is concerned in their employments. If to take a long journey by the sea or land, where eminent dangers and hazards present themselves unto their thoughts, then God hath their company; but if to stay at home, or walk to and fro in their ordinary employments, they bespeak not the providential wing of God to overshadow them. This is not to 'pray always.' If thou wilt, therefore, be a Christian, do not thus part stakes with God, committing the greater transactions of thy life to him, and trusting thyself with the less: but 'acknowledge God in all thy ways, and lean not to thine own understanding' in any. By this thou shalt give him the glory of his universal providence, with which he encircles all his creatures and all their actions. As nothing is too great to be above his power, so nothing is too little to be beneath his care. He is the God of the valleys as well as of the mountains. The sparrow on the hedge and the hair on our head are cared for by him; and this is no more derogatory to his glorious majesty than it was to make them at first. Nay, thou shalt, by this, not only give God his glory, but secure thyself, for there is no passage in thy whole life so minute and inconsiderable, which—if God should withdraw his care and providence—might not be an occasion of a sin or danger to thee. And that which exposeth thee to these calls upon thee to engage God for thy defence.

*First.* The least passage in thy life may prove an occasion of sin to thee. At what a little wicket, many times, a great sin enters, we daily

see. David's eye did but casually light on Bathsheba, and the good man's foot was presently in the devil's trap. Hast thou not then need to pray that God would set a guard about thy senses wherever thou goest? and to cry with him, 'Keep back mine eyes from beholding vanity?' Dinah went but to give her neighbours, 'the daughters of the land,' a visit—which was but an ordinary civility—and we may imagine that she little thought, when she went out, of playing the strumpet before she came home; yet, alas! we read how she was deflowered! What need then hast thou, before thou goest forth, to charge God with the keeping of thee, that so thou mayest be in his fear from morning till night!

*Second.* No passage of thy life so small wherein thou mayest not fall into some great danger. How many have been choked with their food at their own table?—received their deadly wound by a beam from their own house? Knowest thou what will be the end of any action when thou beginnest it? Joseph was sent by his father to see his brethren in the field, and neither of them thought of a longer journey; yet this proved the sad occasion of his captivity in a strange land. Job's servants were destroyed with lightning from heaven when they were abroad about their master's business. Where canst thou be safe if heaven's eye be not on thee? A slip of thy foot as thou walkest, or a trip of thy horse as thou ridest, may break thy bones, yea thy neck. O what need, then, of a God to make thy path plain before thee! It is he that 'preserveth man and beast;' and canst thou have faith to expect his protection when thou hast not a heart to bespeak it in thy humble prayers at his hand? What reason hath God to care for thy safety, who carest no more for his honour?

*SECOND.* To pray always may import as much as to pray *in all conditions*; that is, in prosperity as well as in adversity. So Calvin takes it: *omni tempore perinde valet, atque tam prosperis quam adversis*—it holds at all times equally, and as much in prosperity as in adversity. Indeed, when God doth afflict, he puts an especial season for prayer into our hands; but when he enlargeth our state, he doth not discharge us of the duty, as if we might then lay it aside, as the traveller doth his cloak when the weather is warm. Prayer is not a winter

garment. It is then to be warn indeed; but not to be left off in the summer of prosperity. If you would find some at prayer you must stay till it thunders and lightens; not go to them except it be in a storm or tempest. These are like some birds that are never heard to cry or make a noise but in or against foul weather. This is not to pray always; not to serve God, but to serve ourselves of God; to visit God, not as a friend for love of his company, but as a mere beggar for relief of our present necessity; using prayer as that pope is said to have used preaching, for a net to compass in some mercy we want, and when the fish is got then to throw away the duty. Well, Christian, take heed of this; thou hast ARGUMENTS enough to keep this duty always on its wheels, let thy condition be what it will.

[WHY we should pray IN ALL CONDITIONS.]

*First.* Pray in prosperity, *that thou mayest speed when thou prayest in adversity.* Own God now, that he may acknowledge thee then. Shall that friend be welcome to us that never gives us a visit but when he comes to borrow? This is a right beggar's trick, but not a friend's part.

*Second.* Pray in prosperity, to *clear thyself that thou didst not pray in hypocrisy when thou wert afflicted.* One prayer now will be a better evidence for thy sincerity than a whole bundle of duties performed in adversity. Colours are better discerned and distinguished by daylight than by the candle in the night. I am sure the truth and plainness of our hearts in duty will be best discovered in prosperity. In affliction, even gracious souls have scruples upon their spirits that they seek themselves. Smart and pain, they fear, makes them cry till they remember that their acquaintance with God did not begin in their affliction, but that they took delight in his company before these straits drove them to him.

*Third.* Pray in prosperity, that thou *mayest not be ensnared by thy prosperity.* Ephraim and Manasseh were brethren, and so are plenty and forgetfulness—the signification of their names. Prosperity is no friend to the memory; therefore we are cautioned so much to beware when we are full, lest then we forget God: *magnus vir est cui præsens felicitas si arrisit non irrisit* (Bern.)—he is a holy man indeed whose present prosperity doth not mock and abuse him when it smiles most pleasingly on him. O how hard it is to be

pleased with it and not be ensnared by it! 'Wine,' Solomon saith, 'is a mocker;' it soon puts him that is too bold with it to shame. Prosperity doth the same. A little of it makes us drunk, and then we know not what we do. This hath proved often an hour of temptation to the best of men. You shall find in Scripture the saints have got their saddest falls on the evenest ground. Noah, who had seen the whole world drowned in water, no sooner was he almost come to safe shore but himself is drowned in wine. David's heart was fixed in the wilderness; but his wanton eye rouled and wandered when upon the terrace of his palace. Health, honour, riches, and pleasures, with the rest of this world's enjoyments, they are like luscious wine. We cannot drink little of them, they are so sweet to our carnal palate; and we cannot bear much of them, because they are strong and heady, fuming up in pride and carnal confidence. Now prayer is an excellent preservative against the evil of this state.

1. As it *spiritualizes our joy into thankfulness.* It is carnal joy that is dreggy, and therefore soon putrefies. Now, as prayer in affliction refines the Christian's sorrow by breathing it forth into holy groans to God, whereby he is kept from sinful complaints of God and murmurings against him, thus here the Christian, by giving a spiritual vent to his joy in thanksgiving and praises to his God, is preserved from the degeneracy of carnal joy, that betrays the soul to many foul sins, if itself be not one. For this purpose it is that the apostle James cuts out this twofold channel for this double affection to run in: 'Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms,' James 5:13. As if he should say, 'Let the afflicted soul pray, that he may not murmur. Let the joyous saint sing psalms, that his joy turns not sensual.' A carnal heart can easily be merry and jocund when he prospers; the saint alone is praiseful. The psalmist, speaking of the mariners delivered from storms at sea, which threatened their wreck, saith, 'Then are they glad because they be quiet,' Ps. 107:30. But this they may be and yet not thankful. Wherefore he adds his holy option, 'O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!'

2. By prayer the soul is led into the acquaintance of *higher delights than are to be found in all his temporal enjoyments*, and thereby is taken off from an inordinate valuation of them,

because he knows where better are to be had. The true reason why men are puffed up with too high an opinion of worldly felicities is their ignorance of {the} spiritual.

3. Prayer is God's ordinance to *sanctify our creature-comforts*. Everything is 'sanctified by the word of God and prayer,' 1 Tim. 4:5. Now, this obtained, the Christian may safely drink of these streams. The unicorn hath now put in his horn to heal them; Satan shall not have such power to corrupt him in the use of them as another that bespeaks not God's blessing on them. There is a vanity and flatulency in every creature, which, if not corrected by prayer, breeds indigested humours in him that feeds on it.

*Fourth.* In thy prosperity, Pray to *show thy dependance on God for what thou enjoyest*. Thou holdest all thy mercies *in capite*—he that gave thee thy life holds thy soul in life. 'Thou hidst thy face,' saith David, 'and I was troubled.' Truly it is time for God to withdraw his hand when thou goest about to cut off his title. That enjoyment comes but as a guest which is not entertained by prayer. Solomon tells us of wings that our temporal mercies have. Now if anything can clip these and keep them from fleeing away, it is prayer. God would often have destroyed Israel, but Moses stood in the gap; their mercies were oft upon the wing, but that holy man's prayers stayed their flight. God's heart would not serve him to come over the back of his prayer and put that to shame. No; they shall live. But let them say, Moses' prayer begged their life. Now, if the prayer of a holy person could avail for others, and obtain a new lease for their lives, that were, many of them, none of the best; surely, then, the prayer of a saint may have great power with God for his own. Long life is promised to him that honours his earthly father. Prayer gives our heavenly Father the greatest honour. If, therefore, thou wouldst have thy life, or the life of any mercy, prolonged, forget not to pay him this tribute. Yea, would you transmit what God hath blessed you with to your posterity, the best way thou canst take is to lock thy estate up in God's hand by prayer. Whatever will thou makest, God is sure to be thy executor. Man may propose and purpose, but God disposeth. Engage him, and the care is taken for thy posterity.

*Fifth.* Pray now, that thou *mayest outlive the loss of thy prosperity*. When prayer cannot prevail

to keep a temporal mercy alive with thee, yet it will have a powerful influence to keep thy heart alive when that dies. O it is sad when a man's estate and comfort are buried in the same grave together! None will bear the loss of an enjoyment so patiently as he that was exercised in prayer while he had it. When Job was in his flourishing estate, his children alive, and all his other enjoyments, then was he a great trader with God in this duty. He 'sanctified' his children every day. He did not bless himself in them, but sought the blessing of God for them; and see how comfortably he bears all: 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' The more David prayed for his child while alive the fewer tears he shed for it when it was dead.

THIRD. To pray always is to pray *daily*. When the Christian keeps a constant daily exercise of this duty, prayer is not a holiday, but everyday work: 'Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever,' Ps. 145:2. This was typified by 'the daily sacrifice,' called therefore 'the continual burnt offering,' Ex. 29:38; whereby was signified our daily need of seeking mercy at God's hands through Christ. When our Lord taught his disciples to pray, he bade them not to ask bread for a week, no, not for a morrow, but for the present day: 'Give us this day our daily bread'—plainly signifying our duty to seek our bread every day of God. This surely was also the end why God gave the manna in such a portion as should not stuff their cupboards, and furnish them with a store for a month or a week, but be a just *demensum* — measure and sufficient allowance for a day, that so they might be kept in a daily dependence on God, and look up to him daily who carried the key of their pantry for them. And have not we the same necessities upon us with them? Our bodies are as weak as theirs, and cannot be preserved without a daily repast. Do we not depend on him for the bread of the day and the rest of the night? And he hath too good an opinion of his soul's constitution, who thinks it can live or thrive with yesterday's meal, without renewing his communion with God to-day. The mother would think her sucking child not well, if it should forsake the breast a whole day; so mayest thou conclude thy soul is not right, that can pass a day without craving any spiritual repast in prayer. If thy wants be not sufficient to

keep the chariot of this duty on its wheels, yet the sins which thou daily renewest would drive thee every day to confess and beg pardon for them.

We are under a law not to let the sun go down upon our wrath against our brother. And dare we, who every day deserve God's wrath, let the sun go down before that controversy is taken up between God and us? In a word, every day hath its new mercies. 'His compassions fail not; they are new every morning,' Lam. 3:23. These new mercies contract a new debt, and God hath told us the way of payment, viz. a tribute of praise. Without this, we cannot expect a sanctified use of them. He is branded by all for a profane person that eats his meat and gives not thanks. And it would be thought a ridiculous excuse, should he say he gave thanks yesterday, and that should serve for this meal also. We have more mercies every day to bless God for than what is set on our tables. We wear mercies; we breathe mercies; we walk upon mercies; our whole life is but a passage from one mercy, to be entertained by another. As one cloth is drawn, another is laid for a new feast to be set on. Now, doth God every day anoint our head with fresh oil, and shall not we crown him with new praises? I will not enter into a discourse how oft a Christian should in a day pray. At least it must be twice, *i.e.* morning and night. Prayer must be the key of the morning and lock of the night. We show not ourselves Christians, if we do not open our eyes with prayer when we rise, and shut them again with the same key when we lie down at night. This answers to the morning and evening sacrifice in the law, which yet was so commanded as to leave room for those other free-will offerings which their zeal might prompt them to. Pray as oft as you please besides, so that your devotions jostle not with the necessary duties of your particular callings; the oftener the more welcome. We read of David's 'seven times a day.' But be sure thou dost not retrench and cut God short of thy stated hours. 'It is a good thing,' saith the psalmist, 'to give thanks unto the Lord, to shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,' Ps. 92:1, 2. God is alpha and omega. It is fit we should begin and end the day with his praise, who begins and ends it for us with his mercy.

Well, Christian, thou seest thy duty plainly laid before thee. As thou wouldst have God prosper thy labour in the day, and sweeten thy rest in the night, clasp them both together with thy morning and evening devotions. He that takes no care to set forth God's portion of time in the morning, doth not only rob God of his due, but is a thief to himself all the day after, by losing the blessing which a faithful prayer might bring from heaven on his undertakings. And he that closeth his eyes at night without prayer, lies down before his bed is made. He is like a foolish captain in a garrison, who betakes himself to his rest before he hath set the watch for the city's safeguard. God is his people's keeper; but can he expect to be kept by him, that chargeth not the divine providence with his keeping? The angels, at his command, pitch their tents about his saints' dwellings. But as the drum calls the watch together, so God looks that, by humble prayer, we should beg of him their ministry and attendance about us. I shall shut up this discourse with one caution to be observed in your daily exercise of this duty.

*Caution.* Beware that thy constant daily performance of this duty doth not *degenerate into a lifeless formality*. What we do commonly, we are prone to be but ordinary and slighty in the doing. He is a rare Christian that keeps his course in prayer, and yet grows not customary to pray of mere course. The power of religion cannot be preserved without an outward form and order observed in its exercises; and yet very hard it is not to grow formal in those duties which we are daily conversant with. Many that are very neat and nice when their holiday suit is on their back, are yet too slovenly in wearing their everyday apparel. Thus, at a fast or on a Sabbath, our hearts haply are stirred up to some solemnity and spirituality becoming the duty of prayer, as being awed with the sacredness of the time and extraordinary weight of the work; but alas! in our everyday duties we are too slighty and slovenly.

Now, set thyself, Christian, with all thy might, to keep up the life and vigour of thy spirit in thy daily approaches to God. Be as careful to set an edge on thy graces before thy prayer, as on thy stomach before thy meal. Labour to come as hungry to this duty, as to eat thy dinner and supper. Now no expedient for this like a holy watch set about thy heart in the whole

course of thy life. He that watcheth his heart all day, is most likely to find it at hand and in time for prayer at night. Whereas, loose walking breeds lazy praying. Be oft in the day putting thyself in mind what work waits for thee at night. Thou art to draw near unto thy God, and this will make thee afraid of doing anything in the day that will indispose thee, or make thee fear a chide from thy God, when thou appearest before him. That of the apostle is observable: 'If ye call

on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear,' 1 Peter 1:17. As if he had said, 'Do you mean to pray? then look to the whole course of your walking, that it be in the fear of God, or else you will have little heart to go about that work, and as little hope that he will bid you welcome, for he judgeth all persons that pray, not only by their prayers, but by their works and walking.'

## DIVISION SECOND.—THE KINDS OF PRAYER.

*‘With all prayer and supplication.’*

The second branch in the apostle’s directory for prayer follows, which hath respect to *the kinds of prayer* that are to be taken into the Christian’s exercise. As for the season, he must ‘pray always;’ so for the kinds of prayer, ‘*with all prayer and supplication.*’ Now, there is a double ‘*all*’ to be observed, as we shall make clear under two branches. FIRST. There is *all manner* of prayer. SECOND. There is *all matter* of prayer.

### BRANCH FIRST.

*[‘All prayer’ is viewed as to DIVERSITY IN MANNER.]*

I shall begin with the first branch mentioned, viz. the *modus orandi*—*the manner of praying*: and that falls under several divisions, and distinctions. FIRST. Prayer is sudden and ejaculatory, or composed and fixed. SECOND. That which is composed, is either solitary, or social—performed jointly with others. THIRD. Social and joint prayer is either private in the family or public in the church. FOURTH. Solitary and social, private or public prayer, are either ordinary or extraordinary.

*[Prayer distinguished as EJACULATORY OR COMPOSED.]*

FIRST DISTINCTION. Prayer is *sudden and ejaculatory, or composed and fixed.*

*First. Sudden or ejaculatory prayer*, which is nothing else but the *lifting up of the soul to God upon a sudden emerged occasion, with some short but lively expression of our desires to him.* Sometimes it is vocal, sometimes only groaned forth from the secret workings of a secret heart. These darts may be shot to heaven without using the tongue’s bow. Such a kind of prayer that of Moses was, which rang so loud in God’s ear that he asked Moses, ‘Wherefore criest thou unto me?’ Ex. 14:15; whereas, we read of never a word that he spake. It was no season for Moses then to retire and betake himself to the duty of prayer, in a composed and settled way, as at other times he was wont, for the enemy was at his back, and the people of Israel flocking about him, murmuring and charging him with the guilt of blood, in that he had enticed them out of Egypt to fall into such a trap, wherein they expected no other than to lose their lives, either in the sea or by the Egyptians. This no doubt made Moses presently despatch his desires to heaven by the hand of some short ejaculation,

the surest and quickest post in the world, which brought him back a speedy and happy return, as you may see, ver. 16.

Thus, Nehemiah also, upon the occasion of the king’s speech to him, interposeth a short prayer to God between the king’s question and his answer to it: ‘Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said unto the king,’ &c., Neh. 2:4. So soon was this holy man at heaven and back again—even in a trice — without any breach of manners in making the king wait for his answer. Sometimes you have the saints forming their desires into a few smart and passionate words, which fly with a holy force from their lips to heaven, as an arrow out of a bow. Thus old Jacob, when he was despatching his sons back again to Egypt, and had with the greatest prudence provided for their journey, by furnishing them with double money, and a choice present in their hand to appease the governor of the land, that now he might engage heaven on their side, he breathes forth into this ejaculatory prayer, ‘God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin,’ Gen. 43:14. And David, when intelligence came that Ahithophel was of Absalom’s council, let fly that dart to heaven, ‘O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness,’ II Sam. 15:31. This kind of praying David might mean when he saith, ‘Seven times a day do I praise thee,’ Ps. 119:164. Not as if he had seven set hours for this duty every day, as the Papists would have it, to countenance their seven canonical hours, but rather a definite number is here put for an indefinite. And so it amounts to no more than this—he did very often in a day praise God, his holy heart taking the hint of every providence to carry him to heaven on this errand of prayer and praise.

Now, to despatch this kind of prayer, I shall only, first, show why the Christian, beside his stated hours for prayer, wherein he holds more solemn commerce with God, should also visit God occasionally, and step into his presence over and anon—whatever he is about—with these ejaculatory breathings of his heart; for this is a kind of prayer that needs not interrupt the Christian, nor break any squares in his other enjoyments. Is he on a journey? He may go to heaven in these short sallies of his soul, and make no less speed in his way for them. Is he in the field at work? His plough needs not stand still for this. As the meadow is not the worse for what the bee sucks from its flowers, so neither doth a man's worldly occasions suffer any loss from that spiritual improvement which a gracious soul thus makes of them.

[FOUR REASONS WHY *the Christian*  
*should use ejaculatory prayers.*]

*Reason 1.* The first reason may be taken from God, who, to show his great delight in his children's prayers, lets his door stand always wide open, *that whenever we have but a heart*, and will be so kind as to step in to visit him with a prayer at what hour of the day or night soever it be, *we shall be welcome*. Nay, he doth not only give us a liberty, but he lays it as a law upon us, to let him hear from us as oft as possibly we can, and therefore commands us to 'pray without ceasing,' 1 Thes. 5:17, and 'whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him,' Col. 3:17. What do these and such like places signify, but that we should take every occasion that his Spirit and providence bring to our hand to the lifting our hearts up to him in prayer? And an we suppose that a prayer at our first setting forth in the morning, with never thinking of God any more till we come to our round for prayer at night again, will pass for a praying continually? When a father chargeth his son, that lives abroad, to let him as oft as may be hear from him, though he doth not expect a long epistle from him by every messenger that comes that way, yet he looks for some short remembrance of his duty by word of mouth, and that is accepted, till he hath more leisure to write his full mind. God bids pray continually. Now, he knows we cannot be always on our knees in

the solemn performance of this duty. But, therefore, he expects to hear the oftener from us in these occasional remembrances of him—hinted to us all along the day by emerging providences—which the Holy Spirit stands ready as our messenger to convey unto him.

*Reason 2.* The second reason may be taken from the *excellent use of ejaculatory prayers in the Christian's whole course of life*.

(1.) They are of excellent use to be *set against those sudden injections of Satan, which he will be darting into our minds*. It were strange if the best of saints should not find the devil busy with them in this kind. None so pure whose chastity of mind this foul spirit dares not to assault. And when his temptations have once coloured our imagination, it is hard wiping them off before they soak so deep as to leave some malignant tincture on our affections. Now, when any such dart from hell is shot in at thy window, no such way to wind out of the temptation as to shoot thy darts to heaven in some holy ejaculation. Our Saviour taught his disciples the use of this weapon: 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' Now when thou canst not draw out the long sword of a solemn prayer, then go to the short dagger of ejaculatory prayer; and with this—if in the hand of faith—thou mayest stab thy enemy to the heart. He that at one short prayer of David could infatuate Ahithophel, an oracle for policy, can befool the devil himself, and will at thy prayer of faith. 'The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan,' said Christ. It is time now for Satan to be gone, when heaven takes the alarm; as when thieves are about a house to rob it, and they within beat a drum, or give a sudden shriek to call in help, presently they flee. And if God for thy trial should not come at first call, to rid thee of these unwelcome guests, yet thy very crying out—if affectionate and cordial—will clear thee from consenting to their villainy.

(2.) They are a *sovereign means to allay the Christian's affections to the world*—one of the worst enemies he hath in the field against him; for it chokes the soul, thickens the Christian's spirit, and changes his very complexion. Who but dying men smell of the earth and carry its colour in their countenance? Grace dieth apace where the heart savours much of the earth. Now, prayer, what is it, but the lifting of the soul from earth to heaven? Were we oftener in a day sucking in, as it were, fresh air and new

influences of grace from God, our spirits could not possibly be so much poisoned with worldly affections. When one was asked, 'Whether he did not admire the goodly structure of a stately house?' he answered, 'No. For,' saith he, 'I have been at Rome, where more magnificent fabrics are to be seen.' Thus, when Satan presents the world's pleasures or treasures to the Christian—that he may inveigle his affections to dote on them—a gracious soul can say, 'I have been at heaven; there is not an hour in the day wherein I enjoy not better than these in communion with my God.'

*Reason 3.* Ejaculatory prayers keep the Christian's heart in a *holy disposition for the more solemn performance of his duty*. He that is so heavenly in his earthly employments will be the less worldly in his heavenly. It was a sweet speech of a dying saint, 'That he was going to change his place but not his company.' A Christian that is frequent in these ejaculations, when he goes to pray more solemnly, he goes not from the world to God, but from God to God—from a transient view of him to a more fixed; whereas, another discontinues his acquaintance with God, after his morning visit, and comes not in his company till called in by his customary performance. O! how hard a business will such a one find it to pray with a heavenly heart! What you fill the vessel with, you must expect to draw thence. If water be put in, we cannot without a miracle think to draw wine. What! art thou all day filling thy heart with earth—God not in all thy thoughts—and dost thou look to draw heaven thence at night? If you would have fire for your evening sacrifice, expect not new from heaven to be dropped, but labour to keep what is already on thine altar from going out; which thou canst not better do than by feeding it with this fuel.

*Reason 4.* Ejaculatory prayers are of excellent use to *alleviate any great affliction that lies heavy upon soul or body*. While others sit disconsolate, grinding their souls and wasting their spirits with their own anxious thoughts; these are his wings with which he flieth above his troubles, and in an instant shoots his soul to heaven, out of the din and noise of his afflictions. How can he be long uncomfortable, who, when anything begins to disquiet him, lets it not lie boking and belking in his mind—as a thorn in the flesh—but presently gives vent to it,

by some heavenly meditation or heart-easing prayer to God? Those heavenly tidings which came to Job, one upon the neck of another, it was not possible for him to have stood under, had his thoughts been employed on no other subject than his affliction. But, being able to lift up his heart to God—'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'—this one devout meditation or ejaculation gave him incomparable ease. Indeed, in afflictions that are very sharp and violent, it is no time for long discourses; the poor creature cannot hold out in a continued duty of prayer, as at another time. When the fight grows hot, and the army comes to grapple hand to hand with their enemy, they have not leisure to charge their great artillery, then their short swords do them most service. Truly thus it is in this case. The poor creature, may be, finds his body weak, and his spirit oppressed with temptations, which Satan pours like so much shot upon him, that all he can well do is to pray quick and short—now fetch a groan for the pain he feels, and then shoot a dart to heaven to call God in to his help. And blessed is the man who hath his quiver full of these arrows. We see Christ in his agony chose to pray oft, rather than long: 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done.' This short ejaculation he sends to heaven thrice, with some little pause of time between prayer and prayer. 'And was heard in that he feared,' Heb. 5:7.

## USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Reproof to those who either do not use ejaculatory prayer at all, or not rightly.]*

*Use First.* A reproof to those that *use not this kind of prayer*, or do it in a profane manner; or that use this, but neglect other kinds of prayer.

1. For reproof of those that are *wholly unacquainted with ejaculatory prayer*—not such a dart to be found in all their quiver. Their heart is as a bow bent indeed, and their quiver full of arrows. But all are shot beside this mark. The world is their butt; at this they let fly all their thoughts. God is so great a stranger with them, that they hardly speak to or think of him from morning to night, though they travel all day in his



company. And is it not strange that God, who is so near his creature, should be so far from his thoughts? Where canst thou be, or what can thy eye light upon, that may not bring God to thy remembrance, and give thee a fair occasion to lift up thy heart to him? He is present with thee in every place and company. Thou canst use no creature, enjoy no mercy, feel no affliction, and put thy hand to no work, which will not prompt thee either to beg his counsel, seek his blessing, crave his protection, or give him praise for his gracious providence over thee. The very beast thou ridest on, could it speak—as once Balaam's ass did—would reprove thy atheism, who goest plodding on thy way, and takest no notice of him that preservest both man and beast. But God speaks once, yea twice, and brutish men perceive it not. Well may Solomon say, 'The heart of the wicked is of little worth,' when God is not in all his thoughts. What can that heart be worth, that is stuffed with that which is worth naught? at least within a while will be so? for within that moment wherein these poor wretches die, all their thoughts perish and come to nothing. Truly, though ye were so many kings and emperors, yet, if the stock of your thoughts be spent all the day long upon earthly projects—never flying so high as to lead you into communion with God—you are but like those vermin that are buried alive in some stinking dunghill. The food your souls live upon is low and base, and such must the temper of your souls also needs be.

O! how many are there in the world, whose backs are bravely clad with scarlet, while their souls embrace the dunghill—whose bellies are high fed and deliciously pampered, but their souls set at coarse fare! The body, which is the beggar, is mounted on horseback, and the soul, which is the prince, walks on foot—preferred to no higher employment than to hold her slave's stirrup—being made to bestow all his thoughts and care how to provide for that, an allowed nothing for itself. Yet these must be cried up for the only happy men in the world! Whereas, some poor creatures are to be found though their outward port and garb in the world renders them despicable—who enjoy more of heaven and true comfort, by the frequent commerce they have with God, as they are at their loom or wheel, in *one day*, than the other do in all their lives, for all their pomp and fanciful felicities.

What account will such give to God for the expense of their thoughts, the first-born of their souls? What pity is it that strangers should devour them,—the highest improvement whereof is to send them in embassies to heaven, and to converse with God! He who gave man a countenance erect, to walk—not creep on all four, as some other creatures, with their back upon heaven and mouth to the earth—never intended his soul should stoop so below itself, and lick the dust for its food; but rather, that it should look up to God, and enjoy himself in enjoying communion with him that is the Father of spirits. If it be so bad a spectacle to behold a man bowed down through the deformities or infirmities of his body, as to go like a beast on all four, hands and feet; much more, to see a soul so crippled with ignorance and sensual affections, that it cannot look up from the earth where it lies a roveling, to converse with God its Maker.

2. It reproveth those who do indeed shoot now and then to heaven some of these darts of ejaculatory prayers, *but in so profane a way as makes both God and gracious men to nauseate them.* Did you never hear a vile wretch interlace his discourse with a strange medley of oaths and prayers?—rap out an oath, and then send out a vain prayer, in the midst of his carnal discourse? 'God forgive us!' 'God bless us!' 'God be merciful to us!' Such forms of speech many have got, and they come tumbling out when they do not mind what they say. Now, which do you think is like to get first to heaven—their oaths or their prayers? It is hard to say whether their swearing or their praying is the worst. What base and low thoughts have those wretches of the great God, to make so bold with his holy and reverent name, which should not be thought or spoken of without fear and trembling! 'The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of fools;' that is, it is uncomely. The name of God doth not fit a profane mouth; the discourse is not equal. One step in hell and another in heaven is too great a stride at once to be taken. To shoot one dart at God in an oath, and another to him in a prayer, what can you make of this but a toying with that which is sacred? Religion and the eye are too tender to be played with. Such prayers as these are shot out of the devil's bow, and are never to reach

heaven, except it be to bring back a curse for him that put them up.

3. A reproof to those who *content themselves with this kind of prayer*. They will now and then cast a transient glance upon God in a short ejaculation, but never set themselves to seek God in a more solemn way. And is this all thou canst afford? No more than to look in at God's door, and away presently! Dost thou not think that he expects thou shouldst sometimes come to stay longer with him in a more settled communion? It is true, these occasional visits, when joined with the conscientious performance of the other, is an excellent symptom of a heavenly heart, and speaks grace to be very lively when they are frequent. As when a man between his set meals is so hungry that he must have something to stay his stomach, and yet, when dinner when dinner or supper come, can feed as heartily as if he had eaten nothing—this shows indeed the man to be healthy and strong. But, if a bit by the by takes away his stomach, that he can eat little or nothing at his ordinary meal, this is not so good a sign. Thus here: if a Christian, between his set and solemn seeking of God morning and night, finds an inward hunger upon his spirit, so strongly craving communion with God that he cannot stay till his stated hour for prayer returns, but must ever and anon be refreshing himself with the beverage of ejaculatory prayer, and then comes sharp set to duty at his ordinary set time, this speaks grace to be *in statu athletico*—strong and thriving; but, on the contrary, it shows a slighty and naughty spirit to make these an excuse or plea for the neglect of the other. Thou tastest, sure, little sweetness, and findest little nourishment from these, or else they would excite thy soul to hunger for further communion with God. As soon as David opened his eyes in the morning, his heart was sallying forth to God—'When I awake I am still with thee.' And as he walked abroad in the daytime, every occasion led him into the presence with God: 'Seven times a day do I praise thee;' that is, often—as it is said, The righteous fall seven times in a day. But, did these short glances of David's heart steal from the more solemn performance of his duty? No; we find he had his set seasons also: 'Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud,' Ps. 55:17. Mr. Ainsworth interprets this place of solemn stated prayer; and it seems to

have been the practice of more devout Jews to devote three seasons in a day for that duty. I can no more believe him to be frequent and spiritual in ejaculatory prayer who neglects the season of solemn prayer, than I can believe that he keeps every day in the week a Sabbath who neglects to keep that one which God hath appointed.

[Exhortation to the believer's frequent  
use of ejaculatory prayer.]

*Use Second. To the saints.* Be ye excited to the frequent exercise of this duty of ejaculatory prayer. I know you are not altogether strangers to it—if you answer your name and be such as you go for; but it is a more intimate and familiar acquaintance with this kind of prayer that I would gladly lead you into. Such an art it is that, were we but skilful traders in it, we should find a blessed advance in our spiritual estate and soon have more money in our purse—grace and comfort, I mean, in our hearts—than now most Christians can show. We might, by a spiritual alchemy, turn all we touch into gold, extract heaven out of earth, and make wings of every creature and providence that meet us to help us in our flight to God. Our whole life would be—what I have read of a holy man—but *one communion-day with Christ*. Then neither friends nor foes, joys nor woes, callings nor recreations—or whatever else we have in this world to do with—should be able to interrupt our acquaintance with him. Whereas now, alas! everything interposeth, as an opaque body, to hide God and heaven from our eye. We who now walk—like travellers in some bottom or low swamp—with our thoughts of heaven so overtopped by the world, that we hardly get a sight of that glorious city to which we are going from morning to night—and thereby lose much of the pleasure of our journey—should then have it in a manner always before us, as a joyful prospect in our eye, to solace us in the difficulties of our pilgrimage, and make us gather up our feet more nimbly in the ways of holiness when we shall see whither they lead us. We count them pleasantly situated who live in a climate where the sun is seldom off their horizon. Truly, none have such a constant light of inward joy and peace shining upon their souls as those who are familiarly conversant with this duty. They are *in sole positi*—placed in the sun, as is said of the Rhodians; they stand at the best advantage of any other to have, if not a continual, yet a frequent, intercourse with God, from whom both the influences of comfort and grace also do all come. And if those trees must needs have the fairest and sweetest which stand most in the sun, then, surely, they are most likely to excel others both in comfort and grace who are most with God. Every little that the bee brings to the hive—as she flies in and out, though she stays not long on any flower—adds

to the stock. Though the soul makes no long stay with God in this kind of prayer, yet the frequent reiterations thereof conduce much to the increase of its grace. Light gain, with quick returns, makes a heavy purse. Little showers, often following one upon another, plump the corn and fill the bushels. So do these short spurts—sallies of the soul to heaven—enrich and increase grace in the heart exceedingly. Now, if thou shouldst ask how thou mayest make this kind of ejaculatory prayer more familiar unto thee, take these few words of counsel:—

[SOME HELPS to ejaculatory prayer.]

1. *Help.* Keep thy heart with all diligence—thy affections, I mean. The very reason why we sally out so seldom toward God in these occasional prayers is because the weight of our affections poise us another way. The bowl runs as its bias inclines, the stream flows as the fountain empties itself. If our affections be carnal, to earth we go, and God hath little of our company. Adam, it is said, ‘begat a son in his own likeness,’ Gen. 5:3, and so doth the heart of every man. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; as is the heavenly, such they also that be heavenly. Labour, therefore, to get and keep thy heart heavenly; especially look to these three affections—thy love, fear, and joy.

(1.) *Thy Love.* If this fire burn clear, the more of these sparks will from it mount up to God. Love is a great friend to memory. The adulterer is said to have his ‘eyes full of the harlot,’ and holy love will be as mindful of God. Such a soul will be often setting God in its view: ‘I have set the Lord always before me,’ Ps. 16:8. And by often thinking of God the heart will be enticed into desires after him. ‘The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee,’ Isa. 26:8. And see what follows, ‘With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early,’ ver. 9. Love sets the soul on musing, and musing on praying. Meditation is prayer in bullion, prayer in the ore—soon melted and run into holy desires. The laden cloud soon drops into rain, the piece charged soon goes off when fire is put to it. A meditating soul is *in proximâ potentiâ* to prayer. ‘While I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine

end,’ Ps. 39:3, 4. This was an ejaculatory prayer shot from his soul when in the company of the wicked.

(2.) *Thy Fear.* Even wicked men, thought they be great strangers to prayer, yet we shall hear them knocking at God’s door in a fright; much more will a holy fear direct the Christian, upon all occasions, to lift up his heart to God. Art thou in thy calling? Fear a snare therein, and this will excite thee oft in a day to bespeak counsel of God how to behave thyself therein. Art thou in company? Fear lest thou shouldst do or receive hurt, and thou wilt be lifting up thy heart to him that can only keep thee from both. We cannot have a more faithful monitor to mind us of this duty than a holy fear. ‘They that feared the Lord thought upon his name,’ Mal. 3:16. ‘At what time I am afraid,’ saith David, ‘I will trust in thee.’ Fear makes us think where our safety lies, and leads us to our refuge. Had not Noah feared a storm the ark had not been built. Men fear no sin nor danger, and therefore God hears not of them all the day long: the ungodly world, who walk with their back upon heaven and look not up to God from morning to night. We may tell the reason—‘The fear of God is not before their eyes.’

(3.) *Thy joy and delight in God.* O cherish this. As fear disposeth to pray, so joy to praise. Now, and not till now, the instrument of thy heart is in tune. One hint now from the providence of God, and touch from his Spirit, will set such a soul on work to bless God. Carnal men, when they are frolic and upon the merry pin, then they have their catches and songs as they sit in their house or ride on the way: how much more will the gracious soul, that walks in the sense of God’s love, be often striking up his harp in holy praises to God? ‘Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee,’ Ps. 63:3. ‘I will bless thee while I live,’ ver. 4. And again, ‘My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips,’ ver. 5. See how he goes over and over again the same note. Joy can no more be hid than ointment. As that betrayeth itself by its hot and sweet perfumes, so doth holy joy make its own report in the praises it sounds forth to God. It behooves thee therefore, Christian, to be as chary and choice of thy joy as thou wouldst be of the blood in thy veins; for in this runs the spirits of praise and thanksgiving. Now, would you nourish your joy? Do it by sucking the

promises—those breasts of consolation. these are a food of pure juice and strong nourishment; they soon turn into blood—joy and peace, I mean—and with this a spirit of praise must needs also grow.

2. *Help.* Possess *thy heart with strong apprehensions of God's overruling providence in all thy enterprises, great or small*; that he doth what pleaseth him in heaven and earth, so that all thy labour and toil in any business is in vain while [until] this main wheel begins to stir—his providence gives countenance to the action. O, how would this raise thy heart up to God, and send thee with many an errand into his presence! Suppose a man was going about some important business, and had him in his company that alone {which} could help or hinder the despatch of it; were it not strange that he should travel all day with him and not apply himself to this person to make him his friend? This is thy very case, Christian. Thou and all thy affairs are at the absolute disposure of the great God, to bless or blast thee in every enterprise. If thou hast not his vote, thy business is stopped in the head. Now, this God is always in thy company, whether at home or abroad, in thy bed or at thy board. Surely thou didst believe this firmly, thou wouldst oft in a day turn thyself to him, and beg his good-will to favour thy undertaking and facilitate thy business for thee.

3. *Help.* Look thou *complieth with the motions of the Holy Spirit*. The Christian shall find him, as his remembrancer to mind him of the more solemn performance of this duty of prayer, so his monitor, to suggest many occasional meditations to his thoughts—even amidst worldly employments—as a hint that now it is a fit time to give God a visit in holy some ejaculation, by thus setting the door, as it were, open for him into God's presence. Sometimes he will be recalling a truth thou hast read or heard, a mercy thou hast received, or a sin thou hast committed. And what means he by all these but to do thee a friendly office, that by these—thy affections being stirred—thou mayest be invited to dart thy soul up to God in some ejaculation suitable to his motion? Now, take the hint he gives, and thou shalt have more of his company and help in this kind. For, as the evil spirit, where he finds welcome to his wicked suggestions, grows bold to knock oftener at that door because it is so soon opened to him; so the

Holy Spirit is invited, where his motions are kindly entertained, to be more frequent in these his approaches; where was thy neglect of them may cause him to withdraw and leave thee to thy own slothful spirit. When Christ had thrice made an attempt to take away his drowsy disciples by calling them up to watch and pray, and they fell to nodding again, truly then he bids them 'sleep on.'

[*Composed prayer distinguished as  
SECRET OR SOCIAL.*]

SECOND DISTINCTION. What we have called *composed prayer* may be distinguished as *either solitary, or social—performed jointly with others*. It is designated *composed*, because the Christian composeth himself more solemnly to the work by setting some considerable time apart from his other occasions, for his more free and full communion with God in prayer. We begin with the first of these.

*First. Secret Prayer.* When the Christian retireth into some secret place, free from all company, and there pours out his soul into the bosom of God, none being witness to this trade he drives with heaven but God and himself. I shall here, 1. Prove this to be a duty incumbent upon us; and, 2. Give the reasons why.

[*Secret prayer a duty, and the reasons why.*]

1. I shall prove secret or closet prayer to be *a duty incumbent upon us*. That is it is the Christian's duty secretly and solitarily to hold intercourse with God in prayer, I believe will be granted of more than practise it. Even those that are strangers to the performance thereof carry in their own bosom that which will accuse them for their neglect, except by long looking on the light, and rebelling against the same, their foolish minds be darkened and have lost all sight and sense of a deity. If any prayer be a duty, then secret prayer needs be one. This is to all the other as the *carina* or keel is to the ship—it bears up all the rest. If we look into the practice of Scripture saints, we shall find them all to have been great dealers with God in this trade of secret prayer. Abraham had his 'grove,' whither he retired to 'call on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God,' Gen. 21:33. Neither was Rebekah a stranger to this duty, who, upon the babes struggling in her womb, 'went to inquire of

the Lord,' Gen. 25:22, which, saith Calvin, was to pray in secret. Jacob is famous for his wrestling, as it were hand to hand, with God in the night. Holy David's life was little else, he 'gave himself to prayer,' Ps. 109:4. Allow but some time spent by him for nature's refection and the necessary occasions of his public employment—which yet came in but as a parenthesis—and you will find most of the rest laid out in meditation and prayer, as appears, Ps. 119. We have Elias at prayer under the juniper tree, Peter on the leads, Cornelius in a corner of his house; yea, our blessed Saviour—whose soul could have fasted longest without any inward impair through the want of this repast—yet none more frequent in it. Early in the morning he is praying alone, Mark 1:35, and late in the evening, Matt. 14:23. And this was his usual practice, as may be gathered from Luke 22:39 compared with Luke 21:37. Thus Christ sanctified this duty by his own example. Yea, we have a sweet promise to the due performance of it—and God doth not use to promise a reward for that work which he commandeth us not to do—but 'when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly,' Matt. 6:6. Where our Saviour takes it for granted that every child of God will be often praying to his heavenly Father; and therefore he rather encourageth them in the work he seeth them about, than commands them to it. 'I know you cannot live without prayer.' Now, when you would give God a visit, 'enter into thy closet,' &c. But why must the Christian maintain this secret intercourse with God?

2. I shall give the reasons *why secret or closet prayer is incumbent upon us*.

(1.) *In regard of God*. He hath an eye to see our secret tears, and an ear to hear our secret groans; therefore we ought to pour them out to him in secret. It is a piece of gross superstition to bind this only to place or company: 'I will,' saith the apostle, 'that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands,' &c., 1 Tim. 2:8. God is everywhere to be found, at church and at home, with our family and our closet; and therefore we are to pray everywhere. O what a comfort it is to a gracious soul, that he can never be out of God's sight or hearing, wherever he is thrown, and therefore never out of his care! for it is out of

sight out of mind. This comforted holy David. His friends and kinsmen, they, alas! were afar off. He might lie upon his sick-bed, and cry till his heart ached, and not make them hear. But see how he pacifies himself in this solitude, 'Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee,' Ps. 38:9. Little thought Jacob that he had a son prisoner in Egypt, laden there with irons that entered into his soul. But *he* had a God that was nigh unto him all the time of his distress, and heard the cry of the poor prisoner, though his earthly father never dreamed of any such matter.

Great and rich are the returns which in Scripture we find to be sent from heaven upon the solitary adventure of the saints in this bottom. 'This poor man cried,' said David, 'and the Lord...saved him out of all his troubles,' Ps. 34:6. As if he had said, Haply you are afraid to be so bold to go alone and visit God in secret. Though you dare venture to join with others in prayer, and hope to find welcome when you go with such good company, yet you are ready to say, Will God look upon me, or my single prayer? Yes, behold me, saith David, who am newly come from his door, where I lay praying in as poor a condition, and as sad a plight, as ever beggar was at man's—a poor exile, in the midst of enemies that thirsted for my blood. Yet — and that when I betrayed so much dastardly unbelief as to scrabble on the wall like a mad-man—cried, and God heard. Who then need be afraid, either from his outward straits or inward infirmities, if sincere, to go with a humble boldness unto God? Nay, further, as God hath a pitiful eye to see when we pray in secret, so also an angry eye, that sees when we do not. I have read of a prince that would, in the evening, walk abroad in a disguise, and listen under his subjects' windows, whether they talked of him, and what they said. To be sure God's eye and ear watcheth us, 'the Lord hearkened, and heard it,' Mal. 3:16. And he that hath a book of remembrance for his saints that fear him and think upon his name, hath also a black bill for *their* names who shut him out of their hearts and closets. 'The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.' Though his seat be in heaven, yet his eye is on earth; and what doth he observe but whether men 'understand and seek after God?'

(2.) In *regard of ourselves*—the more to prove our sincerity. I do not say that to pray in secret amounts to an infallible character of sincerity—for hypocrisy may creep into our closet when the door is shut closest, as the frogs did into Pharaoh's bed-chamber. Yet this is not the hypocrite's ordinary walk. And though his heart may be naught that frequently performs secret duty, yet, to be sure, his heart cannot be good whose devotion is all spent before men, and is a mere stranger to secret communion with God; or else our Saviour, in drawing the hypocrite's picture, would not have made this to be the very cast of his countenance, 'When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues,' &c. 'But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet,' Matt. 6:5, 6. The command sends us as well to the closet as to the church; and he is a hypocrite that chooseth one and neglects the other; for thereby it appears he makes conscience of neither. He likes that which may gain him the name of religious in the opinion of men, and therefore puts on a religious habit abroad, but in the meantime lives like an atheist at home. Such a one may for a time be the world's saint, but God will at last uncase him, and present him before the eyes of all the world for a hypocrite. The true lover delights to visit his friend when he may find him alone, and enjoy privacy with him; and I have read of a devout person who, when the set time for his private devotions were come, would, whatever company he was in, break from them with this handsome speech, 'I have a friend that stays for me, farewell!' It is worth parting with our best friends on earth, to enjoy communion with the God of heaven. One called his friends thieves, because they stole time from him. None worse thieves than they who rob us of our praying seasons.

(3.) In *regard of the duty itself*, and the influence which the holy management of it would have upon the Christian's life. This duty is a main pillar to uphold the whole frame of our spiritual building. Without this the Christian's house—as Solomon saith of the sluggard's—will drop out at the windows. That which is most necessary to keep the house standing is underground—I mean the foundation. That which keeps the man alive is the heart in his breast, that is unseen. Cease your secret

communion, and you undermine your house—you stab godliness to the heart. If the tree grow not in the root, it will ere long wither in the branch. He that declines this way, can be a gainer in no other. How zealous soever he may appear, all, without this, is but a distempered heat, as when the outward parts burn but the inward chill. Such a one may pray to the quickening and comforting of others, but he will get little of either himself. The truth is, this is the first step toward apostasy. Backsliders grow first out of acquaintance with God in secret. Their delight in this duty declines by little and little. then are they less frequent in their visits. Upon which follows a casting off of the duty quite—and yet they may appear great sticklers and zealots in public ordinances. But, if they recover not what they have lost in their secret trade, they will ere long break here also.

#### USE OR APPLICATION.

*[What communion with God in secret prayer, or the neglect of it, implies.]*

*Use First.* Let us here *admire the condescending love of God*, in stooping to hold any communion with his poor creatures, while they are clad with rags of mortality, and those besmeared also with many sinful pollutions. It is not enough that in heaven, when we shall put on our robes of glory—befitting the attendance of so great a King—that then he will take us into his royal presence, and give us places with those that stand above him; but will he even now, while our garments smell of the prison, and before our grave-clothes be quite thrown off, admit us to be so near an accession? 'What manner of love is this,' that we should now be 'called the children of God,' and as such have liberty to speak our gibberish and broken language, and that with delight to him who continually hath the praises of blessed angels and glorified saints sounding in his ears! Nay, yet more, this liberty to be indulged us, not only when we come together and make up a choir in our public worship, but in our solitary and secret addresses! That a poor creature, whenever himself hath but a heart to step aside, and give God a visit in any corner of his house, should find the arms of so great a majesty open to

embrace him!—this is so stupendous that we may better admire than express it. Should we see a poor beggar speaking familiarly with a great king—who, while all his courtiers stand bare before him, takes him into his embraces, and lets him familiarly whisper in his ear —might it not draw forth our wonderment at such an act of grace from majesty to beggary? This is the glorious privilege of every saint on earth, who, when he prays, hath liberty to come up to the throne of God surrounded with glorious angels, and into his bosom to pour out his soul as freely as the child may speak to his indulgent father. O thank our good friend and brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, for this! It is he that brings us into the presence of God, and sets us before his face—as Joseph his brethren before Pharaoh. Whose face need a saint fear to look upon, that may thus boldly speak to God? Comfort thyself with this, Christian, when thou goest with thy petition to any great man on earth, and he will not be seen of thee —or such a rich kinsman, and he will not own thee —turn thy back of them both, and go to thy God, he will look on thee, and in his Son own thee for his child. Thou hast his ear that can command their heart and purse too. Jacob's prayer altered his brother's purposes, that he who meant to kill him falls on his neck to kiss him. Nehemiah had a boon to beg of the Persian king, and he goes—a carnal heart would think—the farthest way about to obtain it. He knocks first at heaven door: 'Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man,' Neh. 1:11. And now to court he goes, where, behold, he finds the door open before he knocks. For the king said unto him, 'For what dost thou make request?' ch. 2:4. We may, you see, open two doors with this one key. At the prayer of this holy man, God and man both give their gracious answer. The Christian surely cannot long be in want if he can but pray. As one said, the pope would never want money so long as he could hold a pen in his hand. It is but praying in faith, and the thing is done which the Christian would have. Be careful for nothing; but... let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts,' &c., Php. 4:6, 7. 'Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass,' Ps. 37:5. the saints' bills are received at first sight, whatever the sum is.

Christ is our undertaker to see it paid; and his credit holds still in his Father's bosom, and will, to procure welcome for all his saints, even to the least and last of them that shall be found on earth.

*Use Second.* This *blots their names from among the number of saints that were never acquainted with this duty.* What! a saint, and content with what thou hast of God, in joint communion with others, at church or family, so as never to desire any privacy between God and thyself! Canst find no errand to invite thee to speak with God alone? Thou bringest thy saintship into question. When a prince passeth by in the street, then all—even strangers themselves—will come in a throng to see him. But his child thinks not this enough, but goes home with him, must live with him, and be under his eye daily. Hypocrites and profane ones will crowd into public ordinances, but a gracious soul cannot live without more retired converse with him.

*Use Third.* Be exhorted, O ye saints, to *hold up your secret acquaintance with God.* 'I am persuaded' —as Paul said to Festus in another case—that none of these things' which I have spoken concerning this duty, 'are hidden from thee,' if a saint. 'Believest thou' that this is thy duty? 'I know that thou believest.' Dost thou pray in secret? I dare not question it; the Spirit of Christ which is in thee will not suffer thee to be wholly a stranger from it. But I would provoke thee to be more abounding therein. 'These things have I written,' saith John, 'unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God,...that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God,' 1 John 5:13 —that is, that you may believe more. And these things do I now write to you that call upon the name of God in secret, that you may call oftener; and this you need, except you lived further from Satan's quarters than the rest of your brethren do. No duty more opposed by Satan or our own slothful hearts than this. The devil can allow you your church prayers, your family duties, and now and then a formal one in your closet too, and yet make his market of you. Therefore take along with you these three or four directions for your better managing thereof.

*[Directions for secret prayer.]*



1. *Direction.* Let it be your *constant trade*. Rolling stones gather no moss. Unstable and unconstant hearts will never excel in this or any other duty. The spirit of prayer is a grace infused, but advanced to further degrees by daily exercise. Frequency begets familiarity, and familiarity confidence. We go boldly into his house whom we often visit.

2. *Direction.* Let it be *true secret prayer*, and not have its name for naught. Take heed no noise be heard abroad of what thou dost in secret. 'Enter into thy closet,' said Christ, 'and when thou hast shut thy door, pray.' Be sure thou shuttest it so close that no wind of vainglory comes in. Rather than there should, shut the door of thy lips as well as of thy closet; God can hear though thy mouth delivers not the message. It is true, when Daniel prayed he 'opened his window,' but it was to show his faith, not his pride—that he might let the world know how little he feared their wrath, not that he coveted their praise. God curiously observes which way the eye turns, and it is a dishonour he will not bear that thou shouldst be pensioner to the world in expecting thy reward from man and not himself. Lose not God's *euge*—well done! for man's *plaudite*—applause. This is to change heaven for earth, and that is a bad bargain.

3. *Direction.* Be *free and open*. Come not to God in secret and keep thy secrets from him; speak thy very heart, and hide nothing from him. To be reserved and close is against the law of friendship. 'I have called you friends,' saith Christ, 'for all things which I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.' Is Christ so open-hearted not to conceal anything he knows for our good? and wouldst thou have any secret box in thy cabinet, that he—if thou couldst help it—should not see? Art thou confessing sins? Strip thy soul naked, and shuffle not with God. If thou dost, it speaks one of these two things—thou hast some secret design of sin for the future; or harbourest an ill opinion of God in thy breast concerning thy past sins, as if he would not be faithful to forgive what thou art free to confess; like some prodigal child who, though his father promiseth to pay all his debts, and forgive him also, yet because the sum is vast, dares not trust his father with the whole truth, but conceals some in his confession. The first of these is not the spot of God's children; but into the latter they sometimes fall, and, for a while,

may be held by Satan's policy and their own unbelief. But consider, Christian, whatever thy sin is, and how great soever, yet the way to obtain pardon is by confessing, not concealing it. Neither is it concealed from God, though thou confess it not. But God likes a confession out of thy own mouth so well, that as soon as thou dost lay open thy own shame, he hath obliged himself faithfully to cover it with the mantle of pardoning mercy. 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,' 1 John 1:9. Again, art thou making thy requests to God? carry no burden away upon thy spirit, through a foolish modesty and fear of troubling God too much, or asking too deep, so long as the promise is on thy side. Christ never complained that his saints opened their mouths, or enlarged their desires, too wide in prayer; nay, he bids his disciples open them wider, and tells them, 'they had asked nothing;' that is, nothing proportionable to the large heart in his breast to give.

4. *Direction.* It must be *seasonable*. This gives everything its beauty. (1.) Take heed that it *doth not justle with public worship*. The devil takes great pleasure in setting the ordinances of God at variance one against another. Some he persuades to cry up public prayer, and neglect secret; and others he would fain bring out of love with the public, by applauding the other; whereas there is room enough for both in thy Christian course. Moses, though he killed the Egyptian, yet the two Israelites, when scuffling together, he laboured to reconcile. Beware of giving Satan such an advantage as to neglect the communion of saints in the public, under a pretence of praying in thy closet. This is to set one ordinance to fight with another. They are sister ordinances, set them not at variance. Deny thy presence in the public, and thou art sure to lose God's presence in thy closet: 'He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination,' Prov. 28:9. (2.) Look that it *interferes not with thy duty in thy particular calling*. As thou art to shut thy closet door to pray, so open thy shop windows for following thy calling in the world. Go into thy closet before thy shop, or else thou art an atheist; but, when thou hast been with God there, attend thy shop and calling, or else thou art a hypocrite. Thou consistest of soul and body; God divides thy employment between

both. He that is not diligent in the duty he owes God concerning both, is conscientious in neither. When every part in the body hath its due nourishment distributed to it health is preserved. So here. He is the sound Christian that divides his care wisely for his spiritual state and temporal also. Sleep not away thy time for prayer in the morning, and then think thou art sufficiently excused for omitting it because thy worldly business calls thee another way. Jade not thy body with over-labouring, nor overcharge thy mind with too heavy a load of worldly cares, in the day, and then think that the weariness of the one, and discomposure of the other, will discharge thee from praying again at night. This is to make a sin thy apology for neglecting a duty.

*Second. Social Prayer*—that which is performed in joint communion with others. It is double. Either it is private or public—family prayer or church prayer. To this, however, we assigned a separate distinction.

[*Social prayer distinguished as*  
FAMILY PRAYER or CHURCH PRAYER.]

THIRD DISTINCTION. Social and joint prayer is *either private in the family or public in the church*. I begin with the first—family prayer.

[*Family prayer a duty incumbent*  
*on the head of the family.*]

*First.* Social or joint prayer may be *private in the family*. By a family I mean a society of certain persons in mutual relation each to other, natural or civil, who live together under the domestic government of husband, master, or parent. Wherever such a family is found, it is the duty of the governor of it to set up the worship of God there, and this part of worship in particular—prayer in the family. The Jews had their family sacrifice, Ex. 12:21, which the master of the house performed at home with his family. There still remains a spiritual sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving, which every master of a family is with his household to offer up to God. The private house is the Christian's 'chapel of ease,' to worship God in daily with his company. The church began in a family, and it is upheld still by the piety of private families. If the nursery be not preserved, the orchard must needs in time decay.

*Question.* But the question will be, how can it be proved that family prayer is a duty?

*Answer.* I hope none will require an set place of Scripture commanding this *in terminis*—in set terms, or else not believe it a duty incumbent upon them. This were the way not only to lose this part of God's worship, but other duties also. It will trouble us to find an express word commanding us *totidem verbis*, or, in plain terms, to keep the Christian Sabbath, or to baptize our infant children; yet, God forbid we should, with some, shake off the ordinances upon this account. That which by necessary consequence can be deduced from Scripture, is Scripture, as well as that which is laid down in express terms. And if this will content you—which I am sure should—I will hope to give you some satisfaction.

[*How it can be proved that family prayer is a duty.*]

1. That *general command for prayer* will bring this of family prayer within the compass of our duty: 'I will therefore that men pray every where,' 1 Tim. 2:8. If 'everywhere,' then surely, saith Mr. Perkins upon this place, in our families, where God hath set us in so near relation to one another. Paul salutes the church in Aquila and Priscilla's house, Rom. 16:5. And were they not a strange church who should live together without praying together?—had they deserved so high and honourable a name if they had thus shut God out of doors? This were to call them a church, as a grove is called *lucus*, à *non lucendo*—from not giving light. The Jews, when they built any of them a new house to dwell in, they were to dedicate it, Deut. 20:5; and the manner of dedicating their new-built houses was with prayer, as you may see by the title of Ps. 30, penned on this occasion: 'A Psalm and Song at the dedication of David's house.' This they did—

(1.) To *express their thankfulness to God*, who had given them a habitation. Indeed, it is no small mercy to have a settled place for our abode—a convenient house for ourselves and relations peaceably to dwell in; it is more than those precious saints had 'who wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth,' Heb. 11:38; yea, than Christ himself had: 'The foxes have holes, and the

birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. Matt. 8:20.

(2.) By this they were *admonished to acknowledge themselves tenants to God*, and that they held their houses of him, their great landlord, upon condition of doing him homage, by making their houses as so many sanctuaries for his worship while they lived in them. So Mollerus upon the place.

2. The *trust which governors of families are charged with* will evince it is their duty to set up prayer in their families. Every master of a family hath *curam animarum*—he hath the care of souls upon him as well as the minister. He is prophet, king, and priest in his own house, and from every one of these will appear this his duty.

(1.) He is a *prophet, to teach and instruct his family*. Wives are bid to learn at home of their husbands, I Cor. 14:34, 35. Then sure they are to teach them at home. Parents are commanded to instruct their children, 'Ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house,' Deut. 11:19. And, 'To bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' Eph. 6:4. Now, there is a teaching and admonition by prayer to God and praising of God, as well as in catechising of them: 'Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns,' Col. 3:16. The master's praying with his family will teach them how to pray when by themselves. The confessions he makes, petitions he puts up, and mercies he acknowledgeth in his family duty, are an excellent means to furnish them with matter for their devotions. How comes it to pass that many servants and children, when they come to be themselves heads of families, are unable to be their relations' mouth to God in prayer—but because they have, in their minority, lived in prayerless families, and were kept in ignorance of this duty, whereby they have neither head nor heart, knowledge or affections, suitable for such a work?

(2.) He is a *king in his house, to rule his family in the fear of God*. As the political magistrate's duty is to set up the true worship of God in his kingdom, so he is to do it in his house. He is to say with Joshua, 'I and my house, we will serve the Lord.' Were it a sin in a prince, though he served God himself in his palace, yet if he did not set up the public worship of God in his kingdom? Surely then it is a sin

the governor of a family not to set it up in his house, though he prays himself in his closet.

(3.) He is a *priest in his own house*, and where there is a priest there must be a sacrifice; and what sacrifice among Christians but the *spiritual sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving*? Thus David, we find, went from public ordinances to private duty with his family, 'Then David returned to bless his household,' II Sam. 6:20; that is, saith one upon the place, he returned to worship God in private with them, and to crave a blessing from God upon them. And this hints a third particular.

3. The *practice of saints in all ages* hath been to have a religious care of their families. Good Joshua promised for himself and his house that they would serve the Lord. If he meant the inward worship of God, he promised more than he was able to perform in regard of his family, for he could not thrust grace into their hearts. We must therefore understand him that it should not be his fault if they did not, for he would use all means in his power to make them do so. He would set them a holy copy in his own example, and he would take care that they should not live without the worship of God in his family. We find Elisha praying with his servant, II Kings 4:33, master and man together—queen Esther and her maids keeping private fast in her family, Est. 4:16. Now it were uncharitable to think that she was a stranger to the ordinary exercise of this duty, who was so forward to perform the extraordinary, and put others also upon it. Surely this gracious woman did not begin her acquaintance with this duty now, and take it up only at a dead lift in her present strait. That were a gluttonous fast, indeed, that should devour the worship of God in her family for all the year after. Cornelius' family religion is upon record, 'A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway,' Acts 10:2. Mark, he was 'a devout man, and feared God with all his house.' Fear is oft put for the worship of God. God is called 'the Fear of Isaac,' Gen. 31:53; that is, the God whom Isaac worshipped. 'Him shall ye fear, and him shall ye worship;...neither shall ye fear other gods,' II Kings 17:36, 37; that is, ye shall not worship or pray unto them. Thus we may conceive Cornelius was a devout man, and feared God with his house. Surely he that was merciful to the poor

at his door, to refresh his pinched bowels with his alms, could not be so cruel to his relations' souls within his house as to lock up his religion in a closet from them.

*[Three objections to family prayer answered.]*

*Objection (a).* But what necessity is there that a family must meet jointly to worship God together? *will it not serve if every one prays for himself in his closet?*

*Answer.* A family is a *collective body*. As such it owes a worship to God. It is he that 'setteth the solitary in families,' Ps. 68:6; and as their founder, will be vouched by them. 'Pour out thy fury upon the families that call not on thy name,' Jer. 10:25. It holds in domestic families as well as national; for he rears up the one as well as the other. There are family sins; and these are to be confessed by the family, as national sins by the nation. There are family wants, and they require the joint supplications of the family. There are family occasions and employments, and those call for the united force of the family, to pull down a blessing upon their joint labours for the good of the whole society. 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.' And is it not fit that they who join in work should join in prayer for a blessing on their endeavour? There are family mercies that the whole society share in; and is it not meet that they which eat of the same feast should join in the same song of praise to the founder of it? In a word, there are judgements that may wrap up the whole family, and where all are concerned in the danger all should lend their help to prevent it—and many hands make light work. A rope twisted of many cords is stronger than those very cords would be if single; and so the prayer of many together more prevalent, because likely to be more fervent, than of the same persons severally employed in their closets—though I would not learn one to jostle with the other. There is room for both; why should they fall out? Polanus (in his *Syntag. de Terræmotu*) tells us of a town in the territory of Berne in Switzerland, consisting of ninety houses, that was in the year 1584 destroyed by an earthquake, except the half of one house, where the master of the family was earnestly praying with his wife and children upon their bended knees to God.

*Objection (b).* O, but I have *not abilities and gifts for such a work*, and better left undone than spoiled in the doing.

*Answer.* No more hadst thou skill and ability for thy trade when thou wentest first to be an apprentice. Apply thy mind to the work; bind the duty upon thy conscience; search the scripture, where matter for prayer is laid up, and rules how to perform the duty. Study thy heart, and observe the state of thy family, till the sense of the sins, wants, and daily mercies thereof—which thou hast lodged in thy memory—be left warm upon thy spirit. In a word, exercise thyself frequently in secret prayer, be earnest there for his Spirit to enable thee in thy family service, and take heed of driving the Holy Spirit from thee, whose assistance thou prayest for, by sloth, worldliness, pride, or any other course of wickedness. Then, up and be doing, and thou mayest comfortably expect God will be with thee, both to assist and accept thee in the work. Moses was sick of his employment that God called him to, and fain would have put it off with this mannerly excuse, 'I am not eloquent,...but I am of a slow speech.' But this objection was soon answered: 'And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,' Ex. 4:11, 12. His call was extraordinary, and his assistance was such. Thy call to this duty, as the head of a family, is ordinary, and so thou mayest look for ordinary assistance. Haply thou shalt never have an ability, to such a degree, with a flow of words to express thyself as some others. But let not that discourage thee. God looks not at the pomp of words and variety of expressions, but sincerity and devotion of the heart. The key opens not the door because gilt, but because fitted to the wards of the lock. Let but the matter of thy prayer be according to God's mind, holy and warrantable, and the temper of thy heart humble and fervent, and no fear but thou shalt speed. Yea, let the prayer be old—pray to-day what thou didst yesterday; be but sure to bring new affections with the old prayer, and thou shalt be friendly received into God's presence, though thou canst not on a sudden put thy requests into a new shape. God will not shut his child out of doors

because he comes not every day in a new-fashioned suit.

*Objection (c).* Others there are who object not their own weakness as the reason of their not praying in their families, but the *wickedness of others in their family*. They are confident enough of their own gifts, but question others' grace, and whether they may pray with such.

*Answer.* I will grant there are such in thy family. But is this a ground to lay aside the worship of God? Little thinkest thou whither this principle will lead. By this principle the worship of God should not only be laid aside in most private houses but in all our public congregations also. If thou mayest not pray in thy family because a wicked person is present, then not join in prayer with any public congregation, because thou canst never be assured that they are all godly; nor must the minister pray there, for fear some wicked ones should be in the company; and so this part of divine worship must be thrown out of the church till we can find an assembly made up of all true saints; and where such a one ever was, or will be on this side of heaven, none I think is able to tell. Surely the saints in Scripture were not thus scrupulous. How oft did Christ himself pray with his disciples, though a Judas was among them! I have elsewhere, clearly I think, proved it is the duty of all, even of the wicked, to pray; and that God will never charge the act of prayer upon him as sin, but his obliquity therein; much less will he impute to thee another's sinful frame of heart with whom thou joimest in prayer. Pray thou in faith, and his unbelief shall not prejudice thy faith, nor his pride thy humility. Thou joimest with him in the duty, but hast no communion with his sin. You may as well say, if a cut-purse in the time of prayer should pick another's pocket, that all the company are guilty of his theft. How much better were it, Christian, to fear lest thou pray with a wicked heart in thy own bosom, than with a wicked person in thy family? Thou art like neither to hurt thy own soul by praying in his company, nor better his by omitting for his sake. May be, though he be carnal, yet he is outwardly complying, and how knowest thou but thy prayer—especially in his presence—may pierce his heart, and give a lift towards his conversion? Such I have heard of who have had the first sensible impression made upon their hearts in this duty of prayer. If he be not only carnal, but

a mocker at the worship of God, and a disturber of the duty, better thou shouldst, with Abraham, turn such an Ishmael out of doors, than for his sake turn God out of doors by denying him the worship due unto him.

## USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Reproof to those who unnecessarily throw themselves to live in families that are prayerless.]*

*Use First.* What we have said of family prayer gives reproof to those Christians *who needlessly, and upon choice, throw themselves upon such families where the worship of God is not set up*. Dost thou know whither thou goest? Thou art running with Jonah from the presence of the Lord, and mayest expect a storm to be sent after thee. Haply thou art a servant, who once didst live in a godly family, where thou hadst many sweet privileges and spiritual advantages—a table spread every day for thy soul as oft as for thy body, besides some exceedings now and then of extraordinary duties—and thereby didst enjoy a kind of heaven upon earth; but, for a little ease in thy work, or gain in thy wages, thou hast made this unhappy change, to put thyself under the roof of those who will sooner learn thee to curse and swear than to pray; and where, by the orders kept in the family, thou canst not know a Lord's-day from a week-day, or whether there be such a thing as religious worship and invocation due to thy Maker or no. Alas, poor creature! What! wert thou even now in so green a pasture, and now wandering upon the barren heath, where nothing is to be got for thy precious soul?—where, as on the mountains of Gilboa, none of those heavenly dews fall with which thy soul was wont to be wet and watered? Truly thou art gone out of God's blessing into the warm sun. Had God, indeed, cast thee by a necessary providence on such a place, thou mightest then have hoped to keep thy spiritual plight, though wanting thy former repast; but, being thy own choice, it is to be feared thou wilt soon pine and languish in thy spiritual state. Leanness is like to shrivel up thy soul, while thou hast thy fat morsels in thy mouth. Thy spirit will grow light and poor, though thy purse may grow heavy. We shall have thee ere long complain, as Naomi, that

thou 'wentest out full, but comest home empty.' How darest thou choose to dwell where God himself doth not by his gracious presence? He inhabits the praises of his people, and takes his abode in the house of prayer. And if the Holy Spirit dwells not, walks and breathes not in the house, it must needs be haunted with the evil one. Make thy stay there as short as may be. Leave the dead to dwell with the dead, atheist with atheist; thy safety will be to get among better company. Is the church so barren of godly families, that no such are to be found who will open their door to let thee in? Go inquire where such live, and offer to do the meanest office in that house, where thou mayest enjoy thy former privileges for thy soul, rather than stay where thou art. The very beasts groan to serve the wicked, whereas holy angels themselves disdain not to minister unto the saints.

But haply thou wilt say, it is not thy choice, but necessity. Thou art by thy parents put apprentice to a master that is wicked, or thou livest under thy own parents' shadow, and thou canst not help it though they be profane; or with a husband whom thou didst hope, at thy choice of him, would prove a help meet to thy soul, but thou findest it otherwise; what would you have us in this case do?

1. Mourn under it as thy *great affliction*. Thus David did when he lived in Saul's wicked family, whose court and family, for irreligion and profaneness, he compareth to the barbarous Arabians and profane Ishmaelites, lamenting he was cooped up with such, whom, by his relation, he could not well leave, and for their wickedness he could worse bear. 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Meshech, and dwell in the tents of Kedar.'

2. Be the more in thy *secret communion with God*. If thou didst live with a niggard<sup>ccxiii</sup> who pinched thee for thy belly, wouldst thou not, though thou hadst but a penny in thy purse, lay it out for bread rather than starve? Thou hadst need have a bit the more in a corner because thou art cut short of thy daily bread in the family. Thy soul cannot live without communion with God. Take that thyself which others will not be so kind to allow thee; and, that thou mayest do this, husband all thy ends of time the better. Thou shalt thus, by God's blessing, (1.) Keep thy spiritual life and vigour; (2.) Be antidoted against the infection of that profane air thou breathest in;

and, (3.) Have a vent to ease thy incumbered spirit of those griefs, reproaches, and trials thou canst not but meet with from such relations. Gracious Hannah had an adversary in the same family—Peninnah by name—who provoked her sorely, even to make her fret; but this sent her to God in prayer, and there she eased her soul of her burden.

3. Adorn thy piety to God by *faithful performance of thy duty to thy relations*, though they be not so good as thou desirest. Art thou a servant and thy master profane? Be thou submissive and humble, diligent and faithful. Let him see that thou darest not rob him of thy time by sloth, or wrong him in his estate by falseness—though he be a thief to thy soul by not providing for it—but dost, with thy utmost skill and strength, endeavour to discharge thy trust to him. We see too oft that the unfaithfulness and negligence of some professing servants, do set their carnal masters further off from the worship of God than before they were; yea, make them loathe the duties of religion, which otherwise they might have been won unto, till at last they come to think all profession and forwardness in the duties of piety towards God, to be but a hypocritical cloak to cover some unfaithfulness to men, and to say of their servants when they beg leave to go to a sermon, and wait on God in his ordinances, as Pharaoh of the Israelites, 'Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the Lord,' Ex. 5:17. Thus, as the apostle tells us, the name of God and his doctrine comes to be blasphemed by the ill behaviour of professing servants, I Tim. 6:1.

Again, art thou a wife, and thy husband carnal, who lives without any care of his own soul, or those under his roof? Pray the more for him because he prays not with thee. Pray thou for thy family in thy closet, though he neglects it in the house. But, with this, be sure to commend thy piety to thy husband's conscience, and make it as legible as may be to his eye, by thy meekness of wisdom in thy carriage to him, and whole conversation in thy family. A fair print invites to read the book. Religion fairly printed in thy meek and dutiful behaviour to him, and discretion in all thy affairs, how knowest thou but it may in time win him to the consideration of the excellency of religion, which makes thee so officious and faithful to him? He is an unwise angler that scares the fish he desires to take;

and she an unwise Christian that, by her peevish and undutiful carriage, offends her husband, whose conversion she desires and prays for.

*[Counsel to those that live in praying families.]*

*Use Second.* A word of counsel to you whom God hath planted in religious families.

1. Bless God for *casting thy lot in so pleasant a seat and fruitful a soil for thy soul*, where thou mayest suck in the sweet air of God's Spirit that breathes from thy godly parents or other governors at the throne of grace from day to day; that thou art not wedged into some blind atheistical family, there to live with a godless crew, among whom thou mightest have passed thy days without any knowledge of thy Maker, and with them have been involved in that curse of God which is in the house of the wicked, and hangs like a black cloud in the threatening, ready to pour down upon the families that call not upon his name. Look round thy neighbourhood and see how many families there are who live like brutes, as in so many dark caves and dens, where none of that heavenly light is seen, from one end of the year to the other, which shines on thy face every day. What nurture and breeding should thy soul have had under the tutoring of such parents and masters, who themselves live 'without God in the world?' The queen of Sheba counted them happy that stood before Solomon, not so much that they might see his pomp, but hear his wisdom. O happy thou—if grace to know thy privilege—that thou ministerest unto a godly master, art under gracious parents, or yoked to a holy husband, from whose devout prayers, pious counsels, and Christian examples, thou mayest gain more than if they had the wealth, delicacies, and preferments of Solomon's court to confer upon thee.

2. Look you make *improvement of this spiritual advantage*, or else it will go worse with you than others. Rebellious Israel is told, 'They shall know that they had a prophet among them.' The meaning is, they shall know it to their cost; and so shall those that have lived in families, under such governors who went before them, and, as it were, chalked out a way to heaven by their godly example, lamenting over their precious souls so oft with their prayers and tears. If such miscarry, they shall know to their

terror what families they once live in but had not a heart to prize or improve the mercy. God forbid that any of you should find the way to hell out of such doors, and force your way to damnation through such means afforded to prevent it. What will Cain answer when his father that begat him shall bear witness against him, and say, 'Lord, this wicked child of mine never learned his atheism of me. I brought him to thy worship and taught him thy fear, but he liked it not, and first proved a murderer and then an apostate. First, he behaved himself wickedly in thy service, and then ran out of thy doors and cast it quite off.' What will then the flouting wife of David—who, though of a wicked stock, was privileged with so gracious a husband—say when she shall be accused for making him her laughing-stock for his zeal in the worship of God? Or how will the wicked children of the same holy man who walked with such uprightness in his house look their godly father on the face at the great day? You, my children, said dying Mr. Bolton, dare not, I believe, meet me at the day of judgment in an unregenerate state. The weight of such holy men's prayers and admonitions will then sink their ungodly relations deeper into hell than others who drop thither out of dark and blind families.

*[A word to those heads of families that have not the worship of God in their houses.]*

*Use Third.* Unto you that are heads of families, but yet have *not had a heart to set up the worship of God in them*. I am afraid God hath little from you in your closets who hath none in your families. It is no breach of charity to suspect your care for your own souls that show none for your relations. If ever thou hadst been acquainted with God thyself and tasted any sweetness in secret communion with him, couldst thou thus rob thy family of so great a blessing? Could you find such a treasure, and hide it from them you love so well? Have they not souls as precious in their bosoms as thy own? Art thou not willing they should find the way to heaven as well as thyself? Yea, art thou not God's feoffee<sup>ccxiv</sup> in trust to take care of their souls as well as of their bodies? Dost thou owe no more to thy child and servant than to thy hog or horse? Their bodies are looked to, and wilt thou do no more for the other? How knowest

thou but thy holy example in the duties of God's worship among them may leave such impressions on their hearts as shall never be worn off to their dying day? Did you never hear any, to the praise of God, acknowledge that the first turn towards heaven they ever had was by living in such a godly family, where, with the worship of God, a savour and secret sense of the things of God did secretly steal into their hearts? Certainly were our youth more acquainted with the duties of religion in private, the minister's work would be much facilitated in the public. By this the consciences of many would be preserved tender, and so become pliable to the counsels of the word preached; whereas now the devil hath a sad advantage—from the irreligion and atheism that is in most families—to harden their hearts to such a degree as renders them almost impenetrable. It is no wonder to see that tree thrives not which stands but little in the sun; and as little wonder to see them continue profane and wicked that but once in a week come under the beams of an ordinance, and then {neither} see nor hear any more of God till the Sabbath comes about again.

Alas! how is it like the spark should then be found alive which had all along the week nothing to keep it from dying? One well compareth the public ministry to the mason that builds the house, and family governors to them that make the brick. Now, if you, by neglecting your duty, bring clay instead of brick, you make the minister's work double. The truth is, the neglect of family worship opens a wide flood-gate to let in a deluge of profaneness into the church. Thou livest now without the worship of God in thy family, and haply in a few years from under thy one hive swarms many other families, children or servants, and it is most like they will follow thy copy. Indeed, it were a wonder that they who are taught no better should do otherwise; and so irreligion is like to spread apace. When thy head is laid in the dust by profaneness is not buried in thy grave with thee. No, thou leavest others behind to keep it alive. O how dismal is it to lay the foundation of a sin to many generations! The children unborn may rise up and curse such. If I had heard my father pray, may the child say in a dying hour, or had been led into the acquaintance of the worship of God by his example, then had not I lived like a heathen as I have done. Well, as you would not

have your children and servants meet you in the other world with their mouths full of outcries and accusations—or if this, because it seems further off, dread you not, as you would not have them prove a plague and scourge to you in this world—let not your family government be irreligious. It is just that God should suffer thy servant to be unfaithful to thee in thy estate, who art so to his soul; that thy children when old should forget their duty to thee, that didst bring them up like heathens in their youth without learning them their duty to God.

*[A word to those heads of families who do have the worship of God in their houses.]*

*Use Fourth.* To you that *have set up this duty in your families*, a few words of counsel for the more holy management thereof.

1. Think it *not enough* to prove thee a saint that thou prayest in thy family; you may set up the worship of God in your house and not enthrone God in your hearts. God forbid that you should bless yourselves in this, and dub yourselves saints because of this. Alas! you are not as yet got so far as some hypocrites have gone. The duty is good, but the outward performance of it doth not demonstrate any to be so. There are many turning to hell nearer heaven than this. From the act therefore, look to the end thou proposest to thyself in it. He is a foolish archer that shoots his arrow before he hath taken his aim aright. The question God asks is, 'Dost thou at all pray to me, even to me?' Thou mayest possibly affect others with thy praying, yea, be instrumental to break their hearts by thy confessions, and refresh their spirits by the sweet expressions that flow from thee, thyself playing the hypocrite all the while. It behooves thee therefore to consider what is the weight and spring which sets this duty agoing in thy family. Is it not to gain an opinion of being religious in others' thoughts? If so, thou playest at small game. Indeed, religion were a sorry thing if this were all to be got by it. When thou hast obtained this end it will not ease thee of one stitch of conscience, nor quench one spark of hell's tormenting fire for thee. But if this be it thou huntest after, it is a question whether thou believest there be such a place or no. these few principles well girded by faith about the loins of thy mind—that there is a God, and



he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him; that heaven is prepared for the sincere, and hell gapes for the hypocrite—would be enough to set thy heart right in the duty. Though the traveller minds not much his way where he apprehends no danger, yet, when he comes to pass over a narrow bridge, where a wry step may hard his life by falling into a deep river that runs on each hand, he will surely watch his eye that is to guide his foot. This is thy case. Prayer is a solemn work as any thou canst go about in thy whole lifetime. A by-end in this may hazard thy soul as much as a wry look thy body in the other. We need do no more to lose our souls than to seek ourselves.

2. Take heed thou *blottest not thy holy duties with an unholy life*. If thou meanest to foul thy hands with sin's black work in the day, why dost thou wash them in the morning with prayer? It is to no purpose to begin with God and to keep the devil company all the day after. Religious orders in thy house and a disordered conversation ill agree. O! do not render the worship of God base to the thoughts of thy servants and family. Those that like the wine will yet nauseate it when brought in a cup that is nasty and unclean. The duties of God's worship command a reverence even from those that are carnal, but if performed by those that are loose and scandalous they grow fulsome. Eli's sons made the people loathe the Lord's sacrifices. By thy religious duties thou settest a fair copy. O do not write it in sinking paper. It is but a while thou art seen upon thy knees; and a little seeming zeal at thy devotion will not gild over a whole day's sinful miscarriage spent in passion, idleness, riot, or any other unholy course. It is said Christ preached with power and 'authority, not as the scribes,' Matt. 7:29. Not but that they had authority to preach, for they sat in Moses' chair; but because they lost that reverence, by not walking suitably to their doctrine, which their place and work would have given them in the consciences of their hearers. 'They said and did not,' and thereby rendered their doctrine ineffectual. If thou wouldst pray with authority and power, enforce thy duties with purity of life.

3. Preserve *peace and unity in thy family*. A brawling family cannot be a praying family. The apostle exhorteth husband and wife to love and unity, lest their prayers be 'hindered,' 1 Peter 3:7. Contentions in a family, they both hinder the

spirit of prayer, and also the answer to our prayers.

(1.) They *hinder the spirit of prayer*. The Spirit of God is a Spirit of peace and love, and therefore delights not to breathe in a troubled air. The ready way to send him going is to brawl and chide. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God,' saith the apostle, Eph. 4:30. And that we may not, hear what is his counsel: 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.' When these are gone, then (and not before) look for his sweet company. You may as well dwell comfortably together with your house on fire, as pray so together when you in the house are on fire.

(2.) Contentions *hinder the answer to our prayers*. If we pray in anger, God cannot be pleased. 'The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.' A loud wind beats down the smoke. Our prayers are compared to incense, but they will never ascend to heaven till this storm be laid. Go to pray in this plight, and God will bid you come when you are better agreed. The Spirit will not help in such prayers; and if the Spirit hath no hand in the inditing, Christ will have no hand in presenting the prayer. And if Christ present it not, to be sure the Father will not receive it, for 'through him we have an access by one Spirit unto the Father,' Eph. 2:18.

4. Be very *choice whom thou makest a member of thy family*. Get, if thou canst, such under thy roof as may give a lift with thee in thy family worship. Though it be not thy sin to pray with a wicked wife and servant; yet is it thy sin to make choice of such for thy relations, if otherwise thou canst help it. Yet, alas! how little is this considered, though the blessing and comfort of the family be deeply concerned therein! A little beauty, honour, or pelf do too oft blind the eyes and bribe the judgments of those we may hope to be themselves gracious, that they can yoke themselves with such as are very unmeet to draw with them in heaven way and work. David knew that Michal came of a bad stock, but haply hoped to bring her over to comply with him in the service of God, and we see what a grievous cross she proved to him. Solomon tells us of some that trouble their own house, Prov. 15:27. He that for carnal respects takes a wicked wife into his bosom, or servant into his family, is the

man that is sure to do this. Haply when he would pray and praise God, his wife, like Job's, will bid him curse. When he is at duty she will despise him in her heart, and make a mock of his zeal, as Michal did of David's. And so they who, for some natural abilities they see in a servant, venture on him, though wicked and ungodly, pay dearly for it. Such often bring with them that plague of profaneness which infects the rest; so that, what they earn their masters with their hands, they rob them of with their sins, which brings the curse of God to their family. Who that is wise would build a house with timber that is on fire? If the servant thou entertainest be wicked, fire is in him that will endanger thy house. Make it therefore thy care to plant a godly family. This was David's resolution—haply he saw the evil of his former choice: 'Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight,' Ps. 101:6, 7. Then the music will be sweet in thy family duties, when thou canst get a consort into thy house; such whose souls are in tune for those holy services thou art to join with them in.

5. Keep a *diary of thy family sins and mercies*, that so neither the one may escape thy confession and humiliation, nor the other thy grateful recognition. If this were observed, we should not come with such jejune and barren hearts to the work, as now, alas! most do. Take some time to affect thy heart with both of these. The brokenness of thy heart who prayest, will conduce much towards the same disposition in those that join with thee. Nothing melts metal sooner than to pour on it {that} which is melted. The drowsy speaker prays oft the rest asleep that join with him. Take heed, therefore, of formality; this is the canker which eats out the very heart of religious duties. Remember thou art to thy family what the minister is to the public assembly. As the deadness of his heart in prayer and preaching hath a bad operation upon his people, to make them like himself, so hath thine on thy family. Thou dost not only suffer a personal loss to thyself, but wrongest the rest of thy company. As when thou wastest thy estate, thy wife, children, servants, and all fare the worse, and must pinch for it; so when thou chokest up thy heart with inordinate cares of the

world, or any other way indisposest thyself by thy sinful walking for the duty of prayer, thy whole family goes by the loss with thee.

6. Observe the *fittest seasons for duty in thy family*, when with most freedom and the least disturbance it may be performed. In the morning take the opportunity before a throng of worldly business crowds in upon thee. In some families, I have observed, where they are in great employments, that if duty be delayed till some worldly occasions be despatched, then, either it hath been shut out, or shut up in such straits of time that the slightly slovenly manner of performing it hath proved little better than the total neglect. To prevent this disorder, it is best to forestall the world's market, betimes in the morning to set upon the duty, and offer up to God the first-fruits of the day, before our thoughts meet with a diversion. We read that the Israelites gathered their manna early 'in the morning,' and 'when the sun waxed hot it melted,' Ex. 16:21. I would wish, especially, such who have multiplicity of worldly occasions, to take their time for communion with God early, while their thoughts are more compact, before they are hot in their worldly business, lest they then find their thoughts so diffused and scattered among other businesses, as will not easily be gathered into a close and united attendance upon God in the duty. Again, when night comes, delay not the work till ye are more fit to go to your pillow than to your cushion, to sleep than to pray. If the eye sleep, the soul cannot well wake. Especially consider your servants that labour hard in the day; O do not expose them to the temptation of drowsy prayers! If our hearts took delight in the work, we would plot and contrive which would be the best time for communion with God, even as lovers do how and when they may most privately meet together.

[*Public or church prayer required by God, and the reasons why.*]

*Second.* Social or joint prayer may be *public in the church*. We mean by this, that prayer offered in and by the church assembled together for the worship of God. In handling of it I shall endeavour these five things, to show—1. That God requires a public worship of his people. 2. That prayer is a part of this public worship he

commands. 3. Why God requires a public worship, and in particular, public prayer. 4. I shall resolve a question or two concerning public prayer. 5. I shall make some applicatory improvement of this head.

1. That God *requires a public worship of his people*. This word, *cultus*, or worship in general, is *obsequium alicui præstitum juxta excellentiam ejus*—worship is that honour and service which we give to anyone according to his excellency. And that is threefold—civil, moral, or divine. *Civil worship* is the due honour and service we pay to a person in place and power over us, as prince, father, or master. *Moral*, is that due reverence and respect which we pay to a person that hath any excellency of virtue or place, without authority over us. Thus we give honour and veneration both to the saints living on earth with us, and to the saints and angels in heaven. *Religious or divine worship* is the honour and service we give to that Being who, we believe, is the author of our beings and fountain of our happiness. Now this Being is God, and he only. To him therefore, and him alone, is religious worship due. ‘Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods,’ Deut. 6:13, 14. This religious worship of the true God comes under divers distinctions, inward and outward, private and public. The public worship of God is the present subject of our discourse—that, I mean, which the congregation performs to him in their religious assemblies, called ‘the congregation of saints,’ Ps. 89:5; and, ‘the assembly of saints,’ ver. 7. The church of God on earth began in a family, and so did the worship of God. But when the number increased, the worship of God became more public: ‘Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord,’ Gen. 4:26; that is, they began publicly, saith Mercer. Seth and other of the religious seed began to have their holy assemblies for the service of God (Willet, in locum). It is observable how God at the promulgation of the law on Sinai, when he first formed the Israelites into a polity, took special care for erecting a public worship to his name. That was the ‘day of their espousals,’ Jer. 2:2. And then he instituted a solemn form of public worship, with exact rules how it should be performed. The same care took our Lord Jesus for his gospel church, in appointing both church ordinances and officers to dispense the same.

2. Prayer is *part of that religious worship which the church is to perform to God in her public assemblies*, yea, a principal part, put therefore frequently for the whole, ‘The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord,’ Zech. 8:21, 22. It is a prophecy how believers in gospel times should zealously provoke one another to go to the assemblies of the church—of which Jerusalem was a type—there to pray and worship God together. ‘It is written,’ saith our Saviour, ‘My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer,’ Mark 11:17. This was partially performed when converts in the apostles’ days did flock to Jerusalem, there to worship God. *Sed perfectè impletum est illud in Christi ecclesia ex omnibus gentibus collectâ &c.*—it is more fully accomplished in the church of Christ, gathered out of all nations, that should keep up the worship of God in their assemblies. St. Luke forgets not to mention this of prayer amongst the other duties and offices of primitive Christians in their assemblies, ‘And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,’ Acts 2:42. By continuing stedfast ‘*in the apostles’ doctrine*,’ Mr. Perkins understands their attendance on the apostles’ sermons; by ‘*fellowship*,’ understands their contributions to the poor, which were gathered at their assemblies, a work very fit for that place, ‘for with such sacrifices God is well pleased,’ Heb. 13:16; by ‘*breaking of bread*,’ the celebration of the Lord’s supper; and by ‘*prayers*,’ those which they put up together in communion at their church meetings. Nor is this of prayer crowded last, because the least duty of the company, but rather because it hath a necessary influence to them all. The word and sacraments, which God useth to sanctify his people by, are themselves sanctified to us by prayer. And St. Paul, when he hath shown, 1 Tim. 1, what doctrine ministers are to preach in the church, he, ch. 2, directs them what to insist chiefly on in their public prayers: ‘I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and

peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,' 1 Tim. 2:1, 2. This the church of Christ ever esteemed a principal part of their public worship. Tertullian, speaking of the assemblies of the church, saith, *coimus in cætum et congregationem, ut ad Deum quasi manufacta precationibus ambiamus orantes, hæc vis Deo grata est*—we meet in the congregation that we may by our fervent prayers environ God, as an army doth a castle, and this holy fore with which we assault heaven pleaseth him. I proceed to the third head, to give some account.

3. *Why God requires a public worship* or a joint service of his people in communion together, and *why this particular duty of prayer*.

(1.) As a free and open *acknowledgment of their dependence on and allegiance to God*. It is most reasonable we should own the God we serve, even in the face of the world, and not, like Nicodemites, carry our religion in a dark lantern. He is unworthy of his master's service that is ashamed to wear his livery, and follow him in the street with it on his back. 'Thou hast avouched,' saith Moses to Israel, 'the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice. And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people,' Deut. 26:17, 18. Even heathens understand this much, that they owe a free profession and public service to the god they vouch: 'All people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever,' Micah 4:5. Now by walking in the name of God, they mean they will invoke his name, and vouch him by a public worship, as you may see by ver. 1, 2, of that chapter. And this is a gospel prophecy concerning the last days; where, by the way, we may take notice of the folly and pride of those that cast off public ordinances, and private also, from a pretence of their high attainments, leaving these duties of religion as strings for those that are yet children to be led by. This is horrible pride and ignorance to have such a high opinion of themselves. But were they so perfect as they falsely imagine themselves, and needed not any further teaching, yet ought they still to vouch God by worshipping of him? The ground from which divine worship becomes due to God, is his own infinite perfections, and our dependence on him as the author of our beings

and fountain of our bliss. Hence it is, that angels and saints in heaven worship him, though in a way suitable to their glorified state. Some ordinances, indeed, fitted to the church militant on earth, shall there cease. But a worship remains: yea, it is their constant employment. Saints on earth serve God always, but cannot always worship, therefore they have stated times appointed them. Now to cast off the worship of God is to renounce God himself, and communion with his church both on earth and in heaven. 'But ye are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain,' Isa. 65:11. They did not give him his public worship, and he interprets this as a casting him off from being their God. Sometimes, I confess, the church doors are shut by persecutors, and, when this flood is up, the ways to Zion mourn; yet then we are to lament after the Lord and his ark. Holy David was no stranger to private devotions, yet could not but bewail his banishment from the public: 'My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary,' Ps. 63:1, 2.

(2.) To *preserve love and unity in the church*. God is one, and dearly loves oneness and unity among his people. The reason he gives why he would have the curtains of the tabernacle coupled together, that it might be 'one' tabernacle, Ex. 36:13-18. The fastening of these curtains so lovingly together for this end, that the tent might be one, signified the knitting and clasping together of the saints in love. Now, though this be effected principally by the inward operation of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts, for he alone can knit souls and knead them into one lump; yet he useth their joint communion in ordinances as a happy means through which he may convey and derive his grace that fastens them in love together. These are the ligaments that tie one member to another in this mystical body. And do we not see that Christians, like members of the natural body, take care for, and sympathize with, one another, so long as they are united in one communion? But when these ligaments are cut, communion in worship is broke; then we see one member drops from another, and little care for or love to each other is to be found among them. The apostle saw good reason to join both these in one exhortation: 'Let us consider one another to

provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,' Heb. 10:24, 25. As if he had said, If you cannot agree to worship God one with another, you will have little love one for another. When the Jews' staff of 'beauty' was cut asunder, the staff of 'bands' did not last long unbroken, Zech. 11:10. Religion hath its name *â religando*—from binding back; it is a strong binder. Break the beautified order of church communion, and a people will soon fall all to pieces. It is observable how endearing conversation and communion is in things of an inferior nature. Scholars that go to school together, those that board in the same house, *collactanei*—that suck the same milk, twins that lie together in the same belly, they have a mutual endearment of affection each to another. How influential then must church communion needs be where all these meet?—when they shall consider they go to the same public school of the ministry, sit at the same table of the sacrament, suck the same breasts of the ordinances, and lie together in the bosom, yea womb, of the same church. This was admirably seen in the primitive Christians, who, by fellowship in ordinances, were inspired with such a wonderful love to one another, that they could hardly find their hearts in their own breasts: 'All that believed were together, and had all things common; and continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,' Acts 2:44, 46. But when a breach was made in the church's communion, then love caught her cold, and grew upon Christians as divisions increased. Now one would think the cause of our disease, being so easily known, the cure should not be so hard, as, alas! at this day we find it.

(3.) For the saints' *safety and defence against their enemies*. Paul rejoiced at the order and steadfastness of the Colossian saints, Col. 2:5. Order is a military word, and denotes *cohorte ordine apto conglobatam*—an army compact, and cast into a fit order that every part is helpful to each other for its defence. And such an army are the saints when they stand in communion together according to divine rule. Our blessed Saviour, when departing from earth to heaven, what course took he to leave his disciples in a defensive posture after he was gone? Doth he send them home to look every one to himself?

No, but to Jerusalem, there to stand as it were in a body by joint communion, Acts 1. The drop is safe in the river, lost when severed from it; the soldier safe when marching with the army, but snapped when he straggles from it. Cain, looking upon himself as an excommunicated person from the church of God, expected some great evil, as well he might, would befall him. Therefore the gracious soul, meant by the spouse, is brought in asking where the assembly of the faithful is, that joining herself to it she may be protected in a time of danger: 'Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions?' Song 1:7.

(4.) Because of the *great delight he takes in the joint prayers and praises of his people*. We need not detract from the excellency of private devotions, to magnify the public prayers of the church. Both are necessary, and highly pleasing to God. Yet it is no wrong to the private devotions of a particular saint, to give the precedency to the public prayers of the church. God himself tells us he 'loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob,' Ps. 87:2. No doubt the prayers which the faithful put up to heaven from under their private roofs were very acceptable unto him; but, if a saint's single voice in prayer be so sweet to God's ear, much more the church choir—his saints' prayers in consort together. A father is glad to see any one of his children, and makes him welcome when he visits him, but much more when they come together: the greatest feast is when they all meet at his house. The public praises of the church are the emblem of heaven itself, where all the angels and saints make but one consort. There is a wonderful prevalency in the joint prayers of his people. When Peter was in prison, the church meets and prays him out of his enemies' hands. A prince will grant a petition subscribed by the hands of a whole city, which may be he would not at the request of a private subject, and yet love him well too. There is an especial promise to public prayer, Matt. 18:20: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' *Non dicit ero, non enim tardat vel cunctatur, sed sum jam illic, invenior præsens gratia et favore singulari, eo quod summopere me delectet hujusmodi concordia*—he doth not say, I will, for he makes no delay or

demur upon the business: but I am there—let them come as soon as they will—present by my special favour and grace, because this concord in prayer highly pleaseth me. It is the gloss of Lucas Brugens upon the place.

4. I come to answer *a question or two concerning public prayer.*

(1.) The first question is, Whether it be lawful that the public prayers of the church be performed in a language not understood by the people?

*Answer.* All the offices of the church, and duties performed in its worship, are to be done unto edification. This is an apostolical canon. Now, none can be edified by what he understands not, and therefore it must needs be, as Beza calls the popish Latin service, *ludibrium Dei at hominis*—a mocking of God and man, for to babble such prayers in the church which the people know not what they mean. ‘If I pray,’ saith the apostle, ‘in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful,’ I Cor. 14:14. He means, the congregation are not the wiser for his understanding the prayer he puts up, except he could make them understand it also. We can no more be edified by another’s intellect than be saved by another’s faith. When God intended to defeat that bold attempt of those sons of pride who would needs build a tower that should vie with the heavens for height, he did no more but confound their languages that they might not understand one another’s speech, and it was done. Presently their work ceased. And as they could not build, so neither can he edify the people that understands not his speech in prayer. A dumb minister may serve the people’s turn as well as he who by his speech is a barbarian to them. For the minister’s voice is necessary in his public administrations, as Augustine saith, *significandæ mentis suæ causâ, non ut Deus sed ut homines audiant*, &c., —to signify his meaning, not that God may hear, for he hears those prayers which the tongue is not employed to express, but that the people may hear, and so join their votes with his to God. As the minister is to pray for them, so they to pray with him; which they are to testify by their hearty amen at the close. But this they cannot do, if we believe St. Paul, ‘How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou

sayest?’ I Cor. 14:16. ‘The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth,’ saith Solomon, Prov. 16:23; that is, he will not, as we say, suffer his tongue to run before his wit, but know what he shall speak before he sends his tongue on his errand. And surely, above all this, wisdom is to be shown in our prayers, wherein we speak not to man but God. To say amen to that prayer which we understand not—what is it but to offer the sacrifice of fools? Holy matter in prayer is the incense to be offered, the tongue is the censer; but the affections of the devout soul bring the fire to the incense before it can ascend as a sweet perfume into the nostrils of God. Now, if the intellect want light to understand what the matter of the prayer is, the affections must either be cold or wild; and wild fire is unfit to offer up the incense of prayer with. It is not enough that the praying soul be touched with some devout affections, but that these affections be suitable to the matter of the prayer, yea, arise from the sense it hath thereof.

(2.) The second question is, Whether a *set form of prayer be lawful to be used in the church?*

If it be unlawful, it is because, by the use of a set form in prayer, some command of God is transgressed; for where there is no law there is no transgression.

Now, it will trouble those who decry all set forms —how holy soever the matter of them be—to show any command upon Scripture record that forbids the praying by a set form, or that disallows its use either in express terms or by necessary consequence. It will be granted, yea must, that the Scripture is a perfect rule in this particular duty of God’s worship, as well as in other. But among all the precepts and rules in the book of God, we find none that commands we should pray by a conceived form, and not by a set form. We are commanded who to pray to, to God, and none other, Ps. 44:20; in whose name we are to pray, I Tim. 2:5; Eph. 5:20; we are bound up to the matter of our prayer, what we are to ask, I John 5:14; and lastly, in what manner we are to pray—we must pray ‘with understanding,’ John 4:22; I Cor. 14:16; Heb. 11:6; ‘in faith,’ James 1:6; Heb. 11:4, with sincere fervency, Jer. 29:12; in a word, which comprehends all in one, we are to pray ‘in the Spirit,’ Eph. 6:18; in the Holy Ghost,’ Jude 20. Now he that can do all this need not fear but he prays lawfully, and consequently acceptably. And we confess this may be done by one that

prayeth with a set form, or else we must very boldly charge many eminent saints in scripture for praying unlawfully. Who dares say that Solomon praised God unlawfully when he used the very form which David his father had penned? or, that Moses did not pray in the Spirit, because he prayed in a constant form at the setting forward of the ark, and at its being set down again? Thus you have seen what God hath prescribed to our praying acceptably; and if it had been of such dangerous consequence to have prayed by a set form, as to make our prayers abominable, would God have omitted to warn his people of it, especially when he foresaw that his churches generally in their assemblies would make use of them, as they have done for thirteen or fourteen hundred years? But may we not rather, yea undoubtedly we ought to conclude, that seeing the Lord in his word descends not to prescribe what the outward frame and order of our words in prayer should be, whether conceived *ex tempore*, or cast into a form beforehand—only gives general rules that all things should be done decently, that we be not rash with our mouth, or our heart hasty to utter anything before God, and such like that are applicable to both—I say we should conclude both are lawful and warrantable, the Scripture having determined neither the one way nor the other. And therefore to put religion in one, so as to condemn the other as unlawful, looks—as a learned holy pen hath it—too like superstition, seeing God himself hath bid no bond upon the conscience either way.

As for the excellency of conceived prayer, wherein the devout Christian, out of the abundance of his heart, pours out his requests to God, none but a profane spirit dares open his mouth against it. But is there no way to magnify the excellency of that but by vilifying and imputing sin to the other? Alas! the evil is not in a form, but in formality; and that is a disease that may be found in him that prays with a conceived prayer. A man may pray without a form and yet not pray without formality. Though I confess he that binds himself constantly to a set form—especially in his private addresses—seems to me to be more in danger of the two, to fall under the power of that lazy distemper. But to hasten the despatch of this question—for I intend not a full discourse of this point, but would top a few heads only, which you may find more largely

insisted on in many worthy treatises on this subject—I would desire those that scruple the lawfulness of all set forms, to look wishly upon those set forms of blessing, prayers, and thanksgiving that are upon scripture record, and were used by the servants of God with his approbation, and then consider whether God would prescribe or accept what is unlawful. The priests had a form of blessing the people, Num. 6:24. Moses used, as I hinted, a form of prayer at the remove of the ark, ‘Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee;’ and when it was set down another form, ‘Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel,’ Num. 10:36, which very form was continued and used by David, Ps. 68:1. Asaph and his brethren had set forms of thanksgiving given them to use in their public service, ‘Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the Lord into the hand of Asaph and his brethren,’ I Chr. 16:7. This was the first appointed to be sung in the public service; the several parts thereof were afterwards much enlarged, as you may see by comparing Ps. 105 with the former part of the song in the place fore-quoted, and Ps. 96, with the latter part of it. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon used the very form of words in praising God which his father had penned, II Chr. 7:6. Good Hezekiah commands the Levites ‘to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David,’ II Chr. 29:30. This holy man no doubt was able to have poured forth extemporary praises, as it is thought he did in that prayer which he on the sudden, put up on the occasion of that railing letter sent him, II Kings 19:14; yet did not think it unlawful to use a form in his public administration. Yea, our blessed Saviour—an instance beyond all instances—both gave a form of prayer to his disciples, and himself disdained not to pray three several times one after another the very same form of words, ‘He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words,’ Matt. 26:44. And that hymn which he sang with his disciples is conceived by the learned to be that portion of psalms which the Jews used at the celebration of the passover. (See Beza and Gerhard, Harmo, in locum.)

5. I come now to the fifth thing propounded in prosecution of this head of public prayer, and that is *some applicatory improvement of this head*.

(1.) This shows *what reason the people of God, wherever they live, have to pray for good magistrates, especially kings and princes. Regna sunt hospitia ecclesiæ*—as the inn is to the traveller, so kingdoms are to the church in its pilgrimage here on earth. As they are, such is its usage in the world, and entertainment that it finds. ‘Pray for kings,’ saith the apostle, ‘and all in authority; that we may lead quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,’ 1 Tim. 2:2. By godliness he means in an especial manner the free profession of the truth and public exercise of God’s pure worship. No magistrate may hinder the saints living godly as to the embracing of the truth in their hearts and secret performance of prayer. Daniel would and could pray, do Nebuchadnezzar his worst. But princes carry the keys of the church doors at their girdles, and can shut or open them. When faithful magistrates sway the sceptre, then the ways of Zion are easy and open. When enemies to the ways and worship of God bear rule, then they mourn; church doors are shut and prison doors opened to the servants of Christ. Then the woman flees into the wilderness, and the church into private chambers, as we find in the apostles’ days, when the church was met with the door shut to pray for Peter. O, pray for kings and princes; for, as they carry the keys of the church doors, so God carries the key that opens the doors of their hearts at his pleasure.

(2.) It reproves those that *turn their backs off the public worship*. Now they are of two sorts—the profane atheist, the scrupulous separatist.

(a) The *irreligious atheist*—such who, out of a profane spirit, turn their back off the public worship of God. The Jews have a saying of one of their rabbis much in their mouths, *quisquis incolit civitatem in quâ extat synagoga, et inibi non pecatur, is est qui meritò dicitur vicinus malus*—he that dwells in a city where there is a synagogue, and comes not to prayers there, he is a person that deserves the name of a bad neighbour. How many bad neighbours do we, alas! live among, who are seldom seen in the public assembly from one end of the year to the other? Many live as if they had rent the bond that was sealed at their baptism, and renounced all homage to their Maker, and would tell the world they owe him no worship. Worse brutes these are than the hog in their sty, or horse in their stable. They were made for our use, and

accordingly serve us. Man was intended for the service of his Maker—a creature made for religion —by which some would define and distinguish the human nature from that of brutes, rather than by his rational faculty. Indeed, in some brutes there is a sagacity that looks something like man’s discursive faculty. But religion is a thing their nature is wholly incapable of, and therefore nothing makes man so truly a brute as irreligion. The Jewish Talmud propounds this question, Why God made man *vesperâ Sabbathi*?—on the evening before the Sabbath? and gives this as one reason, *ut protinus intraret in præceptum*—that is, God made man on the evening just before the Sabbath, that he might forthwith enter upon the observation of the command to sanctify the Sabbath, and begin his life as it were with the worship of God, which is the chief end why it was given him. May we not therefore wonder at the patience of God in suffering these ungodly wretches to live, that by casting this horrid contempt upon his worship, walk contrary to the very end of their creation? If the bells which call us to the worship of God were to give them notice of a wrestling, foot-ball, or drunken wake, O how soon should we have them flock together! But prayers and sermons they care not for. What shall we impute this irreligion and atheism of multitudes among us to? Surely it proceeds from a criminous conscience. It is said of Cain, ‘He went out from the presence of the Lord,’ Gen. 4:16; that is, say some interpreters, from the place where God had his church and worship, there God is especially present.

Guilt indeed makes men afraid of God. This makes them {do} what they can to wear off the thoughts of a Deity that are so troublesome to their flagitious consciences. Now, to do this, they have no other way than to shun those duties which will bring God and their sins to their remembrance. Herod was soon persuaded to cut off that head whose tongue was so bold to tell him his faults; and profane hearts are easily drawn to cast off those duties which will gall and rub hard upon their sore consciences. But that man is in a miserable case that knows no way to get ease but by throwing away the plaster that must heal his wound. Ah, poor wretches! this will not serve your turn. What though the prisoner stops his ears, and will not hear the judge pronounce the sentence against him, will



that save him from the gallows? Surely no; but rather procure his being sent thither the sooner for his contempt of the court, who, had he carried himself better, and humbly begged his life at the judge's hand, might possibly have got the sentence reversed. Whether sinners will hear the word or no, come to his worship or no, God will proceed in his work. Flouting against God, and turning thy back on his worship, is not the way to prevent but hasten divine vengeance. How much better were it to make thy humble supplication to thy judge, and wait at the posts of wisdom! While men, though bad, wait on ordinances, there is hope, for they are under the means. But when they cast them off, then their ruin hastens.

(b) The *scrupulous separatist*—such who do not absent from the public worship out of a profane atheistical spirit, as the former, but from *scruples whether they may lawfully be present at the prayers there put up, because there are some maladministrations in the performance of it*, or at least {that} which they think to be such. At these they are distasted, and so withdraw. May be it is because the duty of prayer is performed with a set form, which they conceive unlawful. This I shall waive, having spoken already to it. Or, may be it is not a form, but some passages in the form used, that offends them, and therefore they dare not be present. So that the question will be—

*Question.* Whether it be lawful to be present at that service, or those prayers in the congregation, that have something faulty in them?

To the answering of this question, we must first distinguish of faults, *all are not of a size*. There are faults in a matter, and faults in the form and method, of a prayer. And faults in the matter may be either fundamental or of a less nature—such as are not fundamental or bordering thereupon; and those less faults may be generally dispersed through the prayer, that it is soured throughout with them, or only in some particular passages.

Again, we must distinguish between *approving of the faults, defects, and corruptions that are in a prayer, and being present at the service of God where some things are done faultily*. Now I answer, that it is lawful for a Christian to be present at those prayers wherein some things may be supposed to be faulty for outward form,

yea, and also in matter, in things not fundamental nor bordering thereupon, and these not dispersed through the whole body of the prayers, but in some passages only. We may be present where God is present by his grace and favour. We may follow the Lamb safely wherever he goes. Now God doth not, for corruptions of doctrine that are remote from the foundation, or of worship in things ritual and of an inferior nature, cast off a church, and withdraw his presence from it; neither ought we. Indeed, if the foundation of doctrine be destroyed, and the worship becomes idolatrous, in that case God goes before us, and calls all the faithful after him to come out from the communion of such a church. But, where corruptions in a church are of the former nature, and such laws be not imposed by the church in their communion with it as being a necessity of approving things unlawful, the sin is not in holding communion with it, but in withdrawing from it, and that no little one either. Many things must be tolerated for maintaining peace and unity, and enjoying the worship of God, when it is not in our power to redress them. Neither doth our presence at the ordinance carry interpretatively a consent with it of all that is there done. It is one thing to tolerate and another to approve. Whoever said that all who are present in an assembly by it show their consent to every impertinent phrase in the minister's prayer, corrupt gloss, or false interpretation he makes of any text quoted in his sermon? If this were true, our Saviour led the people into a snare when he bade them beware of the leaven of the Pharisees' doctrine, yet bade them hear them preach, Matt. 23:3.

(3.) Of *exhortation*.

(a) *Make conscience of joining with the church in her public worship*. Do not think thou art left to thy liberty whether thou wilt or not, but bind it upon thy conscience as a duty, for so indeed it is. You think it is the minister's duty to dispense ordinances. Surely then it is your duty to attend on them. He might as well pray for you at home as come to church and not find his people there. Is there a woe to him if he doth not provide food for your souls, and none for you if you come not to partake of it? How can you reasonably think so? And when you come, think not you are time enough there if you get to the sermon, though you miss the prayers, which should prepare you

for the word and sanctify the word to you. It is not the way to profit by one ordinance to neglect another. The minister may preach, but God must teach thee to profit. If God opens not thy understanding to conceive of, and thy heart to conceive by, the word thou hearest, no fruit will come of it. Now prayer is the key to open God's heart, as his Spirit the key to open thine.

(b) Take heed how thou comest to, and behavest thyself, as in other parts of public worship, so especially *in prayer*. [1.] *How thou comest to public worship*: take heed thou *comest not in thy filthiness*, I mean, that thou regard not iniquity in thy heart. Wash and then pray. So David resolves, "I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar,"—alluding to the priests, that went to the laver before they approached with their sacrifice to the altar, Ex. 40. It was counted a great presumption in one that durst come near his prince with a stinking breath. O what a bold act then is it to draw near to the great God with any sin upon thee! This is sure to make thy breath in prayer stink, and render thee for it abominable to him. [2.] *How thou behavest thyself in the duty*; be sure it be *with a holy reverence*—with an inward reverence and also an outward reverence.

We are to believe in the duty of worship *with an inward reverence*. God is called 'the Fear' of his people, because he is revered by them in their approaches to him. 'Fear' is put for the whole worship of God, because no part of it is to be done without a holy trembling. This, as the quaver to the music, gives a grace and acceptableness both to our prayers and praises also: 'Serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling.' Now, to fill thee with awful<sup>ccxv</sup> thoughts of God, labour to set up a right notion of God in thy mind as infinitely glorious in holiness, majesty, and power. Irreverence is the product of low thoughts we have of a person, which makes it impossible that an ignorant soul should truly reverence God—how humble soever his outward posture is—because he knows not what God is. A prince in a disguise is not known, and therefore not entertained, when he comes, as when he appears in his royal majesty. The saints use to awe their hearts into a reverence of God in prayer by revolving his titles of majesty in their thoughts, Ps. 89.6, 7.

We are to believe in the duty of worship *with an outward reverence*. God is a Spirit, yet will

have the reverence of our body as well as spirit, for both are his, and especially in the public. A prince would not like a rude behaviour from his servant in his bedchamber where none besides himself is witness to it, but much less will he bear it in his presence-chamber, as he sits on his throne before many of his subjects. Now, the fittest gesture of body in public prayer to express our reverence is kneeling: 'Come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord,' Ps. 95:6. So Paul, taking his leave of the elders of Ephesus, kneeled and prayed with them all, Acts 20:36. And all the Christians at Tyrus, accompanying Paul to the ship with their wives and children, 'kneeled down on the shore, and prayed,' Acts 21:5. Where that cannot be done, they should stand—if debility of nature hinder not. As for sitting we do not find it commended in Scripture as a praying posture; neither have the churches of Christ judged it so: *sedentem orare extra disciplinam est*, saith Tertullian—to pray sitting is not according to the church's order. As for that, II Sam. 7:18, David 'sat before the Lord,' it may be read, he abode or stayed before the Lord. So the word in other places is taken; as Gen. 27:44; Lev. 14:8; I Sam. 1:22.

Again, in the duty of worship we are to exercise *attention and intention of mind*, that we may go along with the minister by our devout affections, and witness our consent to the prayers put up with our hearty amen at the end of them, I Chr. 16:36; Neh. 8:6; I Cor. 14:16. Else indeed, we are as a broken string in a consort, that speaks not with the rest, and thereby discomposeth the harmony.

[The several kinds of prayer distinguished  
as ORDINARY OR EXTRAORDINARY.]

FOURTH DISTINCTION. Solitary and social, private and public prayer, are *either ordinary or extraordinary*. For the development of this distinction I shall endeavour to answer these five questions: —*First*. What extraordinary prayer is. *Second*. By whom it is to be performed. *Third*. What are the special seasons wherein we are to take it up. *Fourth*. Why extraordinary prayer is superadded to ordinary. *Fifth*. What counsel or direction may be given for the acceptable and successful performance of this duty.

[THE NATURE of extraordinary prayer.]

*Question First.* What is *extraordinary prayer*?

*Answer.* Prayer may be called extraordinary in a double respect: 1. In regard of the time set apart for the performance of it. 2. In regard of its adjunct.

1. Prayer may be called extraordinary *in regard of the time set apart for the performance of it*. Then it is extraordinary when some more than ordinary portion of time is set apart and devoted to this work. Thus we find Jacob wrestling till break of day, Gen. 32, and Joshua with the elders of Israel till eventide; the one probably spending the night, the other the day, in this duty. And Israel, in their war with Benjamin, 'wept and sat there before the Lord that day till even,' Judges 20:26. We find Daniel many days together in prayer, Dan. 10:12.

2. Prayer may be called extraordinary *in regard of its adjunct*. Then prayer is extraordinary when fasting is joined to the duty of prayer. Now, fasting is a religious abstinence, whereby we forbear the use of all earthly comforts in the time set apart for this duty —so far as necessity and decency will permit—the more to afflict our souls and enforce our prayers; as,

(1.) *A forbearing of food*, whether meat or drink, Est. 4:16; Jonah 3:7. From this the whole action is called a *fast*, which imports not a sober use of food—for this we are at all times bound to observe—but a total abstinence, if necessity of nature, through some debility and infirmity, doth not require otherwise. For, in this case, the less duty must yield to the greater —the end of fasting being to help us in prayer, which it doth not when nature faints under it; for the soul cannot fly if the wings of our bodily spirits flag.

(2.) All *costly apparel* and ornaments of the body. Gaudy rich clothes on a fast-day do no better than a light trimming on a mourning suit: 'They mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments,' Ex. 33:4. And this was by God's own command; 'for the Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel,' that they 'put off their ornaments,' ver. 5. In a word, all carnal mirth, music, perfumes, and whatever might recreate and delight the senses, are to be forborne upon this extraordinary occasion. See Dan. 6:18; 10:2, 3. For, though abstinence from food, with the other severities imposed on the outward man, be not in themselves acts of worship, nor intrinsical to the nature of prayer, yet are they required in the extraordinary

performance of this duty by way of adjuvancy to it, and they have a reference to spiritual ends.

(a) By this abstinence we acknowledge our *unworthiness to enjoy such comforts, and that God may justly take from us what for a time we voluntarily deny ourselves of*.

(b) We express by our outward abstinence and fasting, the *strength and vehemency of those inward affections which are to be exerted in extraordinary prayer*. Men use to signify the violent passions of their soul by forbearing the repast and delights of the body. Is it a passion of grief one is oppressed with? you will see him oft forsake his food. Thus David: 'My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread,' Ps. 102:4. Is it fear that possesseth the heart with the apprehension of some great danger impending and approaching? you will have such a one refuse his wonted repast. So the mariners did in the sea-storm, Acts 27. Is it anger that vexeth a man? Ahab was deep in his passion upon the denial of Naboth's vineyard, and he throws himself on his bed and will not eat, 1 Kings 21. Is it desire of compassing any great design that the head and heart is taken up and transported with? such a one will not allow himself time for his meal. 'Cursed be the man,' saith Saul, 'that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies,' 1 Sam. 14:24. We find the smith, in the prophet, so earnest in his idolatrous work, that he pincheth himself with hunger, and he will not eat though his strength faileth, nor drink though he be ready to faint, Isa. 44:12. Now, in extraordinary prayer the Christian is to have all these affections in a spiritual and holy manner wound up to the highest key possible. He is to have a deep sorrow for sin, fear and trembling at the judgments of God feared to come for them; a holy anger and indignation against sin, with a vehement desire to be revenged on it for the dishonour it hath cast upon God; and, in a word, a longing desire to make his peace with God and recover his favour, which sin hath unhappily deprived him of. Now, because the excess of natural passions discovers itself this way, even to afflict their very bodies, and makes them deny themselves that which nature most craves, therefore God will have his people in their extraordinary humiliations do the same, that nature may not put grace to shame.

(c) By this abstinence, especially from food, we tame and subdue our wanton flesh, and so come to have a *greater advantage for mortifying those sensual lusts that receive the fuel which feeds and inflames them from the flesh*. A full body is a mellow soil for such lusts to grow rank in. *Cum carne nutriuntur vita carnis*—the lusts of the flesh are nourished when the body is pampered. If the body be kept high, carnal lusts will not easily be kept low. What else made Paul to beat down his body by fasting and watching, in which he was often, but that he might have the fuller blow at those lusts that received strength from it? *Nostrum est lasciviens jumentum frænis inediae subjugare, ut sessorem Spiritum sanctum moderato et composito portet incessu* (Hieronymus, Epist. 9)—indeed a pampered horse is most like to cast his rider; and the Holy Spirit, using the body as well as soul in the work, this bridle of fasting is of excellent use to curb it.

(d) This abstinence from food is required to *sharpen our spirits, and enliven the powers of the soul in this duty*, which are pressed down and thickened, as I may so say, with the charge of the stomach. A full body makes a heavy eye and drowsy spirits; and what can then be expected but yawning prayers, especially when we are to continue longer than ordinary at the work?

[BY WHOM extraordinary prayer is to be performed.]

*Question Second.* Who are they that are called to the practice of this duty of extraordinary prayer?

*Answer.* The command comprehends *all that by age are enabled to understand the nature of this duty when any extraordinary occasion occurs for the performance of the same*. We find it required of a church and nation. It is the magistrate's duty, when there is a national cause, to call his subjects to the public practice of this duty, Joel 2:15; Neh. 9:1; and he that refuseth his call thereunto makes himself an offender both to God and man, Lev. 23:29. It reacheth to private families. Esther and her maidens keep a religious fast together Est. 4:16. Yea, it is a duty bound upon single persons, and reacheth to the secret closet, 'But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret,' Matt. 6:17, 18. The circumstances of the place show it is meant of a

secret fast in the closet. We have them all together in one place, 'The land shall mourn;' there is a national fast: every family apart, the family of the house of David, and the house of Nathan apart,' &c.; there is domestical: 'and their wives apart,' Zech. 12:12; there is a personal secret fast in the closet.

*Objection.* But is not this extraordinary prayer and fasting *too austere and rigid a duty for gospel times*? Where doth Christ command his people in gospel times to macerate their bodies with such severities as these? Joy and praise better becomes the freedom and liberty of the gospel.

*Objection met.* Such wild stuff hath been vented by some in our late loose times. These are a new sort of saints, which the world hath hardly been acquainted with before these unhappy days of ours; they would be in heaven before their time, and leave no tears on their cheeks for Christ at death to wipe away. If any of these could live without sin and suffering they would have some colour for their plea; though even then, being yet 'in the body,' they should owe those tears to their brethren which they need not drop for themselves. The apostle I am sure bids us 'weep with those that weep,' and mourn with those that mourn, Rom. 12:15. Thus did Nehemiah fast for his afflicted brethren in Jerusalem when his own affairs were prosperous enough—being surrounded with the beams of the Persian emperor's favour. But there are none in mortal flesh free from sin or exempted from sorrow; and therefore a mourning habit may sometimes become the best of saints on earth. 'They that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses,' Matt. 11:8.

Glorified saints, who dwell in the King of heaven's court, are always clad with joy, but this on earth is the saint's holiday suit. As he hath now and then his rejoicing days, so he wants not his days for mourning. 'The days will come,' saith our Saviour of his disciples, 'when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast,' Matt. 9:15—and surely they lived in gospel times. If these merry professors had been by Paul to see him how he beat down his body and chastised himself with fasting, they surely would have chid him for his pains, and thought him ignorant of his Christian liberty. The worst I wish these poor deluded souls is, that they who are so much for joy here meet with no

mourning in another world. It is but an ill sign when men quarrel with a duty for its strictness, and slip the yoke off their necks because the wanton flesh saith it is uneasy. These are like Ephraim, whom the prophet compares to a heifer 'that loveth to tread out the corn,' but not to plough. That is hard hungry work. A thanksgiving day, *that* brings a feast with it. This they like, and are content it should pass for a gospel duty. But a day of prayer and fasting, wherein they are to pinch their carcass a little, this will not go down. But is there no feast except that it goes down the throat and fills the belly? Certainly this blessed duty deserves not the ill name it hath given unto it by men of sensual spirits. It is indeed to carnal wretches a heavy yoke, a tedious work. As the milk kine carried the ark went bellowing for their calves that were taken from them, so do these in a fast-day after their employments and enjoyments of the world, from which they are for that time restrained. Alas! poor creatures, as the ark was nothing but a burden to the kine, so the duty is no other to them. But the true saint, that knows what ease his poor heart feels in exonerating his conscience by humble confession of sin, what sweet satisfaction his soul meets with in communion with God, and what faith and inward peace he carries away with him from the duty, will give you another character of this ordinance than so. He will tell you he had rather be fasting with God than feasting at a king's table. What saint had not rather be fasting on the mount with Moses, than eating and playing with the carnal Israelites below the hill? Who would not miss a meal for his body, to satiate his soul with those delights that the presence of God in such an ordinance affords? Who would not take pleasure in mourning and weeping for sin, to have the tears he shed dried up with kisses from his Saviour's mouth? It is indeed to him that stands sucking of the bush—I mean the external part of the duty—a dry sapless service; but to him that is taken into the wine-cellar, and there drinks full draughts of the love of God, it is a most sweet soul-ravishing ordinance. The lower exterior part of the duty, like the bottom of Jacob's ladder, stands on the earth, and leaves the creature on the earth also where it found him—for 'bodily exercise profiteth little;' but the top and spiritual part of it reacheth to heaven, and

mounts the gracious soul thither, even unto bosom communion with God. There is as much difference between a saint and a hypocrite or carnal soul in this duty, as there is between a thief locked up with his keeper in a prison, and a scholar locking up himself in his study to read some book that he is greatly delighted with; to the one it is a grievous burden, to the other an incomparable pleasure.

[THE SEASONS *for extraordinary prayer.*]

*Question Third.* What are the special seasons wherein the Christian is to take up the practice of this duty of extraordinary prayer?

*Answer.* I answer, in general, *any extraordinary occasion, as it emergeth in the course of providence in the Christian's life.* This kind of prayer is not of constant use, as ordinary prayer is; this is food, that physic. And it were absurd to be taking physic all the year long; which shows the folly of the Papists in their fasts, which are holden at set times, whether affairs be prosperous or not prosperous, ordinary or extraordinary. I would not be thought here to speak against set fasts; we have had our monthly fasts, but the extraordinary cause for which they were appointed continued. But to instance in a few special seasons wherein the Christian hath a fit occasion to make use of this extraordinary duty.

*Season 1.* When the Christian is to set upon any more than ordinary *enterprise, wherein he may meet with great difficulty or danger, and the issue whereof will be a great mercy or affliction.* Now is a fit season to take up this extraordinary duty, as an excellent means whereby all mountains of intervening difficulties may be levelled, and his undertaking be crowned with happy success. Thus Esther, before she adventured upon that heroic attempt of going uncalled into the king's presence to beg the life of her people, given to the butchery and slaughter by the king's seal at bloody Haman's request—an action that carried death and danger on the face of it—she first goes to God by fasting and prayer, and gets all the auxiliary forces of others' prayers she can, and, attended with this convoy, she, against the Persian law, presents herself before the king, and speeds; for instead of losing her own life, which was forfeited by the law for this attempt, she reverseth the unjust judgment passed upon

the life of her people, and recoils it upon the head of him that laid the plot. Prayer had so unlocked and opened the king's heart that she hath but what she asks at the king's hands.

No such engine to facilitate and carry on any great design to its desired end as this of extraordinary prayer. Who could have believed that Ezra and his company of pilgrims should all get safe from Babylon to Jerusalem, being so generally hated everywhere? Now what stratagem doth this leader of his people use to secure his passage and escape the fury of his enemies? Doth he desire a band of the Persian king to be their guard? No; he hath gloried so much of that God they served, that he is ashamed the king should think now he was not willing to cast himself upon his protection; but he goes to fasting and prayer, Ezra 8:21. Then they take their march, and find the way all along cleared before them, ver. 31. Our blessed Saviour hath sanctified this duty for this end in his own holy example, who, when to choose and send forth the twelve to preach the gospel, that they may speed the better in their embassy, he sends them forth under the conduct of prayer, and to that end spends the preceding night himself in prayer, Luke 6:12, 13. Now, though every Christian is not called forth, or likely to be in all his life, to such great and public enterprises as some others are, yet if he will observe the several passages of his more private employments and turns of providence in the course of his life, he shall find many such actions occur as give him a fair hint to make use of this duty. Haply thou art to enter upon a calling, or, in the calling thou art, meetest with many difficulties and temptations. Thou hast a long journey or dangerous voyage to take; thou hast to do with a subtle potent adversary, though thy cause be good, yet like to outwitted or overborne. Here is a fair errand put into thy mouth to go before the Lord for counsel, assistance, and protection. May be thou hast children, and these are to be disposed of into callings or new relations; and is not this a great undertaking wherein thou hast a great adventure going in their bottom? Will not the issue that depends on this great change of their condition lay the foundation of much grief or joy to thee? Yet how slighty are many herein, as if it were of little more importance to marry a child than it is to put off a horse or cow at a fair! Few matches


are, alas! thus made in heaven—I mean by solemn prayer engaging God in the business. Abraham's servant puts many parents to shame—he hard at prayer for success in his journey when sent to take a wife for his master's son, and not they for their children. But I wonder not that they who propound low and carnal ends to themselves in such enterprises, should forget by prayer both to ask his counsel in the match, or invite him to offer his blessing at the wedding.

*Season 2.* When the Christian is *in the dark concerning any truth, and cannot satisfy his judgment by humble and diligent inquiry he hath made after it.* Now is a fit season to take up this extraordinary duty as an excellent means to be led into the knowledge of the mind of God therein. Prayer is the proper key to unlock God's heart, and he alone can open our understandings and satisfy our scruples. This course Daniel took, and got more understanding by his fasting and prayer than by all his study, for a messenger is sent from heaven to 'give him skill and understanding,' Dan. 9:20-23, and again, ch. 10:12. In both he sped. And the angel is careful to let him know that it was his extraordinary praying that procured this extraordinary favour, and also how acceptable his motion was, by the easy access and quick despatch it found with God; and therefore tells him in both, that he had no sooner set upon this course of afflicting his soul but he was heard, and the messenger ordered to give him an answer to his prayer. Surely prayer hath not lost its credit in heaven, but is now as welcome to God as ever; and though an angel be not the messenger to bring the saint an answer, yet he shall have it by as sure and more honourable hand—even the Holy Spirit, whose office is to lead his people into truth. Thus Cornelius, Acts 10, came to be instructed in the mystery of the gospel, upon his extraordinary seeking of God by fasting and prayer. It is very probable this good man in those divided times, wherein he saw many zealous for the old way of Jewish worship, and others preach up an new way, stood in some doubt what to do; and this might stir him up by fasting and prayer to ask counsel, and beg further light, of God, to direct him in the way of truth, as may seem by the tenor of the message sent him from God in the vision while he was at prayer, which bade him send to Joppa 'for one Simon, whose surname is Peter,...and he shall tell thee what thou

oughtest to do,' ver. 5, 6. And certainly, in our divided times, wherein there is so much difference in judgment, had there been less wrangling among ourselves, and more wrestling with God for his teaching Spirit, we had been in a fairer way to find the door of truth, which so many are yet groping for. The way of controversies, and contentious disputes raise this dust, and blow it most into their eyes that gallop fastest in it, so that they miss the truth, which humble souls find upon their knees at the throne of grace. When the apostles were quarrelling, then they got nothing from Christ but a chiding, Luke 22:24, &c.; but when they were praying together earnestly, then he sent the Spirit to teach them, Acts 2.

*Season 3.* When the Christian is *under any great affliction*. Now is a fit season if he be able for the work. 'Is any among you afflicted? let him pray,' James 5:13. That is, let him then be more than ordinary in this duty; for he must, yea will, if a Christian, pray where he is not afflicted as well as when he is. But the meaning is, he must now pray after an extraordinary manner; he must now pray with more vehemency; for, though in all our addresses to God, we are to express the lively workings of our hearts to him, without which our prayers are unsavoury (cold prayers ever find cold welcome); yet God expects, and it always hath been the care of, holy men in their extraordinary applications to this duty of prayer, to wind up their affections to a pitch higher than ordinary, having the advantage of some special occasion to help them thereunto. Look upon them in some great strait and affliction, and you shall find them exceeding themselves, and put upon them a prince-like spirit. So Jacob behaved himself in prayer, Gen. 32:28. As a prince fighting in the field for his crown and kingdom, he wrestled with the angel, who was no other than God himself; that is, he strained as it were, every vein in his heart, and put forth his whole might in prayer, as a wrestler would do that grapples with a potent adversary. Moses is so transported in zeal for Israel, when a dismal cloud of wrath impended them for their idolatry, that he offers rather to die upon the place, than to go down the mount and not carry the joyful news of a pardon with him, Ex. 32:32. And Nehemiah, when he had been afflicting his soul and praying before the Lord, it was with such vehemency that the anguish of

his spirit looked out at his eyes, and left a mark of sorrow upon his very countenance, which his prince could observe as he waited on him.

Again, in affliction we are called to pray, as more intensively, so more extensively; I mean longer and oftener. Thus I find that  of our Saviour, rendered by Lucas Brugensis and others, *prolixius orabat*—he prayed longer, that is, he spent more time than ordinary in it. Thrice one after another we find him at it, Matt. 26:44. His agony was great and the waves of his affliction violent, and therefore he doubles, yea trebles, his prayer with deep sighs and strong cries to his Father. Nature never strains so to its utmost, as when it is oppressed; then temples work, lungs heave, and heart pants; so in affliction the spirit of prayer should be increased and intended.

*Season 4.* When the Christian is buffeted with any temptation, or overpowered with a corruption, and *cannot, with the use of ordinary means, quench the one or master and mortify the other*. If the short dagger of ordinary prayer will not reach the heart of a lust, then it is time to draw out this long sword of extraordinary prayer upon it. There is a 'kind' of devils, our Saviour tells us, that 'goes not out but by prayer and fasting,' Matt. 17:21. You know the occasion of this speech was that complaint of one concerning his lunatic son, 'I brought him to thy disciples and they could not cure him.' Thus some poor souls complain they have come to the word preached so long, in their daily prayers begged power over such a lust, resolved against it many a time, and none of these means could cure it; what can they now do more? Here thou art told. Bring thy condition to Christ in this solemn ordinance of prayer and fasting; this hath at last been the happy means to strengthen many a poor Christian to be avenged on those spiritual enemies which have outbraved all the former, and like Samson to pull down the devil's house upon his head.

*Season 5.* When *sin doth abound more than ordinary in the times and places we live in*. Sinning times have ever been the saints' praying times. This sent Ezra with a heavy heart to confess the sin of his people, and to bewail their abominations before the Lord, Ezra 9. And Jeremiah tells the wicked rout of his degenerate age that his 'should weep in secret places for

their pride,' Jer. 13:17. Indeed sometimes sin comes to such a height and insolence, that this is almost all the godly can do, to get into a corner and bewail the general pollutions of the present age; as he told Luther, *abi, frater, in cellam et dic miserere Domine*—go, brother, into a cell and bewail. 'If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?' Ps. 11:3. Such dismal days of national confusion our eyes have seen, when foundations of government were destroyed, and all hurled into a military confusion. When it is thus with a people, what can the righteous do? Yes, this they may, and should do, '*fast and pray.*' There is yet a God in heaven to be sought to, when a people's deliverance is thrown beyond the help of human policy or power. Now is the fit time to make their appeal to God, as the words following hint, 'The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven,' ver. 4; in which words God is presented sitting in heaven as a temple, for their encouragement, I conceive, in such a desperate state of affairs, to direct their prayers thither for deliverance. And certainly this hath been the engine that hath been above any instrumental to screw up this poor nation again, and set it upon the foundation of that lawful government from which it was so dangerously slid.

*Season 6.* To name no more, *times of great expectation are times for extraordinary prayer.* When the people of God have been big with expectation of great mercies approaching, then have they been more abounding in prayer. As the cocks crow thickest towards break of day, so the saints, the nearer they have apprehended the accomplishment of promises made to his church, the more instant they use to be in prayer. When a woman with child her reckoning is near out, then she desires her midwife to be at hand. And prayer hath had the name of old for its excellent usefulness to obstetricate mercies. 'The children are come to the birth,' saith good Hezekiah; and then he desires the help of the prophet's prayer for the fair delivery of it: 'Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left,' Isa. 37:3, 4. When Daniel the prophet had learned by study that the happy period of the seventy years' captivity, bound upon the Jews' neck for their sin, was now at hand, Dan. 9:1, then in an extraordinary manner he sets himself to pray and afflict his soul before the Lord. And we have reason to hope that spiritual Babylon—

Rome, I mean—is not long-lived; it is high time therefore that the saints should fall more earnestly than ever to dig her grave for her by their prayers.

[THE REASONS *for extraordinary prayer.*]

*Question Fourth.* But why is extraordinary prayer to be *superadded by the Christian to his ordinary exercise of it in his daily course?*

*Answer 1.* Extraordinary prayer is superadded in *obedience to the command of God.* He commands not only that we should '*pray always,*' but '*with all prayer*' also, and extraordinary prayer is one kind among the rest. And let none of us say it is not enough to pray once or twice every day, but we must upon some occasions devote a whole day also, to the damage of calling and family? O what niggards would some be towards God, were they left free to devote what time they thought fit for his worship? This cavil sounds too like that of Judas: 'To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor,' Matt. 26:8, 9. 'But this he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief.' Truly so, when I hear some carnal wretches cry out against this waste of time in praying and fasting—'how much might the improvement of that time, if laid out in their callings, have advantaged their families, wives, and children'—I am ready to think it is not because they have such a care of their relations as they pretend (for they who grudge a day for prayer can throw, some of them, many away at the ale-house or in idleness), but they carry thievish hearts in their bosoms, which love to rob God of his due, and care not how little service they put him off with. Is he a loyal subject that pays the ordinary tribute to his prince, but, if occasion of state requires a subsidy, refuseth this, or doth it grudgingly? God's commands are none of them, no not this which carries some outward severity on it, so grievous, that any should need to groan or grumble under them. Those yokes—duties and commands, I mean—whose outside seem most hard have the softest lining within. What seem harder than suffering? and yet when are the saints fuller of heaven's joy? What duty more austere than this of fasting and afflicting our souls? and yet in the breast of this lion, that scares sensual wretches, the



Christian finds the sweetest honey-comb of inward comforts. Temple-work is sure to be well paid if well done; though it be never so little work in his house, God will not have it done gratis. None shall kindle a fire on his altar for naught. And therefore he takes it in great disdain at their hands who durst say, 'What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?' Mal. 3:14. Whereas the fault was not in the duty, but in themselves, that they got no more by it. As if a naughty servant should bring himself by his riot and excess to poverty, and then give out a hard master hath undone him.

*Answer 2.* It is superadded to *comport with the providence of God, by a suitable return of duty to his actings and dispensations towards us.* When God is extraordinary in his providence, he expects his people should be more than ordinary in seeking of him. What else means that of the prophet? 'Thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel,' Amos 4:12. Here God alarms them by his extraordinary proceedings intended against them, to take the hint of this warning, and apply themselves speedily to the solemn practice of repentance and humbling their souls, as a suitable posture to meet God in, and keep off the storm of his wrath now gathering against them. Is it not high time for a nation to betake them to their defensive arms when a mighty host is marching against them? So, Isa. 26:20, 21, 'Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee,' &c. Here he sends his people to their chambers and closets, that they may, by afflicting their souls and fervent prayers, find a hiding in the day of his indignation. And why must they do thus? 'For behold the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity,' ver. 21. The rising of God out of his place imports some notable enterprise he is about to do; and when the master riseth, it is not manners for the servant to sit still, but to rise also and prepare to follow him where he goes. God takes special notice how we behave ourselves and comport with his dispensations of judgment or mercy, 'In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning,' Isa. 22:12, that is, he called them by the voice of his providence as well as his prophets, the nature of which was such, that had not their lusts bungled

up their ears and made them deaf, they could not but hear and understand that now was the time, if ever, that God expected to see them in sackcloth and tears humbling their souls before him. Now see how heinously he takes their security and profane slighting of his providence, 'And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord of hosts,' ver. 14. Few sins more provoke God than this. 'Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up,' Ps. 28:5. So, 'And thou...O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this,' Dan. 5:22. This lost him his life and kingdom, as the contrary saved Ahab's for a time, though it was not so sincere as it ought. A temporal humiliation got him a temporal benefit.

*Answer 3.* It is superadded for the *great influence that this extraordinary duty solemnly performed would have upon our whole life and course of godliness.* To keep the body healthful requires not only daily food, but now and the physic also; for in the soundest constitution, and that advantaged with the best care and temperance, there will, in time, such a quantity of superfluous humours gather, that nature without help cannot digest. And truly the temper of the soul is as infirm and needs as much tending as the body. Ordinary prayer is the saint's food. He can as little miss the constant returns of it as his usual meals. But extraordinary is his physic, to clear and discharge his soul of those distempers which it contracts, and cannot conquer by the use of ordinary means; as also to advance and heighten the Christian's graces unto a further degree of strength and activity. As God hath, in his wise providence, ordered one star of great influence to be at a certain season of the year in conjunction with the sun, for the more effectual ripening of the harvest in these colder parts of the world; so hath he, in the same wisdom, appointed for the Christian's spiritual advantage and help in this cold climate of the world, that this solemn duty should now and then be taken into conjunction with our ordinary exercise of devotion; for want of which it is that many ripen slower both in their graces and comforts than some of their fellow-saints who sit often under the influences of this powerful quickening ordinance.

[DIRECTIONS for extraordinary prayer.]

*Question Fifth.* What counsel or *direction* may be given to the acceptable and successful performance of this solemn duty?

*Answer.* I come now to shut up my discourse on this point, in answering this last question. A serious necessary one it is, for indeed it is an edge-tool of excellent use, but dangerous in his hand that knows not how to use it. Like some physic, if it doth not purge it poisons. In the same fat soil where the corn is best the weeds also are rankest. Neither grace nor sin grow to such a height anywhere as in those that converse much with this solemn ordinance. And therefore, as they who are in a ship upon a swift stream had need the more look to the steerage of it, because they will be carried amain either to their port or wreck; so have they to be reason to be very careful in the managery of this service, the issue whereof cannot be ordinary because the duty is extraordinary. Now the counsel or direction to be given must necessarily be divided into these three general heads.

1. Some preparatory direction before the duty.
2. Something to be observed in the performance of the duty.
3. Something after the despatch of it.

The city cannot be safe unless the whole line be kept. It is all one whether the enemy breaks in at the front flank or rear of an army; or whether the ship be taken at sea, or sink in the haven when the voyage is over.

[What is needful BEFORE extraordinary prayer.]

1. *Requisite.* Some preparatory direction before the duty. Now there is a double preparation requisite —the one more remote, the other immediate; or, if you please, habitual preparation and actual.

(1.) There is a *remote and habitual preparation*, of great use to the performance of this solemn duty of extraordinary prayer. It lies in this, to look, Christian, that thou showest a conscionable care in thy daily walking, and the constant exercise of this duty in thy ordinary daily offices of devotion, or else thou art like to make but bad work when thou comest to engage in the extraordinary.

(a) *Thy neglect in the ordinary duty* will exceedingly indispose thee for the extraordinary. Who would take a foggy horse out of the pasture to run a race? In extraordinary prayer the soul is to be put on her full speed, all her powers to strained to their utmost ability, and to continue long in the work also. Is he fit for so swift and long a race, whose soul is not kept in breath by the daily exercise of ordinary prayer, but lets his graces, if he hath any, to be choked up with sloth or formality? The more any member is used, the stronger it is. The right hand, which is our working hand, hath more activity than the left, that is used less. A weakness will certainly invade the powers of thy lazy soul, which, though thou perceivest not as thou sittest in thy chair of sloth, will appear when thou risest, and thinkest to go forth in any solemn duty, as thou wert wont to do; then thou wilt find, with Samson, that thou hast lost thy strength in the lap of sloth and negligence. As fasting is too strong for new bottles, so it is too sweet wine for to be put into fusty and mouldy ones. Now the only way to keep a bottle or cask sweet, is to not let it stand long empty without any liquor in it.

(b) As it will indispose thee for this solemn duty, so it is *abad symptom concerning thy spiritual state itself*, which is worse than the former. Grace works uniformly, and discovers a comely proportion in its actings. Haply you may see the son of a prince on some high day in richer and more glorious apparel than on another day that is ordinary; but you shall never find him in sordid, ragged, and beggarly clothes. Still he will be clad as becomes a king's son. Possibly, yea, it is likely, that you may see the Christian come forth, in an extraordinary day and duty, with more enlargement of affections in prayer, and all his graces raised to a higher glory in their actings, than ordinary, but you shall never find him with his robe of grace laid aside. Still the true saint will declare his high birth by his everyday course. He will not live in the neglect of ordinary duties, and cast off communion with God, in his daily walking. O, it is the brand of a hypocrite to have his devotion come by fits, and, like a drift of snow, to lie thick in one place and none in another; to seem for zeal like angels at a time and live like atheists many weeks after. Surely grace acts more evenly and is never so unlike itself. It is ill living in that miser's house who hath never any good meat on his table but

when he makes a feast, and that is very seldom; or with him that upon an occasion hath a day of prayer, but starves himself and family, or pinches them in their daily fare. Well, never think of meddling with this extraordinary duty till thou inurest thyself to the ordinary exercise of prayer, and takest more care in thy daily walking with God.

(2.) There is more *close and immediate preparation required, and this I call actual preparation*. It is true, indeed, he that is conscientious and careful in the ordinary exercises of religion, hath a great advantage of him that either neglects them or is loose in them, for his heart must needs stand in a nearer disposition to this extraordinary service than the other—as he that is up and hath his clothes on, is more ready to go on his master's errand than he that is asleep in his bed. Yet, besides this care in our daily walking, there needs some further pains to be taken with his heart to raise it unto such a frame as may comport with this solemn service. The neat housewife, though she endeavours to keep her house clean, yet, against some good time, as they call it, she is more than ordinary curious in washing her rooms, and scouring her vessels, that they might not only be clean but bright; and so should the Christian. Now is the time for thee to scour off the dust thou contractest in thy daily course, and to brighten thy graces unto a further glory that appears in thy everyday walking, to do which will cost pains and require time.

The Christian is like some heavy birds, as the bustard and others, that cannot get upon the wing without a run of a furlong or two; or a great bell that takes some time to the raising of it. Now, meditation is the great instrument thou art to use in this preparatory work. Allow thyself some considerable portion of time, before the day of extraordinary prayer, for thy retirement, wherein thou mayest converse most privately with thy own heart. This cannot be done in a crowd, neither must it be left to the time of engaging in the extraordinary duty. We cannot do both duties together. The husbandman cannot whet his scythe and cut grass at once. Betake thyself therefore to thy closet, and in the first place call thy thoughts off the world, and as much as is possible clear thy soul of all that is foreign to the work thou art about; this is the wiping of the table-book before we can write anything well on it. Now the more effectually to

gather in thy heart to a holy seriousness, and compact thy thoughts together, it were expedient for thee at first to lay before thee the grand importance of the approaching service. Thou art going to stand before the great God, and that very near in an extraordinary duty, wherein thou wilt either sanctify or profane his reverend in a high degree, and accordingly art to expect his love or wrath in some choice blessing or dreadful curse, to be the issue and result of thy undertaking! Gird the loins of thy mind with some such awful apprehensions as these. As natural fear makes the spirits retire from the outward parts of the body to the heart, so this holy fear of miscarrying in so solemn a duty would be a means to call thy thoughts from all exterior carnal objects, and fix them upon the duty in hand; 'In thy fear will I worship,' Ps. 5:7. Such will the print on the wax be as the sculpture is on the seal. If the fear of God be deeply engraven on thy heart, there is no doubt but it will make a suitable impression on the duty thou performest. Well, now the court is set and silence commanded, a few particulars I shall propound for thy thoughts to go upon in this preparatory work.

[Three PREPARATORY directions.]

*First.* Examine thy soul, *what end thou propoundest to thyself in the intended service of extraordinary prayer*. None but a child or a fool will run before he knows what is his errand. The end is that which a wise man looks to before he sets his hand to any work, and the more weighty the enterprise is the more necessary this is.

1. Consider, *if the end thou propoundest be evil, the duty cannot be good*, because thy heart is not sincere in it. The sincerity of the heart discovers itself in the mark it sets up and end it aims at in a duty, not in the external performance of it. The thief and the honest traveller may be found riding in the same road, but they have different aims therein, and this distinguisheth them. Thus the saint and hypocrite join in the same duty, shoot as it were the same bow, but their eye takes not the same aim, and therefore the arrows meet not in the same butt. The prayers of one are rejected as abominable, and the other graciously accepted. Who more seemingly devout than the captive Jews that kept up a fast for seventy years

together? yet God gives them but little thanks for their pains, because their end was not right: 'When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?' Zech. 7:5. The faster a man gallops, if he be out of his way, it is the worse. Zeal is the best or worst thing in a duty. If the end be right, O it is excellent! but if wrong, stark naught. And it is no easy thing to propound a right end. The eye must be set right in the head before it can look right. If the piece be wrong made it will never carry the bullet straight to the mark. A false heart—and every carnal heart is such—cannot have a true end.

2. Consider that your endeavour in the duty will *bear proportion, and be commensurate, to the end you propound therein*. If your end be low, your endeavour will be no more than to reach that end; as he that intends to build a little cottage contents himself with ordinary stuff, clay and thatch; but he that designs some stately palace provides more precious materials. Thus David was very curious in the materials he laid aside for the temple: 'For the palace,' saith he, 'is not for man, but for the Lord God.' Therefore he 'prepared with all his might gold and silver,' &c., 1 Chr. 29:1-3. The hypocrite's ends in a fast are low and base—his credit with men, carnal profit, and the like. Accordingly, his endeavour is laid out on the external duty—a demure countenance, devout posture, and such expressions in prayer as may most take with those that hear him, and this is all he looks at. But the gracious soul saith with David, This palace I build, this duty I perform, 'is not for man, but for the Lord God,' and therefore his chief care is to provide more precious materials—a broken heart for sin in his confessions, faith and fervency in his petitions, love and thankfulness in his acknowledgments of mercies received.

*Question.* But *when is an evil end propounded in this duty?*

*Answer.* The end we propound may be evil, either intrinsically, when the thing we aim at is evil in its own nature, or else from some irregularity in placing it too high or low in our aim.

(1.) The ends that are *intrinsically evil*. To name two,

(a) When a person or a people shall *fast and pray to cover and more sleightily carry on any wicked enterprise*. This is a horrid evil, a

monstrous abomination. What is this but to hang out the sign of an angel at the door, that they may play the devil within the less suspected? Yet, such deep hypocrisy hath the heart of man discovered, that it dare come and lay its cockatrice egg under the very wing of God, and make use of this solemn ordinance as an expedient to hatch their wicked designs. The fox, they say, when hard put to it, will, to save himself, fall in among the dogs, and hunt among them as one of their company. Thus the hypocrite, the better to conceal his wicked projects, will run among the saints, and make as loud a cry in this duty and others as the best of them all. It is the devil's old trick, and he hath learned it his instruments, to wrap up wicked plots in the gilded covers of God's ordinances. What plotting and counterplotting was there between Shechem the son of Hamor and Simeon and Levi? and the expedient both used to accomplish their designs was an ordinance of God. The one hopes by submitting to it to hook into his hands the whole estate of Jacob's family—'shall not their substance be ours?' and the other persuades them to it that when they were sore they might butcher them without resistance. Absalom, that he might better play the traitor against his father, begs leave to pay his vow at Hebron. Jezebel sets her trap for Naboth, and that he may the more surely fall into her clutches, she croucheth and humbleth herself even before God in a fast. And the demure Pharisee, who bragged so much of his fasting, our Saviour was bold to tell him it was to 'devour the widows' houses.' But, as the father hath it, *manducant in terris quod apud inferos digerunt*—they devour on earth those morsels that will lie heavy on their stomachs in hell to be digesting to eternity. Thus the hypocrite, like antichrist, sits in the temple of God, and there commits his execrable abominations, turning a house of prayer into a den of thieves. O tremble at this great wickedness! It gives a crimson tincture to a sin when it is committed under the disguise of religion.

(b) When a person *thinks by fasting and prayer to satisfy God for his sin, or merit any favour at the hands of God*. This is wicked and abominable, and as contrary to the nature of prayer as buying is to begging. 'The poor,' saith Solomon, 'useth entreaties,' Prov. 18:23. 'Whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer,

but I would make supplication to my judge,' Job 9:15. We cannot have the benefit of the throne of grace till we quit our legal plea. Christ indeed pleads as righteous, and therefore desires what he asks for us as just, because he hath paid for it; but we pray as sinners, and therefore crave all as mercy, yea, though we plead Christ's merit, because he is the greatest and freest gift of all other. Yet, such is the pride of man's heart, that he had rather play the merchant, and tuck his duties for God's blessings, than be thought to receive them gratis. This was the temper of the carnal Jews. They thought to pacify God for their sin, as Jacob his angry brother, with the droves and flocks of duties which they presented him with, and thought their services undervalued when they were not accepted for good payment. Hence their bold expostulating the case with the Lord, 'Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?' Isa. 58:3. Such a high opinion they had of themselves. O take heed of this: pride turns an ordinance into an idol. God accepts our fasts and prayers when used for humiliation, but abhors them when we bring them for our justification. The Pharisee lost himself by his proud brags how oft he fasted, while the poor publican got the prize by a humble confession of his sin, Luke 18. He that thinks to wash his face with puddle water, instead of making it clean will leave it fouler. Truly our best tears are not over clean, and can they make us clean that need themselves to be washed? Holy Job durst not rely on his purity: 'If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment,' Job 9:30-32.

(2.) The end may be, though not intrinsically evil, yet evil from some irregularity in misplacing it; as when we make that our ultimate end which should only be our subordinate end in the duty. That which would be lawful standing in its proper place, becomes sinful when the ultimate end is crowded down to make room for that. The glory of God is to be the ultimate end, not only in every duty of worship, but in all our common actions also, even to eating and drinking. Those low actions are to be elevated to this high end, 1 Cor. 10:31. And good reason he should be our

utmost end from whom we received our beginning. All things are of him, and therefore fit they should be to him. The river-water empties itself into the bosom of the sea from whence it flows. Now, if we are to have so high an end in our lowest actions, then surely in our highest; and such are acts of worship, in which we have immediately to do with God, and are thence called priests, 'to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,' 1 Peter 2:5. There is indeed another end also for which ordinances are appointed, viz. to conduit-pipes for conveying all kind of blessings from God unto us; but this is an inferior end, and to be subordinated to the former, or else we make the glory of God an underling to our particular good, which God will not endure. Possibly we are in some great affliction. This sets us to prayer for deliverance. Thus far we keep our way. But then we turn aside when our deliverance is more regarded by us than his glory. This is to set the subject in his prince's chair; *uti Deo ut fruamur mundo*—to make use of God that we may enjoy the creature. Beware of this. Whatever we prefer in our desires above the glory of God is an idol-worship by us. The heart can engrave as well as the hand, and an idol in the heart is as bad as one set up in the house.

*Question.* But how may I find whether the glory of God, or the particular good thing I pray for, be that which I make my chief end in duty?

*Answer.* It may be discovered two ways: (a) By thy carriage in prayer. (b) By thy carriage after prayer.

(a) *By the carriage of thy heart in prayer.* If the glory of God be chiefly aimed at by thee, this will give a tincture to the whole duty, and be influential into every part of it; thou wilt suit thy requests to this end. For, as there is a secret force from the arm that draws the bow impressed on the arrow which carries it to the mark aimed at by the shooter, so there is a secret power which carries the soul out in duty to act suitably to the end he chiefly propounds and desires to obtain; for no man would willingly obstruct and hinder what above all he wisheth for. We will suppose pardon of sin is the mercy thou prayest for. Now if thou desirest sincerely the glory of God as well as this mercy, yea, above it, this will direct thee in thy confession of sin to afflict thy soul more for the dishonour thou hast by it reflected on God than the wrath thou

hast incurred thyself. So in thy petition, thou darest not beg thy pardon on terms that were dishonourable for God to give it on, but will desire the mercy in such a way as his glory may be both secured and advanced. Now God cannot pardon the sin of an impenitent wretch that holds still the love and liking of his lust without infinite wrong to his glorious name. And therefore, if his glory be so high in thy eye as thou sayest, thou wilt cry as earnestly for his sanctifying grace as for pardoning mercy, and not merely because thou canst not have pardon without it—as a sick man desires a bitter potion to save his life, not that he loves it—but because by it thou shalt be fitted to glorify him.

(b) It may be discovered by *thy carriage after duty*, and that in two particulars: when the thing prayed for is obtained, and also when denied.

When the mercy prayed for is *obtained*. If thou didst chiefly aim at the glory of God in begging it, thy chief care will be to lay it out for his glory now thou hast it; whereas he that aimed at himself in praying for it, will as little regard God in the using of it as he did in begging it. It is natural for things to resolve into their principles. The child that Hannah obtained of God she dedicates unto the Lord—and why? but because this was her end in praying for him, 1 Sam. 1:11 compared with ver. 28. When David's prayer is heard, and he delivered, mark what his resolve from this is, 'I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living,' Ps. 116:9. And again, 'O Lord, truly I am thy servant,...thou hast loosed my bonds,' ver. 16. He returns the mercy to God by improving it for him in a holy life. How can we think he aimed at the glory of God in praying for health that runs away from God as soon as he is set upon his legs? or, in praying for wealth, that lays it out upon his lusts?

Again, when the thing prayed for is *denied*. He that aims sincerely at God's glory in prayer for a mercy—I speak now of such mercies as are but conditionally promised—he will cheerfully submit to the will of God in a denial thereof, because God can in such petitions glorify himself by denying as well as granting them. David prayed and fasted for the life of his sick child. It dies notwithstanding. Now, does this denial make him fall out with God? is he clamorous and discontent? No, it raiseth no storm in his heart or lowering weather in his countenance to hinder him in the service of God.

He washeth his tears from his blubbered cheeks, changes his apparel, and goes cheerfully into the house of God and worshipeth, 11 Sam. 12:20, so powerfully did the will of God determine his will. Thus, as the heavenly bodies are by the *primum mobile* carried contrary to their particular inclination, so grace in a saint overrules his natural affection, and carries him into a compliance with the will of God when it crosseth his own. Our blessed Saviour had natural affections, which made him pray the bitter cup of his passion might, if possible, pass from him; yet not so but he was willing to take a denial, and therefore desires his Father to glorify himself, though it were by taking away his life, John 12:27, 28.

*Second.* The second thing thou art to do, having fixed thy end right, is to *make a private search into thy heart and life, whereby thou mayest be enabled more fully and feelingly to lay open thy condition before the Lord*. Now there are three heads of inquiry thou art to go upon: 1. For the sins thou hast committed. 2. For the mercies thou hast received. 3. For the wants thou liest under.

[Three heads of inquiry in searching into our heart and life.]

1. For the *sins thou hast committed*. The great business of a fast lies in the practice of repentance, and this cannot be done without a narrow scrutiny of the heart: 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord,' Lam. 3:40. The thief must be found before he can be tried, and tried before he is condemned and executed. Some sins no doubt may be taken and apprehended with little pains; but if thou beest true to God and thy own soul, thou wouldst not willingly let any of the company escape. How canst thou expect pardon for any that desirest not justice on all? and how canst thou say thou desirest justice on those sins which thou endeavourest not to apprehend? That constable that having a hue and cry brought him for a pack of thieves, and lets any get away rather than he will rise to search for them, shows his zeal to justice is little. I do not say thou wilt be able to find all. It is enough if by thy diligence thou givest proof of thy sincerity that thou wouldst not conceal any. Set thyself, therefore, in good earnest to the work. Beset

thy heart and life round, as men would do a wood where murderers are lodged. Hunt back to the several stages of thy life, youth, and riper years all the capacities and relations thou hast stood in, thy calling general and particular—every place where thou hast lived, and thy behaviour in them. Bid memory bring in its old records, and read over what passages are there written. Call conscience in to depose what it knows concerning thee, and encourage it to speak freely without mincing the matter: and take heed thou dost not snib this witness, as some corrupt judges use when they would favour a bad cause, or give it secret instructions—as David did Joab—to deal gently with thee. Be willing to have thy condition opened fully and all thy coverings turned up. For many times foul designs are hid with fair pretences, as the barrels of powder in the parliament cellar under coals and billets. Now, when thou hast gone as far as thou canst, begging Heaven's help in the thing, to search and try thee whether there be any further wickedness that thou hast not found out, then burden thy soul, judge thyself for them with all the brokenness of heart thou canst get, justifying God in the sentence denounced against thee for them. God will have thee lay thy neck on the block, though he means not to give the stroke. In a word, labour in thy meditations to give every sin its due accent, and suffer thy thoughts to dwell on them till thou findest the fire of thy indignation kindle in thy heart against them, yea, flame forth into such a holy zeal against them as makes thee put thyself under an oath to endeavour their utter ruin and destruction. Then thou art fit to beg thy own life when thou hast vowed the death of thy sins.

2. For the *mercies thou hast received*. Thou hast these—at least the most signal instances of them—upon the file, unless thou beest a very bad husband for thy soul. If God thinks fit to bottle his saints' tears, they should surely not forget to book his mercies. Now there are some special seasons wherein the saint should take down this chronicle of God's mercies to read in it; and this is one, when he is to engage in this extraordinary duty.

(1.) As the most effectual *means to melt his heart for sin*. Mercy gives the greatest aggravation to sin, and therefore must needs be the most powerful instrument to break the heart

for sin. With this God doth reproach sinning Israel, 'Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?' Deut. 32:6. They could not have been evil to such a height if God had not been so good to them. When God would break the sore of his people's sin, he compounds a poultice with his choicest mercies and lays this warm to their hearts. David had sat many months under the lectures of the law, unhumiliated for his bloody complicated sin; but Nathan is sent to preach a rehearsal sermon to him of the many mercies that God had graced him with, and while these coals are pouring on his head his heart dissolves presently, II Sam. 12. The frost seldom is quite out of the earth till the sun hath got some power in the spring to dissolve its bands; but then it sets it going. Neither will the hardness of the heart be to any purpose removed until the soul be thoroughly warmed with the sense of God's mercies. 'And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight,' Eze. 20:43. Where is that '*there*' but amidst the thoughts of his mercies, as by the context is manifest? A pardon from the prince hath made some weep whom the sight of the block and axe could not move. Sight of wrath inflames the conscience, but sense of mercy kindly melts the heart and overcomes the will.

(2.) As a *necessary ingredient in all our prayers*. 'With thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God,' Php. 4:6. This spice must be in all our offerings. He that prays for mercy he wants, and is not thankful for mercies received, may seem mindful of himself, but he is forgetful of God, and so takes the right course to shut his prayers out of doors. God will not put his mercies into a rent purse, and such is an unthankful heart, for it drops them soon out of his memory.

3. For the *wants thou liest under*. Before the tradesman goes to the fair he looks over his shop that he may know what commodity he most lacks. Thou goest to this duty to furnish thyself with the graces and mercies thou needest, is it not necessary then to see what thy present store is? what thy personal and what thy relational needs are?—not forgetting the public, in whose peace and happiness thou art so much concerned; for, if this ship sink, thou canst not be safe in thy private cabin. To leave all these

to occur and overtake thee, without charging thy thoughts with them by previous meditation, is too high a presumption for a sober Christian to take up. Besides, thy affections need help as well as thy memory. Nay, we may sooner bring our sins and wants to mind than lay them to heart. It is easier to know them, than knowing them to be deeply affected with them: and we do not come in prayer to tell God a bare story of these things, but feelingly and affectionately to make our moan and complaint with deep sighs and groans to him that can pardon the one and relieve us in the other.

*Third.* When thou hast upon this scrutiny kindled thy affections with the bellows of meditation into a deep sense of these things, then *furnish thyself with arguments from the promises to enforce thy prayers and make them prevalent with God.* The promises are the ground of faith, and faith when strengthened will make thee fervent, and such and such fervency ever speeds and returns with victory out of the field of prayer. 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,' James 5:16. Words in prayer are but as powder; the promise is the bullet that doth the execution, faith the grace that chargeth the soul with it, and fervency that gives fire, and dischargeth it into God's bosom with such a force that the Almighty cannot deny it entrance, because indeed he will not. Now, as he is an impudent soldier that leaves his bullets to be cast or fitted to the bore of his piece till he comes into the field; so he an unwise Christian that doth not provide and sort promises suitable to his condition and request before he engageth in so solemn a service. Daniel first searcheth out the promise—what God had engaged himself to do for his people, as also when the date of this promise expired; and when by meditation and study upon it he had raised his heart to a firm belief thereof, then he sets upon God with a holy violence in prayer, and presseth him close, not only as a merciful God, but righteous also, to remember them now the bond of his promise was coming out: 'O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem,' &c., Dan. 9:16. The mightier any is in the word, the more mighty he will be in prayer. Having despatched the preparatory directions, I now come to those that are to be observed in the duty itself.

[What is needful IN extraordinary prayer.]

2. *Requisite.* That necessary to be observed in the performance of the duty of extraordinary prayer. Because those directions will serve here which are given in another place for the duty of prayer in general, I shall name but a few, and those briefly.

(1.) When the time to engage thyself in this extraordinary duty is come, *beware thou settest not upon it in the confidence of thy preparation*, whatever thy care success therein hath been. What a worthy doctor directed ministers {to do} as to their preaching, is applicable to Christians as to their praying—he bade them study for their sermons as if they expected no divine assistance in the pulpit, and when they came in the pulpit to cast themselves upon divine assistance as if they had not studied at all. Thus prepare before thou comest to fast and pray, as if thou wert to meet with no further assistance in the duty; but when thou comest to the performance of the duty, cast thyself wholly upon divine assistance as if thou hadst not at all prepared. I know not which of the two doth worst, he that presumes upon God's assistance in this great work without preparation, or he that presumes on his preparation, and relies not after he hath done his best endeavour on the gracious assistance of God. The first shows he hath but mean thoughts of this solemn ordinance, yea, low and unworthy thoughts of the great God with whom he hath to do in it; and the other too high thoughts of himself.

What though now, Christian, thou marchest in goodly array and thy heart in order; how soon, alas! may all that preparation be routed, and thy chariot-wheels, which thou hast taken so much pains to oil, be set fast or knocked off! Now thy thoughts are united, thou thinkest; dost thou know where they will be a few minutes hence, if thy God help thee not to keep them together? Thou canst as easily hold the four winds in a bag, as keep the thoughts of thy fluid mind from gadding. Now thy affections are wound up to some height, but canst thou hold the pegs from slipping? Cannot God wither thy hand while thou stretchest it out in prayer; make thy tongue falter when thou wouldst make use of it; yea, suffer a sudden damp to fall on thy spirit that shall chill all thy affections and leave thy heart



as cold as a stone in thy bosom? 'Surely man at his best estate is vanity.' And this in regard of the temper of his spirit as well as in the constitution of his body and other {of} his worldly advantages. How oft do we see the gifts of his mind and the vivacity of his graces fade and wither in one duty, which at another, when the Spirit of God vouchsafed his gentle breath to quicken them, did flourish and send forth their fragrant spices in abundance! O do not then applaud thyself in thy gourd, which may so soon be smitten, neither commit so great an adventure as the success of this duty is in the leaking bottom of thy own preparation.

(2.) *Pray often rather than very long at a time.*

It is hard to be very long in prayer and not slacken in our affections. Those watches which are made to go longer than ordinary at one winding do commonly lose towards the end. The flesh is weak; and if the spirits of the body tire, the soul that rideth on this beast must needs be cast behind. Our Saviour, when he prayed for his life, we find him praying rather often than long at once. He who, in a long journey, lights often to let his beast take breath, and then mounts upon him again, will get to his journey's end may be sooner than he that puts him beyond his strength. Especially observe this in social prayers. For, when we pray in company we must consider them that travail with us in the duty; as Jacob said, 'I will lead on softly,...as the children are able to endure.' Yet I speak not this that you should give any check to the Spirit of God in his assistances, which sometime come so strong that the Christian is, as it were, carried with a full fore-wind, and hath the labour of tugging at the oar saved him. The ship of the soul goes with most facility when with most speed. Such assistances lift both the person praying and those that join with him—if gracious, and under the same quickenings—in a manner above all weariness. The Spirit brings spirits—affections, I mean—with him. Such a soul is like a vessel that runs full and fresh—what pours from him is quick and spiritfule; whereas at another time, when the Spirit of God denies these assistances, his prayer tastes flat to his own palate, if not to others'.

(3.) Be very careful to *approve thyself faithful in the soul-humbling work of the day.* Let thy confessions be free and full, the sense thou hast of thy sins be deep, and thy sorrow for them be

sincere and evangelical, for as thou quittest thyself in this, so thou wilt be in all the other parts of the duty. If thou confessest thy sin feelingly, thou wilt pray against it fervently. If thy sorrow be deep and reach to thy very heart and spirit, then thy petitions for pardoning mercy and purging grace will also come from the heart, be cordial, warm, and vehement. Whereas he that melts not in confession of sin will freeze in his prayers that he puts up against it; if his tears be false and whorish—*lachrymæ mentiri doctæ*, his desires cannot be true. Why do men ask in their petitions that grace which they do not in their hearts desire, but because they do not feel the smart, and are not loathed with the evil, of their sins that they confess? thus many confess their sins as beggars sometimes show their sores, which they are not willing to have cured. Again, as thou art in thy confession of sin, so thou wilt be in thy acknowledgments of mercy. The lower thou fallest in the abasement of thyself for thy sins, the higher thou wilt mount in thy praises for his mercies. The rebound of the ball is suitable to the force with which it is thrown down. The deeper the base is in confession, the shriller will the treble of thy praises be, for these mutually aggravate one another. the greater our mercies are, the greater are our sins; and the greater our sins, the greater are the mercies which, notwithstanding them, our good God vouchsafeth to us. So that the sense we have of one must needs be in proportion to the other; as we are afflicted for sin so will we be affected with mercy.

(4.) Improve the intervals of prayer with *seasonable and suitable meditations*, that thou mayest be fitted to return to the work with more life and vigour. Meditation is prayer's handmaid to wait on it both before and after the performance. It is as the plough before the sower, to prepare the heart for the duty of prayer, and the harrow to cover the seed when it is sown. As the hopper feeds the mill with grist, so doth meditation the heart with matter for prayer. Now, if it be necessary that thou shouldst consider before duty what thou art to pray, then surely after duty to make reflection on thyself how thou didst pray. The mill may go and yet no corn be ground. Thus thou mayest confess many sins, and yet thy heart be broken and ground with sorrow for none of them all. Thou mayest pray for many graces, and exercise little or no grace

in thy praying for them—thy heart being lazy, and putting no weight to the work—without which these spices are not broken, and so send not forth their sweet savour. Look therefore back upon the past duty, and observe narrowly what the behaviour of thy heart was in it. If thou findest it to have been lazy, and drew loose in its gears, or played the truant by gadding from the work with impertinent thoughts—in a word, if under the power of any sinful distemper, be sure at thy return to the duty of prayer that thou chargest this home upon thyself with shame and sorrow. This is the only way to stay God's hand and stop him from commencing a suit against thee: 'If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged,' I Cor. 11:31. *Ubi desinit justitia incipit judicium*—where justice takes end judgment begins. If we do not justice on ourselves, then God will right himself as well as he can. Indeed thou canst not in faith pray for pardon of these sins till thou hast shown thyself on God's side by entering thy protest against them. Moses took the right method—he expressed his zeal first for God against Israel's sin of the golden calf, and then fell hard to the work of prayer to God for the pardon of it. He durst not open his lips for them to God till he had vented his zeal for God, Ex. 32:26 compared with ver. 30, 31. And if he took this course when to intercede for others, much more then shouldst thou when to pray for the pardon of thy own sin.

Again, if upon this review of thy prayer thou findest thy heart was warm in the work, that thy affections flowed out to God, and his reciprocated loves again by unbosoming himself to thee, take heed that no secret pride robs thee of thy new got treasure; be humble and thankful, remembering they were not thy own wings on which thou wert carried. And also, be careful to improve these divine favours given to encourage thee in the work, as the handfuls of ears of corn let fall for Ruth in the field of Boaz. God would not that they should stop thy mouth, but open it wider when thou comest again to pray. Did thy heart begin to melt in thy bosom? O now cry for more brokenness of heart. Did thy God cast a kind look on thee? let it set thee a longing for fuller discoveries of his love. When the beggar sees the rich man putting his hand to his purse he cries more earnestly. God is now on the giving hand, and this should embolden thee to ask; as Abraham, who, as God yielded, made

his approaches closer, improving the ground which he got by inches for a further advantage to gain more, Gen. 18:27.

[What is needful AFTER extraordinary prayer.]

3. *Requisite.* That which is *necessary after extraordinary prayer.* The third word of direction is to the Christian, how he should carry himself when the day for extraordinary prayer is over, and this lies in a holy watch that he is to set upon himself. He that prays and watcheth not, is like him that sows a field with precious seed, but leaves the gate open for hogs to come and root it up; or him that takes great pains to get money, but no care to lay it up safely when he hath it. If Satan cannot beat thee in the field, yet he hopes to have thee at an advantage when thou hast disbanded thy forces, the duty be past, and thou liest in a careless posture. Esau promised himself an opportunity of avenging himself on Jacob: 'The days of mourning,' saith he, 'for my father are at hand; then will I slay him,' Gen. 27:41. Thus saith Satan: The days of mourning and fasting will soon be over; he will not be always upon his knees praying, not always beating down his body with fasting, and then I will fall upon him. Now one of these two ways thy danger is like to come upon thee—either by his wounding thy faith or slackening thy care in thy obediencial walking; and if he can do either, he will give a sad blow to thy prayers.

(1.) Look therefore after such a day *to thy faith.* To pray and not to act faith, is to shoot and not look where the arrow lights; to send a ship with merchandise to sea and look for no return by the voyage. Thou hast in prayer laboured to overcome God to hear and help thee; now take as much pains to overcome thy heart into a quiet waiting on God and entire confidence in him. When Jehoshaphat had ended his public fast, he stands up the next day and speaks these words to his people that had joined with him in that solemn duty, 'Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper,' II Chr. 20:20. So when our blessed Saviour had taught his disciples to pray, then he presseth them entirely to commit themselves and their affairs to that God to whom they prayed, Matt. 6:19-34. Truly else extraordinary prayer is but extraordinary prattle;



we mock God, and our prayers will mock us, for no fruit will come of them. The hunter may want his supper, though his dog runs fast and mouths it well, if, when he comes at the prey, he dares not fasten upon it. Now it is faith's office to fasten on the promise and take hold of God, without which thy loud cry in prayer is bootless and fruitless. O canst thou trust thy cause with the lawyer, after thy opening it to him; and put thy life into the physician's hand by following his prescriptions, when thou hast acquainted him with thy disease; and darest not thou venture thy stake in God's hand, after thou hast poured thy soul forth to him in prayer! This is a great folly. Why shouldst thou think omnipotency cannot help, or truth and faithfulness will not? Yea, a grievous sin to bring the name of the great God into question by thy unbelief. Yet this our Saviour complains sadly to be the usage God meets with at their hands from whom he might expect better. 'Shall not God avenge his own elect which cry day and night to him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.' What greater security can the heart of a saint desire more than the word of a faithful God? yet few to be found after all their praying for deliverance that can entirely wait for the same. 'Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?' Luke 18:8.

(2.) Look after a day of extraordinary prayer *to thy obediential walking*. Solomon's advice is, to 'keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God,' Ecc. 5:1. Mine at present is, to look to thy foot as thou comest from it. Thou mayest do thyself more mischief than all the devils in hell can do thee. They cannot intercept thy prayers and hinder the happy return of them into thy bosom, but thou mayest soon do it: 'Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear,' Isa. 59:1, 2. This is the whisperer that separateth chief friends; that makes God, our best friend, stand aloof from his people and their prayers. Be as careful, Christian, after a fast, as a man would be after strong physic. A cold caught now—a little disorder in thy walking—may be of sad consequence. Remember that as thou hast left thy prayers, so thy vows, with the Lord. As thou

lookest God should answer the one, so he expects thou shouldst pay the other. Break thy promise to him and thou dischargest God with thy own hand of any mercy he owes thee. It is folly to think thou canst bind God and leave thyself free.—We have despatched then the first branch of the distinction of the kinds of prayer, which held forth the *diversos modos orandi*—diverse manners of praying; from which hath been shown, that we are to pray with all manner of prayer, *ejaculatory* and *composed*, *solitary* and *social*, *private* and *public*, *ordinary* and *extraordinary*; and we now go on to the second.

## BRANCH SECOND.

[*'All prayer' viewed as to DIVERSITY IN MATTER.*]

Passing from what we have said of diverse manner in prayer, we are now to consider the *diversam materiam orationis*—the diverse matter of prayer. And thus, to pray with all prayer and supplication, is to encircle the whole matter of prayer within the compass of our duties, and not to leave anything out of our prayers which God would have taken in. Now this diversity of prayer's matter, some think they find in the two words of the text,  and ; but I shall not ground my discourse on so nice a criticism. We will content ourselves with the division which the same apostle makes: 'In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God,' Php. 4:6; and, 'Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks,' 1 Thes. 5:17, 18. In both which places the whole matter of prayer is comprehended in these two: FIRST. Request or petitionary prayer. SECOND. Thanksgiving. These two are like the double motion of the lungs, by which they suck in and breathe out the air again. In the petitionary part of prayer we desire something at God's hands; in thanksgiving we return praise to him for mercies received from him. I begin with the petitionary part of prayer.

[*THE PETITIONARY part of prayer.*]

FIRST. The first of the twofold division of the whole matter of prayer, viz. *petitionary prayer*. This is threefold. *First*. Precatory. *Second*.

Deprecatory. *Third.* Imprecatory. As for that of intercession, we shall leave it to another place, under those words 'supplication for all saints.'

[*First kind of petitionary prayer*—THE PRECATORY.]

*First. Precatory prayer*; that part of prayer, I mean, *wherein the Christian desires of God, in the name of Christ, some good thing of the promise to be given unto him.* Now the good things promised are either spiritual or temporal—those that respect our souls and our eternal salvation, or those which relate to our bodies and temporary estate of them in this life. Such a large field hath the Christian given him for his requests to walk in, for 'godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,' 1 Tim. 4:8. This earth below, to a saint, is a land of promise, though not the land which is chiefly promised. God hath not promised him heaven but left him to the wide world to shift for his outward subsistence, he hath not bid them live by faith for their souls, but live by their wits for their bodies. No, he that hath promised to 'give' him 'grace and glory,' hath also said, 'no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly,' Ps. 84:11. Their bill of fare is provided as well as their inheritance hereafter. Now all that I shall do here is to put a compass into your hand, by the help of which you may steer your course safely, when you are bound in your requests to either point of the promise, whether it be for temporal or spiritual mercies. And that I may not run you beside the true channel upon rocks or sands, I shall touch the needle of that compass I would commend to your use with the lodestone of Scripture, from which we may gather a fourfold similitude to be used in our request for spiritual and temporal good things promised, and a threefold dissimilitude also.

1. There is a *fourfold similitude to be used in precatory prayer.*

(1.) Whether thou prayest for temporal or spiritual blessings, thou must pray *in the sense of thy own unworthiness*, for thou deservest neither. When Christ prays for us, he pleads as an advocate for justice, because he paid before he prays, and asks but what he gives the price for. But we poor creatures are beggars, and must crave all as pure alms, for the money comes not out of our purse that made the purchase; neither was God the Father bound to engage his Son,

or the Son to engage himself, in our recovery, who were fallen by forfeiture into the hands of divine justice. So that mercy is the only plea thou who art a sinner canst make with God. Thou *mayest* with *man* stand upon thy desert. Thus Jacob claimed his wages at Laban's hand; but when he hath to do with God he changeth his plea, and sues *sub formâ pauperis*—in the form of the poor: 'I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant,' Gen. 32:10. So Daniel: 'We do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies.' No blessing so great but may be obtained where mercy is the plea, and none so little that we merit. If thou wouldst therefore beg anything at God's hand, confess thou deservest nothing. Then are we fit to receive great things from God when we are least in our own eye; then nearest the crown when we judge ourselves unworthy of a crust. The proud Pharisee brought his righteousness in his prayer to God, and carried away his sin bound upon him; the publican brought his sin in his humble confession, and carries away his absolution and justification with him. Thus God crosseth his hands like Jacob in giving his blessings.

(2.) In both thou must pray *in faith*, for both spiritual and temporal blessings are promised, and therefore thou art to believe that God will be as faithful and punctual in the performance of the less promises that concern this life, as in the more weighty matters which respect thy eternal happiness in the other. Indeed, he promiseth spiritual blessings *in specie*—grace and glory he will give; but temporal enjoyments *in valore*—either in kind or value—'no good thing will he withhold.' And it is fit he should judge when a temporal enjoyment will be good for us, and when it will be better to give some other thing in the lieu of it. Hence that method in our Lord's prayer, first to pray, 'Thy will be done,' before we pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' But the seal is the same which ratifies temporal promises with that which he sets to spiritual; his truth and faithfulness are as deeply obliged to perform temporal promises, according to the tenure in which they are made, as to make good the other. And therefore we are as strongly to acquiesce in his care and providence for our protection and provision here, as for our salvation hereafter; else he had done his people

wrong to take them off from an anxious care for those things which he meant not to charge his providence with. Certainly if he bids us be careful for none of these things, but only let our requests be made known to him, he intends not our loss by our ease, but thereby would have us understand and believe that he will take the care upon himself, and give us at last a full account of his love and faithfulness in the issue of his providence, how all was disposed for our best advantage.

(3.) We must join our endeavour *in the use of all means with our prayers*, whether they be put up for spiritual or temporal blessings. Lazy beggars are not to be relieved at our door. 'This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat,' II Thes. 3:10. And certainly God will not bid them welcome to his door whom he would have us deny at ours. We must pray with our hand at the pump or the ship will sink in sight of our prayers.

Is it temporal subsistence thou prayest for? Pray and work, or pray and starve. Dost thou think to set God at work whilst thou sittest with thy hand in thy bosom? Those two proverbs in Solomon are observable, 'The hand of the diligent maketh rich,' Prov. 10:4; and, ver. 22, 'The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.' He that prays but is not diligent is not like to be rich. He that is diligent but prays not may be rich, but he cannot be blessed with his riches. But he that obtains his riches by sincere prayer in conjunction with his diligence is rich by the blessing of God, and shall escape the sorrow which the worldling lays up with his money; yea, though he gets not an estate, yet he hath the blessing of God, and that makes him rich when there is no money in his purse.

Again, is it any spiritual blessing thou prayest for? Wouldst thou have more knowledge in the things of God? Think not it will drop into thy mind without endeavour. Daniel studied as his eyes were one while on the book, and another while lift up to heaven in prayer, Dan. 9:2. 'Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,' Dan. 12:4. It is got by running from one means to another. As the merchant's ship takes in some of her freight at one port, some at another, so the Christian gets some light in a sermon, some in a conference; some in one duty, some in another. And he that

takes up one duty, but through sloth neglects the rest, saves but his pains to lose his gains. Sometimes God is found in this duty and sometimes in that, on purpose to keep up the credit of all, that we waive none.


(4.) Our requests for both must be spiced *with thanksgiving*. 'With thanksgiving let your requests be made known,' Php. 4:6; and, I Thes. 5:18, 'in everything give thanks.' Art thou praying for the love and favour of God? Bless God thou art where it may be obtained, and not in hell past hope or help. Is it health thou desirest? Bless God for life; it is the Lord's mercy we are not consumed. No condition on earth can be of so sad a colour in which there may not some eye of white, some mixture of mercy, be found interwoven. *Puræ tenebræ*—utter darkness, without any stricture of mercy, is found in hell alone. Come not therefore to pray till you know also what to praise God for. As God hath an open hand to give, so he hath an open eye to see who comes to his door, and to discern between the thankful beggar and the unthankful. Will God give more to him on whom all is lost that he hath formerly bestowed? Indeed he doth do good to the evil and unthankful, but it is not a gracious return of their prayers, but an act of common providence, of which they will have little comfort when he brings the bounty of his providence in judgement against them, to aggravate their sins and increase their torment.—Now follows a threefold dissimilitude which we are to observe in framing our requests for spiritual and temporal mercies.

2. There is a *threefold dissimilitude to be used in precatory prayer*. Temporal mercies are chiefly to be desired for the sake of spiritual, but spiritual mercies for themselves, and not for temporal advantages.

(1.) Temporal mercies are chiefly to be desired *for the sake of spiritual blessings, and not their own*. The traveller desires a horse not for itself so much as for the convenience of his journey he is to go. Thus the Christian, when praying for temporal things, should desire them as helps in his way and passage to heaven. I do not say it is unlawful to desire life, health, and other comforts of this life, for the suitableness these have to our natural affections, and to supply our outward necessities; but to desire them only for this is low and base, it is the mere cry of the creature. The ravens thus cry, and all

the beasts of the field seek their meat of God; that is, they desire the preservation of their lives, and make their moan when they want that which should support them. And these creatures being made for no higher end than the enjoyment of these particular narrow good things, they observe the law of their creation. But thou art an intellectual being, and by thy immortal soul, which is a spiritual substance, thou art as near akin to the angels in heaven as thou art by thy meaner bodily part to the beasts, yea, allied to God thy Maker, not only made by him, as they were, but for him, which they are not. He is thy chief good, and therefore thou infinitely dishonourest him and thyself too if thou canst sit down short of him in thy desires. *Nihil bonum sine summo bono*—nothing should be good to thee without God, who is thy chief good. *Non placent tibi mea sine mecum, nec tua mihi sine tecum*—thus shouldst thou say and pray, O Lord, as all my gifts and services do not please thee except with them I give thee myself, so none of these gifts of thy bounty can content me except with them thou wilt bestow thyself on me. Now this regular motion of the heart in praying for temporals is to be found only in those whose inward wheels—I mean powers and faculties—are set right by the hand of divine grace. Man in his corrupt state is like Nebuchadnezzar at grass—he hath a beast's heart, that craves no more than the satisfaction of his sensual appetite. But when renewed by grace, then his understanding returns to him, by which he is enabled in praying for temporals to elevate his desires to a higher pitch and nobler end.

Doth sick David pray that some further time may be added to the lease of his temporal life? It is not out of a fond love to this world or the carnal entertainments of it, but to prepare himself the better for another life. 'O spare me,' a little 'that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more,' Ps. 39:13. Is he comforted with hopes of a longer stay here? It is not any of this world's carnal pleasures that kindles this joy in his holy breast, but the advantage he shall thereby have for praising God in the land of the living. 'Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God,' Ps. 42:11. The saint hath as quick a sense to taste the sweetness of a temporal mercy as another; but his heart being spiritual, and so acquainted with higher

enjoyments, he desires with Luther that God would not put him off with these shells of blessings. O how few thus pray for temporals! Most are but propping<sup>ccxvi</sup> for their lusts while praying for them. 'Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts,' James 4:3. One is sick, and prays for health that he may be again at his pots or harlots. Another is childless, and he would have an heir to uphold the pride and grandeur of his house, but not the increase of Christ's family in the world. A third would be a greater man in the world—and for what? May be, that having more power he may take the fuller revenge on his enemies that are now out of his reach. And other that bring not their sacrifice with so evil a mind, yet look no higher their carnal contentment in the enjoyment they would have, as appears by their carriage in the use of it. Thus the mariners in a sea-storm, 'Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble,' Ps. 107:28. And when they have their life given them as they desire, 'then are they glad because they be quiet,' and God hears no more of them now their turn is served—a plain evidence that they were selfish and carnal in their prayer for this mercy, because they improve it not for their spiritual end. Which makes the psalmist break out into that holy option and vote, 'Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness,' ver. 31. But much more abominable is it to pray for spiritual mercies for the sake of some temporal advantage we hope to have by them. Thus Simon Magus desired the gifts of the Holy Ghost that he might be —a man of fame and name. And do not some labour to bring the gospel to town as an expedient to mend the takings in their shop?—others pray for the assistances of the Spirit, and project their own praise by the means, basely perverting those holy things to secular advantages? O horrid baseness! As if one should desire a prince's robe to stop an oven with it! This is, as Austin saith, *uti Deo ut fruamur mundo*—to make God the stirrup and the creature our saddle.

(2.) Those spiritual blessings which are intrinsic to our happiness and indispensably necessary to our salvation, *these we are to pray for with an undeniable importunity*. Such are pardon of sin, the love and favour of God, and the sanctifying graces of the Spirit. To be cold or indifferent in our prayers for these is a great wickedness. The promise will bear us out in our

greatest importunity: 'Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore,' Ps. 105:4. 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely,' Rev. 22:17. *Tantum possumus in negotio religionis, quantum volumus*—we are powerful in the matter of religion. Nothing loseth us these mercies more than weak velleities and faint desires of them. But our prayers for temporal blessings must be with a latitude of submission to the will of God, because they are promised conditionally. The promise is the foundation of our faith, the superstructure therefore of our prayers must not jet beyond it. This was Israel's sin —'Who shall give us flesh to eat?' Num. 11:18. God had indeed promised to feed them in the wilderness, but not to give them every dish their wanton palate craved; and therefore, when God's bill of fare contents them not, but they cry for flesh, they have their desire but sour sauce with it; for, 'while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them,' Ps. 78:31. Thus they were fed for the slaughter by the meat they inordinately lusted after. O take heed of peremptory prayers for any temporal enjoyment, for thereby thou beggest but a rod for thy own back. Rachel must have children or else she dies, and she at last hath two, but dies in travail of the latter. It was a smart saying of one to his wife, who passionately desired a son, and had one at last, but none of the wisest, 'Wife,' saith he, 'thou hast long passionately desired a boy, and now thou hast one that will always be a boy.' God may justly set some print of his anger on that mercy which he answers our peremptory prayers with. Why, alas! must we needs have that which we must needs lose, or shall not enjoy while we have it?

(3.) Those spiritual blessings which are intrinsical to the saints' happiness are to be *prayed for with boundless desires*. Not, Give me thus much grace and I will trouble thee for no more. No, God gives a little grace, not to stop our mouth, but to open it wider for more. Yet, alas! how unreasonably reasonable are most in this particular! So much holiness contents them as will, like salt, keep them from putrefying in gross sins, that they be not unsavoury to the nostrils of their neighbours, or as will save them from the lash of their tormenting conscience; like school-boys, that care for no more of their lesson than will save a whipping. Alas! this is

not to desire it at all; it is thy credit abroad and thy quiet within thou desirest, and the other but to help thee to these. He that knows the true worth of grace thinks he hath never enough till satisfied with it in glory. Paul had more than many of his brethren, yet prays and presseth as hard after more as if he had none at all, Php. 3:13, 14. But in temporal enjoyments we are to stint our desires, and not let out all the sails of our affections when praying for them. A gracious heart is as unwilling to have too much of these as afraid of having too little. 'Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me,' Prov. 30:8. I think not a saint but could cheerfully say amen to this prayer of Agur—I am sure he ought. That house is best seated which stands neither on the bleak top of the hill nor on the wet bottom. The nature of these temporal good things is enough to convince any wise man that the mean is best. They are not the Christian's freight but his ballast, and therefore are to be desired to poise, not load, the vessel. They are not his portion—heaven is that; but his spending money in his journey thither; and what traveller that is wise desires to carry any greater charge about him than will pay for his quarters?

[*Second kind of petitionary prayer*  
—THE DEPRECATORY.]

*Second. Deprecatory prayer.* The second branch in the petitionary part of prayer is deprecation, *wherein we desire of God, in the name of Christ, the removal of some evil felt or feared, inflicted or threatened*. So that evil is the object of deprecation. Here I shall briefly point at the evils to be deprecated, and how we are to frame our requests to God in deprecating of them. All evil is comprehended in these two:—1. Sin. 2. Suffering.

[*First object of deprecatory prayer.*]

1. *Object. Sin.* This indeed is the evil of evils, against which chiefly we are to let fly the arrows of our prayers. This is the only thing that is intrinsically evil in its own nature. Suffering is rather *evil to us* than in itself, and our sufferings have both their being and malignity from the evil of our sins. Had there been no sin, there had been no suffering. Where that ceaseth, this is not to be found. No sorrow in heaven, because no sin. These, like twins, live and die together.

(1.) *Guilt.* This is the proper effect and consequent of every sin. Whenever any sin is committed there is guilt contracted, whereby the creature becomes obnoxious to the wrath of God; and this guilt wears not off by length of time, but continues bound upon the sinner till God by an act of pardoning mercy absolves him. So that, though the act of sin be transient, and passeth away as soon as the fact is committed, yet the creature is in the bond of his iniquity, held with this chain of guilt as a prisoner to divine justice, till he by faith and repentance sues out his pardon; even as a felon who, may be, is not presently after the fact taken and brought into judgment, yet abides a debtor to the law, wherever he is, till he can obtain his pardon. Now need I speak anything to set out the dismal and deplored condition of a soul under guilt, thereby to provoke you to pray for the removal of it? There is no mountain so heavy as the guilt of the least sin is to an awakened conscience. Better thy house were haunted with devils than thy soul with guilt. If thy conscience tells thee thou art 'in the bond of iniquity,' thou canst not be 'in the gall of bitterness,' they are joined together, Acts 8:23. Guilt is a burden which the sinner can neither stand under nor throw off. One compares him to a beast stung with a gadfly—fain would he run from his pain, but still he finds it in him. This lies throbbing in his soul like a thorn in the flesh, and will not let him rest by day or sleep by night; he turns himself on his bed as Regulus in his barrel stuck with nails—not an easy plat that he can find in it. This makes him afraid of every disease that comes to town, pox or plague, lest it should arrest him and bring him by death to judgment. His guilt makes him think that every bush a man, and every man a messenger of divine vengeance to slay him. The 'mark' that God set upon guilty Cain, Gen. 4:15, is by many interpreters conceived to be a trembling heart, made visible by a ghastly countenance and discomposed carriage of his outward man; and that passage, ver. 12, 'A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth,' the Septuagint read thus,

(a) *Pray with a deep sense and sorrow for thy sins.* The worse nonsense in prayer is of the heart, when that hath no sense of the sin [the person praying] deprecates, or of the mercy he desires. Nothing more hardens the heart of God against our prayer, than the hardness of our heart in prayer; and, on the contrary, no such way to melt God into pity as for our own hearts to dissolve into sorrow. He that would have us 'give wine unto those that be of heavy hearts,' Prov. 31:6, saves this vessel—the promise, I mean, of pardoning mercy, which holds the sweetest wine in God's cellar—to revive the heart of the contrite ones,' Isa. 57:15. A tear in the eye for sin adorns the creature more than a jewel in his ear, and his prayer more than all the embroidery of expressions in it can do. While the publican smote his own breast, he got into God's bosom, and carried a pardon home with him. Will Christ drop his blood to procure thy pardon who canst shed no tears for thy sin? The truth is, here lies the difficulty of the work—not how to move God, but how to get the sinner's own heart melted. It is harder to get sin felt by the creature, than the burden, when felt, removed by the hand of a forgiving God. Never was tender-hearted surgeon more willing to take up the vein and bind up the wound of his fainting patient, when he hath bled enough, than God is, by his pardoning mercy, to ease the troubled spirit of a mourning penitent. It is one rule he gives his servants in their practice upon their spiritual patients, to beware of making too great an evacuation in the souls of poor sinners by excessive humiliation, lest thereby the spirits of their faith be too much weakened: 'Sufficient to such a man is this punishment,' &c. 'So that...ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow,' II Cor. 2:6, 7.

(b) Justify and clear God in all the expressions of his displeasure for thy sins. Thou dost perhaps carry the marks of his anger on thy flesh in some outward judgement; or, which is worse, the



terrors of the Lord have taken hold of thy soul, and like poisoned arrows lie burning in thy conscience, where they stick. Acknowledge him just, and all this that has come upon thee 'less than thy iniquities deserve,' Ezra 9:13. The way to escape the fatal stroke of his axe is to kiss the block. Clear his justice, and fear not but his mercy will save thy life. Thou hast a promise on thy side: 'If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant,' Lev. 26:41, 42. David took this course and sped, 'For I acknowledge my transgressions,' Ps. 51:3. And why is he so willing to spread his sins in his confession before the Lord? See ver. 4: 'That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.' He would have all the world know that God did him no wrong in the judgments that came upon him; he takes all the blame upon himself.

(c) Take heed thou *prayest not with a reservation*. Be sure thou renouncest what thou wouldst have God remit. God will never remove the guilt so long as thou entertainest the sin. What prince will pardon his treason that means to continue a traitor? It is desperate folly to desire God to forgive what thou intendest to commit. Thou hadst as good speak out and ask leave to sin with impunity, for God knows the language of thy heart, and needs not thy tongue to be an interpreter. Some princes have misplaced their high favours to their heavy cost, as the emperor Leo Armenius, who pardoned that monster of ingratitude Michael Balbus, and was in the same night in which he was delivered out of prison murdered by him. But the great God is subject to no mistake in his government. Never got a hypocrite pardon in the disguise of a saint. He will call thee by thy own name, though thou comest to him in the semblance of a penitent. 'Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam,' said the prophet. Hypocrisy is too thin a veil to blind the eyes of the Almighty. Thou mayest put thy own eyes out, so as not to see him; but thou canst never blind his eyes that he should not see thee. And as long as God loves himself, he must needs hate the hypocrite; and if he hates him, surely he will not pardon him. The pardoned soul and the sincere are all one. 'Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile,' Ps. 32:2.

(d) *Make Christ thy plea*. Pardon of sin is a favour not known in the first covenant. Do, and live; sin, and die, were all its contents. No room left for an after-game by that law. The gospel covenant is our *tabula post naufragium*—the only plank by which we may recover the shore after our miserable wreck. This covenant is founded in Christ, who, upon agreement with his Father, undertook to answer the demands of the law, and happily performed what he undertook; upon which the gospel is preached, and pardon promised to all that repent and believe on him. 'Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour,' Acts 5:31. Him hath God 'set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,' Rom. 3:25. As therefore, when Christ intercedes for poor sinners, he carries his blood with him and presents it to God, for the price of that forgiveness he desires for them; so thou mayest bring the same blood in the hand of thy faith when thou prayest for the pardon of thy sins, for 'without shedding of blood is no remission,' Heb. 9:22. This is the more to be heeded, because many, out of ignorance, and some from a corrupt principle, apply themselves to their prayers to the absolute goodness and mercy of God for pardon. Ask them why they hope to be forgiven, and they will tell you, 'God is good, and they hope he will be merciful to them, seeing his nature is so gracious.' But, alas! they forget he is just as well as merciful, and mercy will not act but with the consent of his justice. Now the only salve for the justice of God is the satisfaction of Christ. 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness;...that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,' Rom. 3:25, 26. So that, to desire God to forgive thee thy sin without the intervening of Christ's satisfaction, is to desire God to be unjust, and pardon thee with the loss of his own honour; and how welcome thou art like to be that comest to him on such an errand, is easy to think.

(e) Lastly, take no denial in this thy request, but, *pray for it with unwearied importunity*. It is a mercy thou canst not want; it is more necessary than thy very being. Better never to be than ever be unpardoned. Think but a little on thy dismal condition while guilt is not taken off and thy pardon not obtained, and it is impossible that thou shouldst be a cold faint suitor for this mercy

of mercies. Know, then, while unpardoned thou art God's prisoner. All the plagues written in the law cleave as close to thee as thy girdle to thy loins. Every moment thou mayest fear they should take hold upon thee as thou walkest in thy house, sittest at thy table, or liest on thy bed. Where canst thou be safe who hast God {for} thine enemy? Can the bread resist him that eats it? or the tree withstand the axe of the feller? truly no more canst thou the wrath of an avenging God. Is it not he that holds the stoutest devils in chains?—he who can kindle a fire in thy own bones and bosom, and make thee consume like lime with the inward burning of thy self-tormenting thoughts? Is he not a righteous God, whose justice binds him, in the distributions of justice, to be exact according to the sinner's demerit? Is he not the everlasting God?—not a sorry creature, who may threaten thee to-day, and be dead himself to-morrow; but eternity itself, who ever lives to take vengeance on sinners, out of whose hands thou canst not escape by dying?

In earthly courts, when the man dies his cause dies with him, because out of their jurisdiction, and past their summons. But, at death, thou fallest into the hands of the living God, who will pursue his quarrel with thee in the other world also. No sooner is thy soul abandoned of thy body and turned out of its earthly house, but it shall return to God to receive its doom. Neither shall thy body long rest in the grave where it is earthed, but be called forth to share with the soul in torment, whose partner it hath been in sin. The parting of these at death to a guilty soul is sad enough; but their meeting again at the great day of judgement will be much more dismal. For husband and wife, that have joined in some bloody murder, to be attached and sent to several prisons in order to their trial, must needs fill them with fear and terror of their approaching judgment, but much more dreadful is it to them when brought forth to receive their sentence, and suffer at the same gibbet together. At death, the sinner's body is disposed of to one prison, his soul to another, and both meet again at the great day of assize for the world—then to be sent by the final sentence of the Judge to everlasting flames in hell's fiery furnace, where, after the poor wretch hath experimented a thousand millions of years the weight of God's

just vengeance, he shall find himself no nearer the end of his misery than he was the first day wherein his torment commenced. Then death will be desired as a favour, but it shall flee from him—his misery being both intolerable and interminable. By this time, I suppose, a pardon will be thought worth thy having, and too good to be lost by sluggish sleepy praying for it. When, therefore, thou hast chafed thy soul thus into a sense of the indispensable necessity of this mercy, then take up a holy resolution to lay thy siege to the throne of grace, and never to rise till God open the gates of his mercy to thee. As it is so necessary thou canst not want it; so thou hast the promise of a faithful God that thou shalt not miss it, upon the timely and sincere seeking of it. 'If we confess, he is faithful and just to forgive.' Prayers and tears are the weapons with which the Almighty may be overcome. Manasseh, who could not on his throne —when he sinned and stouted it out against God —defend himself from the justice of God, yet in his dungeon and fetters, greatly humbling himself before the Lord, obtained his mercy. So Ephraim, 'when he spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died,' Hosea 13:1.

(2.) The second thing in sin to be deprecated is *the defiling power of it*. He that desires not to be purged from the filth of sin, prays in vain to be eased of the guilt. If we love the work of sin, we must like the wages also. A false heart, could be willing to have his sin covered, but the sincere desires his nature to be cured and cleansed. David begged a clean heart as well as a quiet conscience: 'Blot out all mine iniquities; create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me,' Ps. 51:9, 10. He desires water to purify his heart, as well as blood to sprinkle and pacify his conscience. Now, in framing thy requests as to this, observe these particulars.

*[Five particulars to be observed in praying  
against the defilement of sin.]*

(a) Be sure thou comest with a *deep abhorrence of thyself for that sin-filth which cleaves to thee*. This is called 'knowing the plague of a man's own heart,' 1 Kings 8:38, when a creature is affected and afflicted with the sense of his corruptions, as if he had so many plague sores

running upon him, and bathes himself for them, as much as Job did for the boils and sores with which his body was covered. The leper was commanded, in order to his cure, to put himself into a mourner's habit: 'His clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean,' Lev. 13:45. Why all this, but to express the deep sense of his sin and misery? Look upon the saints in scripture, and you shall find this was their way to abase themselves in their prayers with the greatest self-aborrancy that was possible. Penitent David takes the fool, yea the beast, unto himself; he knows not how to speak bad enough of himself. 'So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee,' Ps. 73:22. Holy Job cries out, 'I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,' Job 42:6. Others blush, and are as much ashamed to be seen in the presence of God, as one that had fallen into some puddle or jakes<sup>ccxvii</sup> would be in that pickle to come before his prince.

(b) In praying against thy lusts, *look thy heart goes with thy tongue*. In nothing so our hearts put more cheats upon us than in our prayers, and in no requests more than in those which are levelled against our lusts. That is least oftentimes intended which is most pretended. And truly we had need be well acquainted with ourselves before we can find the bottom of our designs. Austin confesseth, when he was a young man, and forced by conviction in his conscience to pray that God would deliver him out of the bondage of his lust, that yet the secret whispers of his heart were *non adhuc, Domine*—not yet, Lord. He was afraid that God would take him at his word. Thus the hypocritical Jews first 'set up their idols in their heart,' Eze. 14:3. This is a great wickedness. And it were a just, though a heavy plague, for God to answer such according to the secret vote of their hearts, by them up to those lusts which they inwardly crave. When Paul begs prayers for himself, to embolden them in their requests for him, he assures them of his sincerity: 'Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly,' Heb. 13:18. As if he had said, I durst not make you my spokesmen to God, if my heart did not check me that I did secretly comply with any sin, and did not mean in all things to live honestly. How then canst thou have the face to go thyself to God on an

errand to desire that of him which thou wouldst be loath to have.

*Question*. But how may we come to know that our hearts are sincere or hypocritical in praying against the defiling power of sin?

*Answer* [1]. Observe whether thy prayer be *uniform*—laid against all sin, one lust as well as another. Sincerity makes not here a balk and there a furrow; is not hot against one lust and cold against another; but goes through stitch in the work: it 'hates every false way,' Ps. 119:104. It shoots its arrows at the whole flock, and singles not this sin out in his prayers which he would have taken, and that left: 'Let not any iniquity have dominion over me,' ver. 133. He knows if all his chains were knocked off, and only one left upon him, he should be as true a slave to Satan as if all the other were still on. He prays not against one sin because a great one, and pleads for another because it is a little one. The dust and rubbish help to fill up the wall as well as the great stones; little sins contribute as well as great to make up the partition wall between God and the creature. Every little speck blemisheth the garment, and every penny increaseth the sums. So little sins defile the soul and swell the sinner's account. Therefore he prays against them as well as the other. David, who desired to be kept back from 'presumptuous sins,' did also beg to be 'cleansed from his secret faults,' Ps. 19:12.

*Answer* [2]. Observe whether thy heart *stand firmly resolved to renounce that sin thou prayest God to subdue*. The sincere Christian binds himself, as well as labours to engage God against his sin. Indeed that prayer is a blank which hath not a vow in it. 'Thou...hast heard my vows,' Ps. 61:5; that is, his prayers, which are always to be put up with vows. Is it a mercy thou prayest him to give? If sincere, thou wilt vow to praise him for it and serve him with it. Is it a sin thou prayest against? Except thou jugglest with God thou wilt vow as well as pray against it. 'Remove from me the way of lying,' Ps. 119:29. There is David's deprecation. Now, mark his promise and vow: 'I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me,' ver. 30. While he prays against the way of lying he chooseth the way of truth.

*Answer* [3]. Observe whether thou beest *vigorous in the use of all appointed means to mortify the lust thou prayest against*. Resolutions in the

time of prayer are good when backed with strenuous endeavours, else but a blind for a false heart to cover itself with. Samson did not only pray he might be avenged on his enemies, but set his hands to the pillars of the house. He that hath bid thee pray against thy lust hath bid thee shun the occasions of it. 'Remove thy way far from her, and come not nigh the door of her house, lest thou give thy honour unto others,' Prov. 5:8; that is, lest thou be hooked in to her by the occasion. Thus Joseph, that he might not be drawn to lie with his mistress, would not stay alone in the room with her, Gen. 39:7-12. So, Prov. 23:20, 'be not among wine-bibbers;' and, 'look not on the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup,' ver. 31, because looking may breed liking. Now, art thou conscientiously careful to keep out of the way that leads to the sin, and to shun the occasion that might betray thee into the hands of that lust thou prayest against? Certainly, he that would not have his house blown up will not have set his gunpowder in the chimney-corner.

(c) Again, God, who bids thee pray against thy lusts, commands thee also to *take the sword of his word, by meditating on it, and applying it close to thy heart and conscience, to cut them down and get victory over them*. Thus did David. He hid the word in his heart that he might not sin. Thou prayest against covetousness. O that God would rid thy heart of it! Well, what dost thou towards thy own delivery from this base lust? Here is a sword put into thy hand, whose edge is sharp enough to cut and kill if thou wilt lay it on in good earnest. This sets forth the vanity of the creature—how vile and base a sin covetousness is; takes away all occasion of inordinate desires and cares for the world by many sweet promises—what he hath laid up in another world for us, and what care in his providence he will take for us in this life. 'Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' Heb. 13:5. Now, what use doth thou make of this weapon? Dost thou strengthen thy assent to the truth of these promises?—labour to affect thy heart with the sweetness of them, and then draw forth this sword to defend thyself against this lust when the enemy comes with a temptation to it? If so, thou wert sincere in thy prayer. A false heart contents itself with a few idle lay prayers against

his lust, but is afraid to use this sword against it. Or, if he doth, he strikes with the back and not the edge; or lays his stroke so favourably on that it shall not much endanger the life of his sin—like a mountebank, that will be sure to make no worse wound in his side than his balsam will in a day or two cure.

Now, to raise thy heart to the greater vehemency in praying against thy lusts, labour deeply to affect thy heart what a fearful plague it is—indeed, of all other incomparably the greatest—for a soul to be given up of God to the power of his lusts. This consideration, if any, will make thee lay close siege to God and set upon him with the utmost importunity, knowing thou art an undone creature if thou speedest not in thy errand. When God intends to smite home he takes his aim at the heart, he gives the creature over to his lusts. Thus he hardened Pharaoh to a final obstinacy, 'I will...send all my plagues upon thine heart,' Ex. 9:14. They did not only light upon the beasts and fruits of the field, or upon their own bodies, but chiefly upon their hearts and spirits, hardening them into obstinacy to their destruction. And this, indeed, is to send all plagues in one. Other plagues, that reach only to estate or body, are consistent with the love and favour of God. He can smite the body and smile on the soul; blast the man's estate and bless him with spiritual riches; make him poor in the world and rich in faith. But he that is given up to his lusts is abhorred of God. A saint may be given up to Satan *ut lictori*—to correct him, for the destruction of the flesh and saving of his spirit; but it is the brand of a reprobate to be delivered up to Satan *ut domino*—that his lusts may have full power over him; which judiciary act of God portends the sinner's destruction, Deut. 2:30; II Thes. 2:11. Outward plagues are sometimes in the sinner's mouth as a bridle to restrain him from sin. But this is a spur that makes them more mad after their lusts; it takes away the sense of sin, and then the wretch plays the devil. Nothing will stop him in his way, but to hell he will go over hedge and ditch.

(d) Pray against the power of thy lusts as *a branch of the gospel covenant*. God is not bound by the first covenant to stir a foot for man's help. Man went of his own accord over to the devil's quarters. He deserted God and chose a new lord; and in his hands God might have left him, without offering any help for his rescue. It was

not any tie that man had upon God by the covenant of nature which obliged him, but his own free grace that moved him, to undertake his recovery. And this he doth by making a new covenant on the ruins of the old. So that, whoever will pray against his lusts with success must first become a covenanter with God, by accepting the terms upon which God in it offers to save us from our sins, and they are faith and repentance. When the soul doth thus face about from his sins to close with Christ, then he becomes a covenanter with God, and may, with faith, call God into the field for his help against this huge host of lusts and devils that come against him. God's chariots are his; the whole militia of heaven is engaged in his quarrel. 'Sin shall not have dominion over you'—and why?—'for ye are not under law but under grace,' Rom. 6:14; that is, you are not under the law covenant made with Adam, but under the gospel covenant made with Christ, and through him with all believers. O how many prayers against sin are lost for want of well understanding this grand notion of the gospel! A great cry is made and complaint by many of their sins to God, and victory over them pretend to be desired; yet they live and grow stronger every day than other. And what is the reason? Alas! they stand not in a federal relation to God; neither take they any care how to get into it. Will a prince raise an army to fight for he knows not whom? Indeed, if his subjects or allies be in distress he is ready to step in for their succour; but strangers cannot expect he should do this for them. Leagues are made before assistance desired. God first promised to bring Israel 'into the bond of his covenant,' Eze. 20:37; and then, that he will 'accept them with your sweet savour,' ver. 41. David knew this very well, that the carnal world are abandoned by God, to be trod under the foot of every lust; and therefore, when he prays God would order his steps in his word, and let no iniquity have dominion over him, he desires it as a favour peculiar to those that were near and dear to him: Deal with me 'as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name,' Ps. 119:132.

(e) Pray not only against the power of sin, but *for the power of holiness also*. A naughty heart may pray against his sins, not out of any inward enmity to them, or love to holiness, but because they are troublesome guests to his conscience. Believe it for a certain truth, his zeal is false that

seems hot against sin but is key-cold to holiness. A city is rebellious that keeps their rightful prince out though it receives not his enemy in. Nay, the devil needs not fear but at last he shall make that soul his garrison again, out of which for a while he seems shut, so long as it stands empty and is not filled with solid grace, Matt. 12:44, 45. What indeed should hinder Satan's re-entry into that house which hath not in it to keep him out?

[*Second object of deprecatory prayer.*]

2. *Object*. The second object of deprecatory prayer is *suffering*. Sin brought suffering into the world. Sin is indeed the elder twin, but suffering stayed not long after it; for it took it by the heel, presently arresting Adam upon the very place where he committed his trespass, and ever since follows it as close as the shadow doth the body. It leaves not the saint till death parts him and his sin, but pursues the wicked with their sins into the other world also. So that this distribution of suffering into temporal and eternal shall content us at present—they being comprehensive of all the miseries which sin hath brought upon the sons of men. Now my work in this place shall be only to direct the Christian how to frame his prayer in deprecating the one and the other also. (1.) Temporal sufferings—how the Christian is to deprecate and pray against them. (2.) Eternal suffering.

[*How the Christian is to pray against temporal sufferings.*]

(1.) *Temporal sufferings*—how the Christian is to deprecate and pray against them.

[1.] *Negatively*—The Christian is *not to pray for an immunity from all temporal sufferings*. There is no foundation for such a prayer in the promise; and what God thinks not fit to promise we must not be bold to ask. Temporal promises are to be understood, saith Melancthon, *cum exceptione crucis*—with exception of the cross. God had one Son without sin, but he will have none in this life without suffering. John writes himself, 'Your brother, and companion in tribulation,' Rev. 1:9. He hath too high an opinion of himself that would have God lead him dryshod on a fair causeway to heaven, while he sees the rest of his brethren march through thick and thin to the same place; or who thinks he

needs not this thorn-hedge of suffering, to keep him as well as others from wandering out of his way to glory. The rod and ferule are not more needful among children at school than suffering is to the saints while in their minority here on earth. If thou wert come to that ripeness of ingenuity as to have worn off all thy childishness, thou shouldst stay here no longer under the lash; but while thou art subject to sin thou must submit to his disciplinary rod. Valetudinarious<sup>ccxviii</sup> bodies can as well spare food as physic, and saints in this their crazy state may as well live without ordinances as without sufferings. In a word, to pray absolutely against all suffering is to desire one of the greatest punishments on this side hell. When God said, 'I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom,' Hosea 4:14, he meant them no good by sparing his rod. If we count him an unwise father that, when he puts his child to school, indents with his master not to whip him; surely much more folly were it in thee to desire God to privilege thee from all suffering.

[2.] *Affirmatively*—how he may and should pray against sufferings; and in these particulars following.

(a) Deprecate the *vindictive justice and wrath of God in all temporal sufferings*. Thus Jeremiah shapes his prayer, 'O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing,' Jer. 10:24, and, ch. 17:17, 'Be not a terror unto me: thou art my hope in the day of evil.' He declines not suffering but deprecates wrath. As if he had said, 'Let trouble come, but not with this message—to tell me thou art mine enemy; shoot thy darts, my breast is open to receive them; but let them not be envenomed arrows headed with thy punitive justice.' Without this sting all suffering is innocent and harmless. But if the creature does fear—though without just cause—that they are shot out of justice's bow, then they drink up his spirits and exanimate him presently. 'When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth,' Ps. 39:11. That holy woman, I Kings 17:18, was not so much distressed for her son's death as for the reflection this sad providence made upon her conscience: 'Art thou come...to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?' Thou canst not therefore be too passionately importunate in deprecating this.

(b) Deprecate the *snare and temptation that suffering may expose thee to*. Satan commonly finds it easy to make some sinful impression upon the saint when he is heated, and his 'heart made soft,' as Job phraseth it, 'in the furnace of affliction.' He is a rare Christian in whom the stream of his grace runs clear upon such royling. Job was a man of a thousand —God's nonesuch: 'None like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man,' Job 1:8; yet bewrayed many weaknesses in his troubles, and would have done more, had not God in pity to his poor servant taken the devil off before he had quite run him down. Christ teacheth us to pray against suffering under the notion of temptation: 'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.' That is, let us not be led into sin when we fall into suffering, let us not fall into thy hands and Satan's together. This discovers a holy frame of heart—to be more tender of our conscience than skin; not so much to fear affliction from God, as, left in it, we should be have ourselves unseemly and unholy towards him. Agur is not so much ashamed to beg as afraid to steal, and so take the name of his God in vain, upon which account he chiefly prays against poverty, Prov. 30:8, 9. There is nothing lost by serving God first and preferring his honour before our own private interest in our prayers. Self-denial is the best for self-seeking; for, by neglecting ourselves for God's sake, we oblige him to take the care of us upon himself, and he is the only happy man who hath his stake laid up in God's hands.

(c) Deprecate the *excess of suffering*—that thou beest not overladen, thy burden too heavy for thy back. This is promised. Thou mayest therefore present it in faith: 'I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure,' Jer. 46:28. The patient doth not intrench upon the physician's art by desiring him to proportion his dose according to the weakness of his body, if, when he hath done this, he acquiesceth in his skill and faithfulness for the same. Indeed, to desire God to consider our weakness, and then not to rely on his wisdom and care, but continue jealous and suspicious, or to murmur at his prescriptions, as if the physic he gives were too churlish and strong, this makes a dishonourable reflection upon God. Sometimes the physician exceeds the proportion that his fearful patient thinks



Certainly the saints—to whom the notions of sin in this life are so grievous, above all the crosses and losses that befall them, and who count a few years' neighbourhood among the wicked so great an affliction, that they cry, 'Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar'—must needs deprecate that dismal state with their utmost vehemency of spirit, wherein they should be everlastingly yoked with sin, and cooped up with unclean sinners, both which they loathe so perfectly.

It was the speech of a gracious woman when on the very marches of death: 'O Lord, send me not to hell among such filthy company, which thou knowest I have not liked on earth.' But as for those that can fadge very well with their lusts, and the company of the wicked here, I know not how they can thus deprecate that place where they shall meet with that which pleaseth them so much on earth. David, Ps. 26, first protests his abhorrency against the ways and society of the wicked: 'I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers; I have hated the congregation of evil-doers; and will not sit with the wicked,' ver. 4, 5: then his zeal for God, and delight he had in his house to praise and serve him, ver. 6-8. After which, he breaks out into this prayer, 'Gather not my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men,' ver. 9. As if he had said, I am not of their knot in my life, O let me not be of their bundle at my death. I have praised thee on earth, send me not to blaspheme thee in hell. I have loved the habitations of thy house here, let me not dwell with unclean spirits hereafter.

(b) *Hell is a state of separation from the blissful presence of God.* Pray to be delivered from it under this notion—as it is the last, yea, everlasting excommunication of the creature from God. 'Go, ye cursed,' that is, never to see my sweet face more—called therefore 'outer darkness,' because not the least beam or stricture of his favour to enlighten the souls of the damned, nor the least crevice is left open for hope to expect it. The heat of hell-fire is not so dismal, as the want of this light. This makes them cursed; 'Go, ye cursed.' The curse lies in their departure from God, the fountain of all blessing. All besides this were tolerable. Would God cast but one kind look upon those miserable souls, as they swim in this lake of fire and brimstone, it were able to change the

property of the place, and the joy thereof were enough to take away the sense of their torment. The three worthies in Daniel could walk in the fire, having God to bear them company, as if they had been only in the sunshine. That which a saint prizeth most in heaven is the presence of God: 'So shall we ever be with the Lord,' 1 Thes. 4:17. And hell is most dreaded by them, because a gulf is fixed between the souls in it and God, that no communion can be had with him to all eternity. O how few pray against hell under this notion! how few cry out with David, 'Cast me not away from thy presence!' Ps. 51:11. If this were the thing above all they feared should befall them in the other world, would they so willingly live without acquaintance with God in this world? Surely no.

(c) *Hell is a state wherein the damned can never actually satisfy God's justice;* for their debt being infinite, and they, because creatures, but finite, will ever be paying. But the last farthing can never be paid, which is the only reason they lie forever in prison, because it can never be said, 'Now God hath his due.' But Christ, the saints' pay-master, discharged their whole debt at once, and took in the bond, which he nailed to his cross, leaving no back-reckoning unpaid, to bring the believer afterward into any danger from the hands of divine justice. Now, as an ingenuous debtor desires his freedom at his creditor's hands, that thereby he may be capable of paying his debt, as well as to escape the misery that himself should endure by his imprisonment; so an ingenuous soul—and such is every saint—deprecates hell, as well with an eye to God's glory, as to his own ease and happiness. Lord, saith the sincere soul, if thou packest me away to hell, there I shall pay thee, it is true, by my just torments something in a dribbling way by retail, but never be able to discharge the whole sum; but at Christ's hands thou mayest receive to the full what thy justice can demand at mine, and also make me thy poor creature a trumpeter of thy praise to eternity. O send me not to blaspheme thee among that wretched crew of damned souls and unclean spirits, who so much desire to join with the choir of holy angels and saints in singing hallelujahs to thy holy and glorious name.

[Third kind of petitionary prayer  
—THE IMPRECATORY.]



*Third. Imprecatory prayer; wherein the Christian imprecates the vengeance of God upon the enemies of God and his people.* On such a sad and solemn errand are the saints' prayers sometimes sent to heaven, and speed as effectually as when they go to obtain blessings for themselves and the church of God. And no wonder, for they are perfumed with Christ's merits, and thereby are as acceptable to God as any other they put up in his name. 'And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God,' Rev. 8:4. Now what kind of prayers these were is clear by the next words, 'And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake,' ver. 5. By which is signified the dreadful judgments which God in answer to his saints' prayers would bring upon the wicked world, whose bloody persecutions of the church, and fury against the truth of God, made the saints to cry to heaven for vengeance upon them; and that it should come inevitably come as thunder, lightning, and earthquakes, that can be resisted by no power or policy of the greatest monarch on earth. Thus, as at the firing of some cannon planted against a city, you may see its turrets or wall come tumbling down; so, upon the prayers of the saints, great judgments were certainly to befall the enemies of God and his church. Now, the path wherein the Christian is here to tread being very narrow, he is to be the more cautious that he steps not awry. He is, in this part of prayer which is imprecatory, like one that drives a chariot on the brow of a steep hill, who, if he hath not the quicker eye and steadier hand, may soon spoil all. The highest strains of a saint's duty run nearest the most dangerous precipices, as the most mysterious truths are soonest perverted into the most damnable errors. I shall therefore first lay down a few particulars which may serve as a rail to compass in this duty, for the better securing the Christian from falling into any miscarriage about it.

1. Take heed thou *dost not make thy private particular enemies the object of thy imprecation.* We have no warrant, when any wrong us, presently to go and call for fire from heaven upon them. We are bid, indeed, to heap coals upon our enemy's head, but they are of love, not

of wrath and revenge. Job sets a black brand upon this, and clears himself from the imputation of so great a sin: 'If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me,...neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul,' Job 31:29, 30. He durst not wish his enemy ill, much less deliberately form a wish into a prayer, and desire God to curse him. Our Saviour hath taught us a more excellent way: 'Bless them that curse you,...and pray for them which despitefully use you,' Matt. 5:44. I know this is counted a poor sheepish spirit by many of our gallants. Go pray for them? No, send them the glove rather, and be revenged on them in a duel by shedding their blood. This is the drink-offering which these sons of pride delight to pour out to their revenge. Or, curse them to the pit of hell with their God damn them oaths! O tremble at such a spirit as this! The ready way to fetch a curse from heaven on thyself, is to imprecate one sinfully upon another. 'As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones,' Ps. 109:17, 18. Moses, I suppose, has as noble a spirit as any of these that style them such men of honour; yet, did he draw upon Aaron, or fall a cursing of Miriam, when they had used him so unworthily? I trow not, but bears all patiently. Nay, when God declares his displeasure against Miriam for this affront put upon him, see how this holy man intercedes for her with God, Num. 12. This is valour of the right make, to overcome evil with good, and instead of seeking revenge on him that wrongs us, to get the mastery of our own corruption so far as to desire his good the more. Thus our Lord, when he was numbered amongst transgressors, even then 'made intercession for the transgressors,' Isa. 53:12; that is, those very men which used him so bloodily, while they were digging his heart out of his body with their instruments of cruelty, then was he begging the life of their souls with his fervent prayers.

2. When thou prayest against the enemies of God and his church, *direct thy prayers rather against their plots than person.* Thus the apostles, 'And now, Lord, behold their threatenings,' Acts 4:29. Not, 'confound their persons,' but, 'behold their threatenings;' and so they leave their case with the Lord to right it for them. So David, 'O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel

into foolishness,' II Sam. 15:31. Indeed, did do more, he destroyed plot and plotter also; and in this sense the saints may oft say with the prophet, 'Thou hast done terrible things we looked not for'—by pouring out his vengeance on the persons, when they have only prayed against their wicked designs.

3. When praying against the persons of those that are open enemies to God and his church, it is safest to *pray indefinitely and in general*: 'Let them all be confounded...that hate Zion,' Ps. 129:5; because we know not who of them are implacable, and who not, and therefore cannot pray absolutely and peremptorily against particular persons. There may be an elect vessel for a time in open hostility against God and his church, whom afterward God may consecrate to himself by converting grace, and so make him a holy vessel for the use of his sanctuary. We do, it is confessed, find some in Scripture prayed against by name. So Moses prayed against Korah and his complices, Num. 16:15; and Paul against Alexander the coppersmith, 'The Lord reward him according to his works;' but these and other in the Scripture had an extraordinary spirit, and not to be patterns for us in this case. Elias called for fire from heaven upon the captains, but the disciples were soundly chid for a preposterous imitation of this act, who had not his spirit, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,' Luke 9:55. Pray thou for vengeance against all the implacable enemies of God, and leave him to direct thy arrow to its mark. Ahab was hit, though the arrow was shot at a venture by one that may be thought not of him. Prayers are sorted in heaven before their answer returns. Some of those emperors for whom the church in the primitive times prayed, yet proving implacable enemies to God and his people, felt the weight of those imprecations, which in general they put up against the adversaries of the truth.

4. In praying against the implacable enemies of God and his church, *the glory of God should be principally aimed at, and vengeance on them in order to that*. 'Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered.' As the sun, when it hath dispelled the vapours that muffled it up from our sight, breaks out in the glory of its beams; so God, by taking vengeance on his enemies, and scattering them in their wicked imaginations with which they endeavoured to obscure his glory in

the world, doth display and make visible the splendour of his attributes before his people's eyes. The saddest consequence which attends the prosperity and success of God's enemies in the world, is their pride and blasphemy against God, his truth, and church. Then they belch out their horrid blasphemies against heaven; then they mock the poor saints, and pierce them with the sharp sword of their mocking language, while they say unto them, 'Where is now their God?' But when God takes to himself power and strength, and confounds these giants and sons of the earth, by tumbling destruction upon their heads in the midst of their wicked enterprises; when he recoils their own plots they have charged against his church upon themselves—making them go off like a pistol in their pocket—to procure their own death and ruin; now the reproach is taken off, and they have an answer given to their question, 'Where is now your God?' He is at their throat, he is with his sword of vengeance vindicating his glorious name upon them. When Julian the Apostate was slain—and confessed at whose hand he received his fatal blow, in crying, *vicisti Galilæ*—thou hast conquered, O Galilean—then Libænius, his scoffing sophister, had his question, 'What is the carpenter's son now a doing?'—which a little before he had put to a Christian in scorn of his Saviour—thrown in his teeth to the confusion of his face, and found the Christian's answer—that he was making a coffin for his master—prove truer than he was aware of. It cannot but be a joyful day to a saint, that prizeth the honour of his God above his own life, when he sees even the wicked—that before denied a providence, and thought all events were thrown out of blind fortune's lap, as if the world were but a lottery, wherein everyone had his portion by chance—now forced by the remarkable appearance of his power and wisdom in saving his people, and destroying his implacable enemies, to confess, 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth,' Ps. 58:11. The exaltation of the glorious name of God, every saint doth, and should, aim at, in the prayers wherein he imprecates vengeance. 'Let them be confounded...let them be put to shame, and perish, that men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the most high over

all the earth,' Ps. 83:17, 18. Now from this head of imprecatory prayer, there is—

(1.) *Matter of comfort to the saints against those direful imprecations which the wicked world belcheth out against them.* The saints in this sense are a cursed people. The wicked make the greatest part of the world; the church is a little flock, but her enemies a huge herd; and these cannot wish well to the saints. Cain, as Luther saith, will hate and kill Abel to the end of the world; the same spirit that was in him remaineth in his seed. Sometimes when the church of God flourisheth, and hath the sun of outward prosperity on her side, they may cry hosanna in the crowd—as Shimei, when David was going up the hill of honour, then he could worship the rising sun, and crouch to him whom he had bitterly cursed in his distress—but when 'they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly' in their heart, Ps. 62:4. A wicked man cannot wish well to a saint as a saint, as, on the contrary, a saint cannot bless the wicked as such. 'Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you: we bless you in the name of the Lord,' Ps. 129:8. They do, indeed, desire their conversion, and therein wish them well, but in the wicked way they are in at present they cannot bless them. So the wicked can desire the saints should come over to their party, do as they do, and then they would applaud and hug them. But, let the saints keep close to God, and refuse to run into riot and excess with them, and they are sure to meet with their curse and imprecation; it is not their unblamable and peaceable will free them from their wrath and fury. 'I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me,' Jer. 15:10. But fear not, thou who art a saint, their imprecations. This is but *anathema secundum dici*; like false fire in the pan of an uncharged gun, it gives a crack but hurts not. God's blessing will cover thee from their curse; 'Let them curse, but bless thou,' Ps. 109:28. When the viper flew out of the fire upon Paul's hand, the barbarians looked that he should presently drop down dead, but it proved no such matter. Thus the enemies of God and his people have looked one generation after another, when the church, that hath been always laden with their curses, should perish under them; but it lives yet to walk over the graves of all those that have wished it ill. Alas,

poor wretches! what is your imprecation worth? Truly as your blessing can do no good, so neither your curse any hurt, till you can get God to set his seal and say amen to it; which is impossible for you to obtain.

Did our Saviour so sharply rebuke the rash request of his disciples, calling for fire to fall on them whom they thought deserved it? and will he gratify the lust of your devilish wrath and fury against his own dear people, by pouring on them what you audaciously, yea blasphemously, desire of him? Will nothing serve you but to have God your executioner to hang whom you condemn? and those no other than his dear children, and for nought else but because they dare not be as wicked as yourselves? Go bid the tender mother imbrue her hands in the blood of her sweet babe, that even now came out of her womb, and now lies at her breast; or the husband betray and deliver the wife of his bosom into the hands of murderers that wait for her life. Would these be an errand to make the messenger that brings them welcome to loving mother or husband? But if any such anomalies in nature's grammar and monsters among men were to be found, yet remember he is a God thou solicitest whose nature is unchangeable and covenant with his people inviolable. How was God courted by Balak and Balaam with altar after altar, from place to place! But all to no purpose: 'Nevertheless the Lord thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the Lord thy God loved thee,' Deut. 23:5. Never was any design carried on with more zeal and passionate desire to effect it than this; one would think that God had said enough to Balaam at first to make him sick of his enterprise, as a thing infeasible, Num. 22:12: 'Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.' But he liked the work and loved the wages, and therefore baffles his conscience, not telling the messengers all that God said to him, and they also report not all to Balak what Balaam said to them, so loath were both the work should fall: yet we see by the event, that they took but pains to lose their labour, nay worse, to lose themselves, for God made them, and him that set them on this work, to drink the curse which they would so fain have brewed for Israel.

(2.) *A word to the wicked.* Take heed that by your implacable hatred to the truth and church of God, ye do not engage her prayers against you. These imprecatory prayers of the saints, when shot at the right mark, and duly put up, they are murdering pieces, and strike dead where they light. 'Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?' I tell you that he will avenge them speedily,' Luke 18:7, 8. They are not empty words—as the imprecations of the wicked poured into the air, and there vanish with their breath—but are received into heaven, and shall be sent back with thunder and lightning upon the pates of the wicked. David's prayer unravelled Ahithophel's fine-spun policy, and twisted his halter for him. The prayers of the saints are more to be feared—as once a great person said and felt—than an army of twenty thousand men in the field. Esther's fast hastened Haman's ruin, and Hezekiah's against Sennacherib brought his huge host to the slaughter, and fetched an angel from heaven to do the execution in one night upon them.

*[Thanksgiving, or THE GRATULATORY PART of prayer.]*

SECOND. The second of the twofold division of the whole matter of prayer, viz. THANKSGIVING. In handling of this I shall still keep my former method.

*First.* I shall show what we are to return praises and thanks to God for. *Second.* How we are to frame our thanksgiving we return.

*[What we are to praise and thank God for.]*

*First.* I shall show *what we are to return praises and thanks to God for.* Now the object of thanksgiving, as of requests, is something that is good, but under another notion. We ask what we want; we bless and praise God for the mercies we have received, or for the hope we have from the promise that we shall in due time receive them. So that we see the Christian hath as large a field for the exercise of his thankfulness in praising God, as he hath in the petitionary part of prayer for his desires. This duty circumscribes heaven and earth; it takes both worlds within its circumference. As God does nothing but he aims at his own glory thereby, Prov. 16:4; so no act of God towards his people,

wherein he intends not their good, and as such becomes the subject of their thanksgiving. Hence we are bid 'in everything give thanks.' O what a copious theme hath God given his people to enlarge their meditations upon—'in everything!' The whole course and series of divine providence towards the saints is like a music-book, in every leaf whereof there is a song ready pricked for them to learn and sing to the praise of their God. No passage in their life of which they can say, 'In this I received no mercy for which I should bless God.' Now, as a partial obedience is not good, so partial thanks is stark naught. Not that any saint is able to keep all the commands, or reckon up all the mercies of God, much less return particular and express acknowledgement for every single mercy. But, as he hath respect to all the commandments, Ps. 119:6, so he desires to value highly every mercy, and to his utmost power give God the praise of all his mercies. 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?' Ps. 116:12. This is an honest soul indeed; he would not sink any debt he owes to God, but calls his soul to an account for all his benefits, not this or that. The skipping over one note in a lesson may spoil the grace of the music; unthankfulness for one mercy disparageth our thanks for the rest. But to sort the mercies of God into several ranks, that you may see more distinctly your work in this duty lie before you.

1. Mercies are either *ordinary or extraordinary*—our everyday commons or exceedings, with which God now and then feasts us. Thou must not only praise God for some extraordinary mercy which once in a year betides thee—a mercy that comes with such pomp and observation, that all thy neighbours take notice of it with thee, as the mercy which Zacharias and Elizabeth had in their son, that was 'noised abroad throughout all the hill country,' Luke 1:65—but also for ordinary, everyday mercies. For,

(1.) We are *unworthy of the least mercy*, Gen. 32:10; and therefore God is worthy of praise for the least, because it is more than he owes us.

(2.) These common ordinary mercies are *many*. Thus David enhanceth the mercies of this kind: 'O God! how great is the sum of them? if I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee,' Ps. 139:17, 18. As if he had said, There is

not a point of time wherein thou art not doing me good; as soon as I open my eyes in the morning, I have a new theme, in some fresh mercies given in since I closed them overnight, to employ my praiseful meditations. Many little items make together a great sum. What less than a grain of sand? yet what heavier than the sand on the sea-shore? As little sins—such as are vain thoughts and idle words—because of their multitude, arise to a great guilt and will bring in a long bill, a heavy reckoning, at last; so ordinary mercies, what they want in their size, particularly and individually considered, of some other great mercies, they have it compensated in their number. Who will not say that a man shows as great, yea greater, kindness to maintain one at his table with ordinary fare all the year, as in entertaining him at a great feast twice or thrice in the same time?

(3.) The sincerity of the heart is seen more *in thankfulness for ordinary mercies* than extraordinary. As it shows a naughty heart upon every ordinary occasion to fall into sin, so the soul very gracious that takes the hint of every common mercy to bless his God. Some, they are bound up in their spirits, that none but strong physic will work upon them; they can digest little afflictions, and swallow ordinary mercies, without humbling themselves under the one or praising God for the other. That is the upright heart which gentle physic prevails with, little chastisements humble, and ordinary mercies raise to thankfulness.

2. Mercies are *complete or imperfect*—begun mercies, or finished. We must not make God stay for our praises till he hath finished a mercy, but praise him at the beginning of a mercy. We should be as ready to return our praises for a mercy, as God is to hear our prayers when begging a mercy. Now God comes forth early to meet a praying soul: 'At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth,' Dan. 9:23. 'I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest,' Ps. 32:5. Thus should we echo in our thankfulness to the first intimation that God gives in his providence of an approaching mercy. If you do but hear the king is on the road toward your town, you raise your bells to ring him in, and stay not till he be entered {through} the gates.

The birds, they rise betimes in the morning, and are saluting the rising sun with their sweet

notes in the air. Thus should we strike up our harps in praising God at the first appearance of a mercy. Notable instances we have for this: Moses did not promise God, when he had saved them from Pharaoh's wrath and the sea's waves, that, at his landing them safe in Canaan, and lodging his victorious colours at the end of their journey in their full rest, he would then praise him for all his mercies together. No, but he presently pens a song, and on the bank, within sight of the howling wilderness, which they were now to enter into, he sings it with Israel in thankfulness for this first handsel after their march out of Egypt. So, II Sam. 6:13, 'And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings.' And, I Chr. 15:26, which is a place parallel to this, and speaks of the same passage, 'When God helped the Levites that bare the ark,...they offered seven bullocks and seven rams.' That is, so soon as, by going a few paces or steps, they perceived God graciously to favour their enterprise—making no breach as formerly he had done upon them—they presently express their thankfulness upon the place for this hopeful beginning, well knowing no way was better to engage God in the continuance and enlargement of this mercy, than by a praiseful entertainment thereof at its first approach.

In a word, thus the Jews in Babylon at the very first peep of day, when their deliverance began to break out, are at their praises: 'Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them,' Ps. 126:2. It was now but coming tide, as I may say, with them; the water was newly turned, and their affairs began to look with a more smiling face, yet now they salute their infant mercy with joy and thankfulness. May be, Christian, thou art upon a sick-bed, and some little reviving thou hast, though far from thy former health—O bless God for this little lift of thy head from thy pillow. May be thou hast been, as to thy spiritual state, in great distress—as it were in the belly of hell—swallowed up with terrors from the Lord, but now thy agony abates; though the Comforter be not come, yet thou hast some strictures of divine light let into thy dungeon, that raise a little hope to wait for more: O, let not this handsel of mercy pass without

some thankful acknowledgment. Some, alas! are like great ships that cannot be set afloat but with the spring-tide and highwater of a mercy completed; if they have not all they would, they cannot see what they have, nor tune their hearts into a praiseful frame.

3. Mercies are such as are *received in this life or reserved for the next*—mercies in the hand or mercies in hope. There are promises which God will have us stay till we come to heaven for the performance of, and these we are to praise God for, as well as what we receive here; bless God for what he hath laid up for thee in heaven, as well as that he lays out upon thee on earth. The more our hearts are enlarged in thankfulness for these mercies, which we now have only in hope, the more honour we put upon his faithful promise. He that bestows much cost upon a house he hath in reversion, shows his confidence is great one day to be possessed of it. When a bill of exchange is paid at sight, it shows the merchant whose it is to be a man of credit and ability. By the joy thou takest up, and the thankfulness thou layest out for what the bare promise tells thee thou shalt at death receive, thou glorifiest the truth of God that is the promiser.

4. There are *bitter mercies and sweet mercies*—some mercies God gives in wine, some in wormwood. Now we must praise God for the bitter mercies as well as the sweet. Thus Job, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' Too many are prone to think nothing is a mercy that is not sweet in the going down, and leaves not a pleasant farewell on their palate; but this is the childishness of our spirits, which, as grace grows more manly, and the Christian more judicious, will wear off. Who that understands himself will value a book by the gilt on the cover? Truly none of our temporals—whether crosses or enjoyments—considered in themselves abstractly, are either a curse or a mercy. They are only as the covering to the book. It is what is written in them that they must resolve us whether they be a mercy or not. Is it an affliction that lies on thee? If thou canst find it comes from love, and ends in grace and holiness, it is a mercy though it be bitter to thy taste. Is it an enjoyment? If love doth not send it, and grace end it—which appears when thou growest worse by it—it is a curse, though sweet

to thy sense. There are sweet poisons as well as bitter cordials. The saints commonly have greater advantage from their afflictions in the world, than enjoyments of the world. Their eyes are oftener enlightened with wormwood than honey—those dispensations that are bitter and unpleasing to sense, than those that are sweet and luscious.

5. Mercies are either *personal, or such as we receive in partnership with others*—and these must be recognized as well as the other. 'Pardon, O God,' said he, 'my other men's sins.' Thus, 'Blessed be God,' say thou, 'for my other men's mercies.' Haply, Christian, thou hast prayed for a sick friend, and he is restored to health: for another in distress of spirit, and the Comforter at last is come to him. Now thou who hadst an adventure in his bottom, hast a mercy also in the return that is made to him, and therefore art to bless God with him. He that prays for his friend, and joins not with him in thankfulness when the mercy is given, is like one that is a means to bring his friend into debt, but takes no care to help him out. Thy friend, Christian, needs thy aid much more to pay the thanks, than to borrow the mercy, because this is the harder work of the two. But above all mercies to others, be sure church mercies and nation mercies be not forgot.

[TEN DIRECTIONS *how to frame our thanksgivings.*]

*Second.* You have heard what is the subject of our praises and thanksgivings; we shall now lay down some directions *how we are to frame our thanksgivings.*

1. *Direction.* Be sure the thing thou prayest God for *be found among the good things of the promise.* That is the compass by which we are to steer our course, as in the petitionary, so also in the gratulatory, part of prayer. If it be not in the promise it is not a mercy, and so not the subject of thanksgiving. When some prosper in their wickedness, they are so bold as to thank God they sped so well. Now, if it be grievous sin for a man to bless himself in any wicked way, Deut. 29:19, much more horrid is it to bless God for prospering therein. By the former, he only voucheth his own sin—which indeed is bad enough—but by the other he makes God a party with him, and tempts the Lord to own it also. It is a good speech of Bernard to this purpose,

who, comparing those that on the one hand thank God for their success in wickedness, with hypocrites, who praise him for the good things they receive, saith, *isti impiè mala suo Deo, isti dei bona fraudulentè inorquent sibi* (Serm. 45 super Cant.)—the one impute their sin to God, the other ascribe the glory of his mercies to themselves. God cannot accept thy praise, unless he first approve thy fact. He that receives a bribe is guilty of the fault. And dare you thus tempt the holy One? If the God you serve were like the heathens' idols, the matter were not much. When the Philistines had practiced their cruelty on Samson, they present his head to their god. The devil desires no better sacrifices than the fruit of men's sins. But the holy One of Israel abhors all wicked praises. 'The hire of a whore, was not to be offered,' Deut. 23:18.

2. *Direction.* Let all your praises *be offered up in Christ*. 'By him...let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God,' Heb. 13:15. 'Ye...are...an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,' 1 Peter 2:5. Couldst thou pen never so rare a panegyric<sup>ccxxi</sup>, couldst thou flourish it with never so much art or rhetoric, and deliver it with the greatest passion and zeal possible, all this would be harsh and grate the Almighty's ear except sounded through Christ. It is not the breath poured into the open air but passing through the trumpet or some other instrument—where it is formed into a tunable sound—that makes it pleasing music. Possibly when thou prayest for a mercy thou shelterest thyself under Christ's wing, and usest his name to procure thy admission—because conscious of thine own unworthiness to receive what thou askest—but, when thou praisest God, thy errand being not to beg and receive but to give, thou expectest welcome. He that brings a present shall surely find the door open. Yes, if thy gift were suitable to the great God. But who art thou that the great God should take a present at thy hand? If thou beest not worthy of the least mercy thou beggest, then surely thou art unworthy of this honour to have thy thank-offering accepted. Thou needest Christ's mediation for the one as much as for the other.

3. *Direction.* Stay not in generals, but descend to the *particular instances of God's mercy towards thee in thy thanksgivings*. *Est dolus in generalibus*—there is guile in generals. It

bewrays a slighty spirit, if not a false, when in confession of sin we content ourselves with a general indictment, 'I am a sinner—a great sinner,' and there to stop, without a particular sense of the several breaches made in the law of God. Neither is here a better symptom when a man puts God off with a compliment at distance for his goodness and mercy in general, but takes no notice of the particular items which swell and make up the total sum. Now, to be able to do this, it will be necessary that thou takest special notice of God's daily providence to thee and thine, yea, and to the church of Christ also. Lay up these in thy heart, as Mary did our Saviour's words, for the matter of thanksgiving against the time of prayer; this true good husbandry for thy soul. You do not expect to find that money in your chest which you never laid up there; neither will you readily find in your heart to praise God for those mercies which you never committed to your memory. It is to be feared the man means not to pay that debt honestly which he doth not set down in his book. Ps. 107, when the psalmist there had stirred them up to thankfulness for the mercies of God in creation and providence, his conclusion is worthy of remark, 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord,' ver. 43. As if he had said, The reason why so little praise is given for such great works of mercy, is because men see not the lovingkindness of God in them; and they see not this because they observe not those; and they observe not those because they have not wisdom. It is not a library that makes a scholar, but wisdom to observe and gather the choice notions out of his books. None want mercies to bless God for. Divine providence is a large volume, written thick and close with mercies from one end of our life to the other; but few, alas! have a heart to read in it, and fewer have wisdom to collect the choice passages of it for such a holy purpose as this is.

4. *Direction.* Excite *thy praising graces*. David stirs up all that is within him to praise God, Ps. 103; that is, all the powers and graces of his soul. To instance but in two or three.

(1.) *Humility.* A proud man cannot well tell how to beg, yet selfishness may make him stoop to it; but in thankfulness he must needs be a bungler, for this is a high piece of self-denial. 'Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but unto thy

name be the praise.' The proud man's gift will cleave to his hand; he is unfit to set the crown on God's head that hath a mind to wear it himself. We find indeed the tool in the Pharisee's hand, but he cuts his work into chips. He seems to honour God with his mouth, but eats his words as he speaks them, and discovers plainly that he intends more to exalt himself than God: 'I thank God I am not as this publican.' This, 'I thank God,' comes in *pro formâ*; it is the publican he disdains, and himself that he applauds. You may easily think what a look ambitious Haman gave Mordecai when he held his stirrup, who desired himself to have been in the saddle. How, alas! can a proud heart give God that which he covets himself? No man, saith Luther, can pray *sanctificetur nomen tuum* till he first be able to pray *profanetur nomen meum*—*sanctified be thy name*, till he be willing his *own name should be debased*.

Labour therefore to vilify, nullify thyself; then, and not till then, thou wilt magnify, omnify thy God. None so zealous in begging as he that is most pinched with his want; none so hearty in his thanks as he that hath most sense of his unworthiness. And who can think better of himself that is thoroughly acquainted with himself? If God had not set thee up, what stock couldst thou have found of thy own? Thou wert as bare as a shorn sheep, naked camest thou into the world, and ever since thou hast been cast upon thy God, even as a poor child upon the charge of the parish. What hast thou earned by all the service thou hast done him? Not the bread of thy poorest meal. And art thou yet proud? Bernard compares Joseph's carriage with his master and the grateful soul's with God thus together: Joseph, saith the father, knew that his master, who put all he had into his hands, yet excepted his wife, and therefore accounted it too base an ingratitude to take her from his master's bed who had been so kind to him in his house. Thus, saith he, God freely gives his mercies into the saint's hands but excepts his glory. Therefore the gracious soul takes what God gives thankfully; but leaves the praise of them, which God reserves for himself humbly.

(2.) *Love and joy. Amour et gaudium faciunt musicum*—love and joy, it is said, make a musician. Indeed then this music of praise is

best—in heaven, I mean—where the graces are perfect.

(a) Excite *thy love*. This is an affection that cannot keep within door, but must be sallying forth in the praises of God. Austin, speaking of heaven, breaks out thus, *ibi vacabimus et videbimus, videbimus et amabimus, amabimus et laudabimus, laudabimus et cantabimus*—in heaven we shall have nothing to do but to behold the face of God, and seeing him we shall love him, loving him we shall praise him, and praising we shall sing and rejoice. Love and thankfulness are like the symbolical qualities of the elements—easily resolved into each other. David begins with 'I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice,' Ps. 116:1. And, to enkindle this grace into a greater flame, he aggravates the mercies of God in some following verses; which done, then he is in the right cue for praises, and strikes up his instrument, 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?' Ps. 116:12. The spouse, when once she was thoroughly awake, pondering with herself what a friend had been at her door, and how his sweet company was lost through her unkindness, shakes off her sloth, riseth, and away she goes after him. Now, when with running after her beloved she had put her soul into a heat of love, then she breaks out into an encomium of her beloved, praising him from top to toe, Song 5:10. That is the acceptable praising which comes from a warm heart; and he that would warm his heart must use some holy exercise to stir up his habit of love, which, like natural heat in the body, is preserved and increased by motion.

(b) Excite *thy joy*. I will sing 'with joyful lips,' Ps. 63:5. A sad heart and a thankful hardly can dwell together—I mean, sad with worldly sorrow. The disciples for sorrow could not hold open their eyes to pray, much more sure were they unfit to praise. This indeed makes the duty of praise and thanksgiving more difficult than to pray, because our joy here is so often quenched and interrupted with intervening sins and sorrows that this heavenly fire seldom burns long clear on the Christian's altar from which his praises should ascend. Temptations and afflictions, they both drive the soul to prayer and more dispose it for prayer; but they untune his instrument for praise. Hannah, she wept and prayed, but durst not eat of the peace-offering, the sacrifice of praise, because she wept. It



behoves us therefore the more to watch our hearts lest they be indisposed by any affliction for this duty. Do with thy soul as the musician in wet weather doth with his instrument, which he hangs not in a moist nasty room, but where it may have the air of the fire. Art thou under affliction? let not thy soul pore too long on those thy troubles, but bring it within the scent of God's mercies that are intermingled with them. Sit near this fire of God's love in Christ —warm thy heart with meditation on spiritual promises— while thou art under bodily pressures, and thou shalt find, through God's blessing thy heart in some comfortable tune to praise God in the saddest and most rainy day that can befall thee in all thy life. Thus David could make music in the cave: 'My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise,' Ps. 57:7.

5. *Direction.* Content not thyself with a bare narrative, but *give every mercy its proper accent according to the enhancing circumstances thereof.* There is great difference in two that sing the same song. From one you have only the plain song; the other descants and runs division upon it, in which consists the grace of music. The mercies of God affect our hearts as they are dressed forth. If we put on them their rich habiliments—the circumstances, I mean, that advance them, they appear glorious to our eyes and enlarge our hearts in praises for them; but considered without these, we pass them slightly. God himself, when he would express the height of his love to his people, presents them to his own eye, not as now they are, but as clothed with the glory he intends them. 'As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee,' Isa. 62:5. At the wedding day the best clothes are put on. Thus do thou, to draw out thy thankfulness for mercies, consider them in the circumstances that may render them most glorious in thine eye. Some emperors have not suffered every one to draw their picture, lest they should be disfigured by their bungling pencil. Truly, slighty praises disfigure the lovely face of God's mercy. They are but few that draw them to life. To do this much study and meditation are requisite. 'The works of the Lord are sought out of them that have pleasure in them.' The curious limner studies the face of the man before he makes his draught. Praise is a work not done in a trice, the lesson must be pricked before it can be sung.

Read therefore the word, and learn from the saints there recorded what aggravating circumstances they have observed in recognizing their mercies.

Sometimes we have them setting the accent upon the speedy return of their prayers, 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me,' Ps. 138:3. This is a print that superadds a further excellency to the mercy. It was but knock, and have; come, and be served. While the church were at God's door praying for Peter's deliverance, Peter is knocking at theirs to tell them their prayer is heard.

Sometimes from the sinful infirmities which mingled with their prayers. Now that mercy would come with a 'notwithstanding these,' and steal upon them when they had hardly faith to wait for them, this hath exceedingly endeared the goodness of God to them. 'I said in my haste, All men are liars. What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?' Ps. 116:11, 12.

Sometimes from the greatness of their strait: 'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.' 'O taste and see that the Lord is good,' Ps. 34:6, 8. So, 'Who remembered us in our low estate: for his mercy endureth for ever,' Ps. 136:23. Indeed this must needs raise high appreciating thoughts of the mercy. The water that God gave Israel out of the rock is called honey, because it came in their extreme want, and so was as sweet to them as honey. Silver is gold when given to a poor man that must else have died for lack of bread.

Sometimes from the frequent returns of God's goodness and expressions of his care; thy mercies 'are new every morning,' Lam. 3:23. 'Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed,' Ps. 129:2. 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,' I Sam. 7:12. This gives such an accent as, without it, the mercy cannot be pronounced with its due emphasis. A course of sin is worse than an act of sin. 'Their course is evil,' Jer. 23:10. So a course of mercy from time to time speaks more love. Some that could beteen<sup>ccxxii</sup> a single alms on a beggar, would beat him from their door should he lie there and make it a trade.

Sometimes from the peculiarity of the mercy, they take notice of the distinction God makes in issuing out his favours: 'He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his

judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord,' Ps. 147:20. 'Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?' John 14:22—Let these few hints suffice to set thee on work to find out the other. Without this, we rob God of the best part of our sacrifice; as if a Jew had stripped off the fat and laid the lean on God's altar; or, as he did by his idol, who took off the cloak of silver it had and put on his own threadbare one in the room of it. The mercies thou receivest are great and rich; give not him thy beggarly praises. He expects they should bear some proportion to his mercy: 'Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness,' Ps. 150:2.

6. *Direction.* Distinguish between mercy and mercy; *let the choicest mercies have thy highest praises.* It shows a naughty heart to howl and make a great noise in prayer for corn and wine, and in the meantime to be indifferent or faint in his desires for Christ and his grace. Nor better is it, when one acknowledges the goodness of God in temporals, but takes little notice of those greater blessings which concern another life. You shall have sometimes a covetous earthworm speak what a blessed time and season it is for the corn and the fruits of the earth—that fit his carnal palate, as the pottage did Esau's—but you never hear him express any feeling sense of the blessed seasons of grace, the miracle of God's patience that such a wretch as he s out of hell so long, the infinite love of God in offering in offering Christ by the gospel to him. He turns over these as a child doth a book, till he hits on some gaud and picture, and there he stays to gaze. Christ and his grace, with other spiritual blessings, he skills not of, he cares not for, except they would fill his bags and barns. Now, shall such a one pass for a thankful man? will God accept his praises for earth that rejects heaven? that takes corn and wine with thanks, and bids him keep Christ to himself with scorn? saying, as Esau when his brother offered him his present, 'I have enough?' A gracious heart is of another strain: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,' Eph. 1:3. Indeed God gives temporals to make us in love with spirituals, yea, with himself that gave them; as the suitor sends the token to get the love of the person.

Again, as we are to distinguish between mercy and mercy, so even in these lower mercies that concern this life, because thou layest the accent of thy thankfulness on the spiritual part of them. In every outward mercy there is food for the flesh and food for the spirit; that which pleaseth the sense and that which may exercise our grace. Is it health? The carnal heart is most taken with it, as it brings the joy of his natural life to him, which sickness deprived him of; but that which, above all, pleaseth a saint, is the opportunity that comes with it for his glorifying God in his place and generation: 'I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God,' Ps. 42:11. Is it an estate that God casts in? The carnal wretch values it for his private accommodation, as if it were given for no higher end than to spend it upon himself, or enrich his family; but the gracious soul blesseth God that gives him to give to the necessity of others, and counts a large heart to be a greater mercy than a full purse. David did not bless himself in his abundance, but blessed God that gave him a heart to return it again into the bosom of God, from whom he received it: 'But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?' 1 Chr. 29:14.

7. *Direction.* Let not thy praises be *transient*—a fit of music, and then the instrument hung by the wall, till another gaudy day of some remarkable providence makes thee take it down. God will not sit at such a niggard's table, who invites him to a thanksgiving feast once for all the year. God comes not guestwise to his saints' house, but to dwell with them; he 'inhabits the praises of Israel,' Ps. 22:3. That day thou blessest not God thou turnest him out of doors. David took this up for a life-work, 'As long as I live I will praise thee.' 'A lying tongue is but for a moment,' saith Solomon, Prov. 12:19. Something drops from a liar within a while that discovers his falsehood; the tongue that lies in praising of God is thus for a moment. He can curse God with that tongue to-morrow with which he praiseth him to-day.

8. *Direction.* Thou must not only continue, but *grow in thy praises.* As the tide increaseth the ship is lift higher on the waters; as your crop increaseth your barns are enlarged; as you grow richer you advance in your garb and port; in a word, as your bodies grow so you make your

clothes bigger. Every day swells the tide of your mercies, adds to your heap, increases your treasure, and heightens your stature. They are 'new,' saith the prophet, 'every morning,' Lam. 3:23; they grow whether thou sleepest or wakest. Now, as the coat thou didst wear when thou wert a child would not become thee now thou art a man; so neither will the garment of praise, which thou didst clothe thy soul with when a young convert, become thee now thou art an old disciple. Thou standest deeper in God's books than before, and God expects according to what every man hath received. Yourselves are not so bad husbands, but you would improve your estates to the height. Would you let a farm now by the rate it bare forty or fifty years ago? why then may not God raise the rent of his mercies also? Look back, Christian, and see how well the world is mended with thee since thou didst first set up. May be thou canst say with Jacob, 'I passed over with my staff, and behold now I am become two bands.'

Well, see what thou hast more, in health, estate, in gifts, graces, or comforts, than thou hadst formerly, and then compare thy present thankfulness with what it was before these additions were made to thy stock and treasure. Would it not be a shame to thee if it should be found not to have grown as the goodness of God to thee hath done, much more if it hath shrunk and grown less? And yet how common are such instances of ingratitude? The freer God is with his mercy, the more close and gripple they are in their thankful returns. When poor, they could be thankful for a short meal of coarse fare, more than they are now for their varieties and dainties. When sick, a few broken sleeps that amounted to an hour or two rest in a night, O how affected were their hearts for this mercy! Whereas now they can rise and take little notice of the goodness of God, that gives them their full rest night after night without interruption. Thus as the days lengthen, so the cold strengthens. But is it not strange to see a man grow colder in his love to God, as the sun of God's mercy riseth higher and shines hotter upon him? O it is sad to see the heap increase, and the heart waste; to find a man grow richer in mercy, and poorer in thankfulness.

9. *Direction.* Let thy praises *be real*. Words, we say, pay no debts. There goes more to thankfulness than a mouthful of windy praises,

which pass away with the sound they make. A gracious heart is too wise to think God will be put off with a song. He will give God that, but it is the least he intends. 'The Lord is my strength and song,...and I will prepare him an habitation,' Ex. 15:2. Aye, here it sticks, building is chargeable; thankfulness is a costly work. Shall I offer to God that which cost me nothing? saith David to Araunah. Cheap praises are easily obtained, but when it comes to charges, then many grow sick of the work. The Jews could sing a 'song' when delivered from Babylon, Ps. 137; but it was long before they could find in their hearts to build God 'a habitation.' The time was not come for that. They might have said, their heart was not come. They had money and time enough to build their own nests, but none for God, though herein they played the fools egregiously, for as fast as they built at one end, God pulled down at the other. Some have been of their mind in our times; instead of finding God a habitation and loving our nation to build synagogues, they have pulled them down and carried the beams to their own houses. Excellent artists, in taking down ministers, ministry, and their maintenance, whereby the gospel should be upheld! If this be the way to thrive, God gave his people ill counsel when he said, Consider now from this day I will bless you, Hag. 2:18. But you will ask what I mean by real praises?

[What is meant by REAL PRAISES.]

(1.) Our praises are real *when they are cordial* —'All that is within me, bless his holy name,' Ps. 103:1—when his mercies beget amiable thoughts of God in our hearts. We read of 'cursing God in the heart,' Ps. 106.1 {better: Job 1:5}; which then is done when we have base, low, unbecoming thoughts of his greatness and goodness. And, on the contrary, when the mercies of God imprint such an image in the heart of him as livelily represents these his attributes, then thou blessest God in thy heart, by adoring his majesty, reverencing his holiness, delighting in his love, and fearing his goodness. Here is real thankfulness. What is *laus*—praise or honour, but a reflection of the person's excellency we commend? Now, as the glass represents the image of the person that looks on it, so the thankful soul reflects those glorious

attributes again upon God which he puts forth in his mercies. Thus God sees his face in a true glass, which the thankful soul holds up while he praiseth him. Whereas an unthankful heart, like a broken glass, distorts and disfigures the beautiful face of God, by conceiving such low thoughts of God as are unworthy of his glorious attributes.

(2.) Our praises are real *when they are obediential*. God accounts those mercies forgotten which are not written with legible characters in our lives, 'They forgot God their Saviour,' Ps. 106:21. That of Joshua is observable, ch. 8:32. Upon their victory over the city Ai, an altar is built as a monument of that signal mercy. Now mark, what doth God command to be written or engraved on the stones thereof? One would have thought the history of that day's work should have been the sculpture, but it is 'the copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel,' ver. 32, whereby he plainly showed the best way of remembering the mercy was not to forget to keep the law. Saul could not blind Samuel's eyes with his many good-morrows, that the people saved the best of the cattle for sacrifice: 'Hath the Lord,' saith he, 'as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams,' 1 Sam. 15:22. As if he had said, 'What, Saul! thinkest thou to bribe God with a sacrifice, while thou art disobedient to his command? Dost thou take the swan, and stick the feather in the room? deny him thine own heart to obey his word, and give him a beast's heart in sacrifice for it? Is this the oblation which he hath required, or will accept?' Truly God riseth hungry from our thanksgiving-dinners, if obedience be not a dish at the table. Without this we and our sacrifices may burn together. God will pluck such from the horns of the altar, and take them off their knees with their hypocritical praises, to pay this debt in another kind. 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land,' Isa. 1:19. Then, and not till then, will God eat of your sacrifices, and yourselves taste the sweetness of your enjoyments. 'He meeteth him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness,' Isa. 64:5. Not either apart, but both together are required; not rejoice without working righteousness, nor that without

rejoicing in the work. The threatening is levelled against Israel not barely because they served not God, but because they served him not 'with gladness in the abundance of his mercies,' Deut. 28. God delights to have his mercy seen in the cheerful countenance of his servants while they are at his work, which may tell the spectators they serve a good master.

(3.) Then they are real praises *when they end in acts of mercy*. Very observable is that place, 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name,' Heb. 13:15. Now mark the very net words, 'but to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.' As if he had said, Think not you may thank God to save charges, be willing to both or neither. God's goodness to us should make us merciful to others. It were strange indeed a soul should come out of his tender bosom with a hard uncharitable heart. Some children do not indeed take after their earthly parents; as Cicero's son, that had nothing of his father but his name. But God's children partake all of their heavenly Father's nature. Philosophy tells us that there is no reaction from the earth to the heavens. They, indeed, shed their influences upon the lower world, which quicken and fructify it, but the earth returns none back to make the sun and stars shine the better. David knew very well that 'his goodness extended not unto God,' but this made him reach forth to his brethren, 'to the saints that are in the earth,' Ps. 16:2, 3. Indeed, God hath left his poor saints to receive his rents we owe unto him for his mercies. An ingenuous guest, though his friend will take nothing for his entertainment, yet to show his thankfulness will give something to his servants. At Christ's return, how doth he salute his saints? Not, 'Come ye blessed,' ye have kept such a thanksgiving day, and filled the air with your songs of praise; but, When 'I was an hungered and ye gave me meat, naked and ye clothed me,' Matt. 25. Alms-deeds in Saint Paul's language are called fruit: 'When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit,' Rom. 15:28; implying that all our profession without these good works are but leaves. This is the solid fruit of our faith —love to God and thankfulness for his mercies. Neither must these acts of charity be restrained to the money in thy

purse or bread in thy cupboard, though these are included: there are poor souls as well as poor bodies, that need relief.

Hath God plucked thee out of Sodom—out of Satan's bondage? Where are then thy bowels of compassion to those who are yet chained to the devil's post? What means dost thou use to redeem these captives out of their worse than Turkish slavery? The argument God urgeth to Israel to use strangers kindly, is to remember they were once so, Deut. 23:7. Hast thou, after long lying in the dungeon of spiritual darkness and troubles of conscience, had thy head lift up with the comforts of the Spirit—received into the presence of God, as Pharaoh's butler was to his prince's court? how canst thou think thyself thankful, while thou forgettest others that lie in the same prison-house, under as sad fears and terrors as once thyself did? 'Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous,' Ps. 112:4. Surely this will hold, if in any, then in this case. In a word—that I may not be thought to make you hard to the outward man, while I stir up your charity to the inward—hath God raised thee to an estate? May be thy pilgrim's staff, with Jacob's, is turned to two troops? Dost thou now show the kindness of God to his poor members? as David, who inquired if there were none of the house of Saul. O how unlike are we to the saints of primitive times! They would run to meet an object for their charity, and we run from them. They considered the poor, what they wanted, how they might relieve them, yea, they 'devised liberal things;' but we consider and contrive how we may save our purse best. They were willing to part with all in case of extremity, while we grudge a little from our superfluity; laying that, by pride, on our backs which should cover the poor's; throw that to our hawks and hounds which should refresh the bowels of the poor; yea, spend more in our drunken meeting, a miser's feast, or a wrangling suit at law, than we can be willing to give in a year to the necessitous members of Christ.

(4.) Our praises are real *when they produce a stronger confidence on God for the future*. Who will say that man is thankful to his friend for a past kindness that nourishes an ill opinion of him for the future, and dares not trust him when he needs him again? This was all that ungrateful

Israel returned to God for his miraculous broaching the rock to quench their thirst, 'Behold, he smote the rock, can he give bread also?' Ps. 78:20. This indeed was their trade all along their wilderness march. Wherefore God gives them their character, not by what they seemed to be while his mercies were piping hot, and the feast stood before them—then they could say, 'God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer'—but by their temper and carriage in straits. When the cloth was drawn, and the feast taken out of their sight, what opinion had they then of God? Could they sanctify his name so far as to trust him for their dinner to-morrow who had feasted them yesterday? Truly no. As soon as they feel their hunger return, like froward children they are crying, as if God meant to starve them. Wherefore God spits on the face of their praises, and owns not their hypocritical acknowledgments, but sets their ingratitude upon record, 'They forgot his works, and waited not for his counsel.' O how sad is this, that after God had entertained a soul many a time at his table with choice mercies and deliverances, these should be so ill husbanded, that not a bit of them all should be left to give faith a meal, thereby to keep the heart from fainting, when God comes not so fast to deliver as we desire! He is the most thankful man that ponders up the mercies of God in his memory, and can feed his faith with the thoughts of what hath done for him, so as to walk in the strength thereof in present straits. When Job was on the dunghill, he forgot not God's old kindnesses, but durst trust him with a knife at his throat, 'Though he slay me yet will I trust in him.' He that distrusts God, after former experience, is like the foolish builder, Matt. 7—he rears his monument for past mercies on the sand, which the next tide of affliction washeth away.

10. *Direction*. Thou must not only praise God thyself while on the stage of this earth, but *endeavour to transmit the memorial of his goodness to posterity*. The psalmist, speaking of the mercies of God, saith, 'We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord,' Ps. 78:4. Children are their parents' heirs, they enter upon their estates. It were unnatural for a father, before he dies, to bury up his treasure in the earth, where his children should not find or enjoy it. Now the

mercies of God are not the least part of his treasure, nor the least of his child's inheritance, being both helps to their faith, matter for their praise, and spurs to their obedience: 'Our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old; how thou didst drive out the heathen,' &c., Ps. 44:1-3. From this they ground their confidence, 'Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob,' ver. 4; and excite their thankfulness, 'In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever,' ver. 8. Indeed, as children are their parents' heirs, so they become in justice liable to pay their parents' debts. Now, the great debt which the saint at death stands charged with, is that which he owes to God for his mercies, and therefore it is but reason he should tie his posterity to the payment thereof. Thus mayest thou be praising God in heaven and earth at the same time.

#### USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Reproof to the ungrateful world,  
and exhortation to saints.]*

We shall wind up this head with a double application of reproof and exhortation.

*Use First. Of reproof to the ungrateful world.*

How few, alas! can we find so ingenuous as to pay this little quit-rent to the great Lord of this world's manor for all the mercies they hold of him! Some are such brutes that, like swine, their nose is nailed to the trough in which they feed. They have not the use of their understanding so far as to lift up their eye to heaven and say, there dwells that God that provides this for me, that God by whom I live, and from whom I have my livelihood. It were well if we knew not in all our towns where such brutes as these dwell. You would count it a sad spectacle to behold a man in a lethargy, with his senses and reason so blasted by his disease, that he knows not his nearest friends, and takes no notice of those that tend him or bring his daily food to him. How many such senseless wretches are at this day lying on his hands? Divine providence ministers daily supplies to their necessities, but they take no notice of his care and goodness. Others there are, that feloniously, yea sacrilegiously, set the crown of praise on their own head which is

due alone to God. Thus Nebuchadnezzar writes his own name upon his palace, and leaves God out of the story: 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' Dan. 4:30. Proud wretch! was not every stone he used in that pile cut out of God's quarry? and for every skep of sand did he not come upon God's ground? Thus the atheistical husbandman cons his plough and dung-cart more thanks than the God of heaven, who 'crowns the year with his goodness.' The proud soldier stands upon his sword, daring to take the honour of his victory to himself, and not ascribe it to the Lord of hosts, who at his pleasure gives and takes away the heart from the mighty.

Yea, some, rather than God shall have it, will give it to any other. Thus Pope Adrian, in his blasphemous inscription on the gates of a college he built, abuseth God with Scripture language, 'Utrecht planted me, Lovian watered me, and Cæsar gave the increase;' which made one underwrite, *nihil hic Deus fecit*—it seems God did nothing for this man. Not that I think it unlawful to acknowledge our benefactors, as instruments in God's hand for our good, but to blot out the name of God, our chief founder, to write the name of an underling creature, is a high piece of wickedness and ingratitude. I like that form which a good man used to his friend for a kindness: 'I bless God for you, I thank God and you.' He that will exact more, requires what we owe him not.

In a word, some, the worst of the three, instead of returning thanks to God for his mercies, abuse them to his dishonour. It is not more sad than true, that the goodness of God with many serves but to feed and nourish their lusts. They eat and drink at God's cost, and then rise up to play the rebels against God; no weapons will serve them to use but the mercies he hath given them. It is too bad if the tenant pays not his easy rent; but to make strip and waste of the trees on his landlord's ground, this is more intolerable. Yet such outrages are daily practised in the wicked world with the mercies of God.

Michael Balbus is infamous for his horrid ingratitude, who, the same night that the emperor had pardoned and released him, barbarously slew his saviour. And do not many, whom God lets out of the prison of affliction, lift

up their traitorous knife at God, wounding his name with their oaths, drunkenness, and profaneness, as soon almost as the sentence of death is taken off and their prison door set open? To conclude, others that will needs pass for thankful, yet all the return is but windy praise—honour him with their lips, and pour contempt upon him in their lives. What music more harsh and displeasing than to hear a harper sing to one tune with his voice and play another with his hand? O it grates in God's ears when Jacob's voice is attended with Esau's rough hands. Truly, when I consider how the goodness of God is abused and perverted by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of his mind that said *maximum miraculum est Dei patientia et munificentia*—the greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful world. If a prince hath an enemy got into one of his towns, he doth not send them in provision, but lays close siege to the place, and doth what he can to starve them. But the great God, that could wink all his enemies into destruction, bears with them, and is at daily cost to maintain them. Well may he command us to bless them that curse us, who himself 'does good to the evil and thankful.' O what would not God do for his creature if thankful, that thus heaps the coals of his mercies upon the heads of his enemies!

But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus. God's mill goes slow, but it grinds small; the more admirable his patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and unsupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of his abused goodness. Nothing blunter than iron, yet when sharpened it hath an edge that will cut mortally. Nothing smoother than the sea, yet when stirred into a tempest nothing rageth more. Nothing so sweet as the patience and goodness of God, and nothing so terrible as his wrath when it takes fire. Be therefore, in the fear of God, stirred up to bethink yourselves what you mean to do. It is the trick, they say, of distracted people to spite their dearest friends and nearest relations most. These above all they seek to mischief. But what folly and madness is it in thee to fly at the face of God with thy sins, that hath done more for thee than all thy friends, and can do more against thee than all thy enemies thou hast in the world! But the more to move thee,

1. Consider that God *keeps an exact account of all his mercies thou receivest*. You cannot steal God's custom. He that could tell the prophet where his servant Gehazi had been, and what he had received of Naaman, will one day tell thee to a farthing every talent thou hast received of him. God hath, as a bag for thy sins, so a book for his mercies, and what he books he means to reckon for.

2. Consider *how severely he hath dealt with those that never had so much mercy from him as thyself*. If heathens are speechless in judgment, when God reckons with them for their mercies, O how confounded wilt thou be that goest from gospel dispensations to hold up thy hand at the bar before the Judge of all the world! 'They are without excuse, because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful,' Rom. 1:21. If the heathen that was not thankful for his penny, cannot lift up his hand in the day of the Lord, where wilt thou appear that hast so many hundred talents in thy hand to answer for?

*Question.* But may be, poor wretch, thou mayest now ask, what thou shouldst do to give God the praise of his mercies?

*Answer.* In a word, thou hast but one way to pay God this his tribute, and it is a strange one—even by *running deeper into his debt than by all the mercies that yet thou hast received of him*. Hear therefore, poor sinner, what I mean: That God—who hath given thee life and being—that hath exercised unspeakable patience towards thee—been at a vast expense in his daily providence upon thee, to preserve, feed, clothe, and maintain thee—all which have been most wretchedly abused by thee, and for it thy life become forfeited to his justice—doth yet offer a greater mercy than all these, even the Lord Jesus, whom, if thou wilt, with shame and sorrow for thy past sins, but come unto, and accept to be thy Lord and Saviour, then wilt thou be in a posture, and not till then, to give God the praise of his other mercies. He that rejects this, that is the greatest of all mercies, can never be thankful for any. It is Christ who alone can give thee a spirit of thankfulness. Not a Christian person in the world but is an unthankful person. 'Evil' and 'unthankful' are inseparable. O what a blessed gospel is this, that teacheth us here to pay debts by running deeper into the score!—to

be thankful for less mercies, by accepting that which is infinitely greater!

*Use Second.* For *exhortation to the saints*; not to call you to this duty, which if you answer your name is undoubtedly your practice, but to quicken you in it, and make you more in love with it.

1. Consider it is *a duty that becomes you well*, 'Praise is comely for the upright,' Ps. 33:1. This garment of praise sits so well on none as on your back; you should not think yourselves dressed in a morning till you have it on. An unthankful saint carries a contradiction with it. 'Evil' and 'unthankful' are the twins that live and die together. As any ceaseth to be evil, he begins to be thankful.

2. Consider it is that which God *both expects and promiseth himself at your hands*; he made you for this end. When the vote passed in heaven for your being, yea happy being, in Christ, it was upon this account, that you should be 'a name and a praise' to him on earth in time and in heaven to eternity. Should God miss of this, he would fail of one main part of his design. What prompts him to bestow every mercy, but to afford you matter to compose a song for his praise? They are 'a people, children that will not lie: so he became their Saviour,' Isa. 63:8. He looks for fair dealing, you see, at your hands. Whom may a father trust with his reputation, if not a child? Where can a prince expect honour, if not among his courtiers and favourites? Your state is such as the least mercy you have is more than all the world can show besides. Thou, Christian, and thy few brethren, divide heaven and earth among you. What hath God that he withholds from you? Sun, moon, and stars are set up to give you light, sea and land have their treasure and store for your use. Others do but ravish them, you are the rightful heirs to them. They groan that any other should be served by them. The angels, bad and good, minister unto you; the evil, against their will, are forced, like scullions, when they tempt you to scour and brighten your graces, and make way for your greater comforts. Like Haman, they hold your stirrup, while you mount up higher in favour with God. The good angels are servants to your heavenly Father, and disdain not to carry you, as the nurse her master's child in her arms. Your God withholds not himself from you. He is your portion, father, husband, friend, and what

not. The same heaven you shall have to dwell in with him; the same table and fare. God is his own happiness, and admits you to enjoy himself. O what honour is this, for the subject to drink in his prince's cup! 'Thou shalt make them drink of the rivers of thy pleasures,' Ps. 36:8. And all this, not as the purchase of your sweat, much less blood; the feast is paid for by another hand, and you are welcome; only he expects your thanks to the founder of it, at whose cost you are entertained. No sin-offering is imposed upon you under the gospel; thank-offerings are all he looks for.

3. God hath *a book of remembrance for your services*; he takes kind notice of the little good that is in you, and done by you. Not the least office of love to his name and house is overlooked, though mingled with much evil; he commands the one, pardons and pities you for the other. 'There is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel,' it was said of Jeroboam's son, I Kings 14:13. What an honourable testimony doth God give of Asa, that 'his was perfect all his days,' II Chr. 15:17, though we find many wry steps he took. The little strength Philadelphia had must not be forgot. What a favourable apology doth Christ make for Joshua, accused by Satan for his filthy garments—'Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?' and for his drowsy disciples—'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak?' Now shall God take notice of the little good in his saints, apologize for their infirmities, commend and reward their weak services, yea eternize their memory with honour, 'The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance,' Ps. 112:6; and doth not he deserve to be exalted for his infinite perfections? praised and loved, who is all good, ever good, and doing good to them? Shall not he be tender of thy name, and thou be regardless of his honour, so as to entomb his precious mercies in the sepulchre of unthankfulness?

4. Consider *what an ornament a thankful frame of heart is to religion*. This commends God to the unbelieving world, who knows little more of him than your lives preach to them. They read religion in that character you print it, and make their report of God and his ways as they see you behave yourselves in the world. If you walk disconsolately, or grumble at divine providence, how they can believe the ways are so pleasant



as they are told? We listen what the servant saith of his master. If he commends him, and goes cheerfully through his work, this gains him credit among his neighbours. It was a convincing testimony Daniel gave to the goodness of God, when he would praise him thrice a day with the hazard of his life. To see a poor Christian thankful for his little pittance, yea, in the midst of his afflictions, as if he had crowns and kingdoms at his dispose, an ordinary understanding would reason thus, Surely this man finds some sweetness in his God that we see not, and is better paid for his service than we know of. The joyful praise of dying saints in the midst of fiery flames, have made their spectators go home in love, not only with religion, but with martyrdom.

5. Consider *the honour that is put upon you in this duty*. To attend on a prince, though bareheaded and on the knee, is counted more honour for a nobleman, than to live in the country, and have the service of his fellow-subjects. Though we serve God all the day long, yet in acts of worship we have the honour immediately to attend on him, and minister to him. O blessed are they who may thus stand about him! Praise is the highest act of worship, and therefore to be continued in heaven's blissful state. Whereas other graces shall be melted into love and joy, so other duties of worship, as hearing, praying, &c., into praise and thanksgiving. The priesthood was a great honour under the law. He chose Aaron and his tribe from among their brethren to serve at his altar; he would take that gift from their hand which he would not at a king's. But in this gospel state every believer hath a more honourable priesthood, because he brings better sacrifices, the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. And while thou art honouring thy God, thou honourest thyself. The whole body shines with the beams of that crown which is put on the head.

6. Consider that thy praises will *render thy prayers more grateful and successful*. It was thought a good omen for Alexander's future victories, that he was liberal to the gods in his sacrifices, throwing frankincense by handfuls into the fire. He is a niggard to himself that is so to his God. *Remittatur in suum principium cæleste profluvium, quo uberius terræ refundatur* (Bern. Sermon. 42 in Cantic.)—let the river of God's

mercies be returned to pay its tribute to God, their source and fountain, that they may refund more abundantly to us again. You shall observe the saints in their greatest straits, when they have most to beg, deliver their prayers praise-wise. Jehoshaphat sends his priest praising God into the field, and God fights for him. David, in the cave, My heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise.' Daniel, when a trap was laid for his life, 'praiseth God thrice a day.' Christ himself, when he would raise Lazarus, lifts up his eyes and blesseth God, 'I thank thee, O Father,' &c.; when he was to suffer, sings a hymn. A thankful heart cannot easily meet with a denial. 'Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand,' Ps. 149:6.

## DIVISION THIRD.—THE INWARD PRINCIPLE OF PRAYER.

*‘In the Spirit.’*

We are come to the third division in the apostle's directory for prayer—the principle or spring from whence they are to flow—the *Spirit*, ‘praying...in the Spirit.’ In proceeding to the consideration of this topic, the first point is that which will be determined by the solution of the following question, viz:—

QUESTION. What is it to pray *‘in the Spirit?’*

ANSWER. Interpreters generally comprehend in this phrase *both the spirit of the person praying, and the Spirit of God, by which our spirits are fitted for and acted in prayer. Est oratio in spiritu, nempe et nostro quo oramus, et Spiritu Sancto per quem oramus* (so Zanch. in loc)—that is a prayer in the spirit, which, by the help of the Holy Spirit, is performed with our soul and spirit. These two indeed go ever together. We cannot act our spirit without the Holy Spirit. Alas! this is like a lump of clay in our bosoms till he quickens it; and we cannot but with our heart and spirit, when the Holy Spirit moves upon it. The Spirit's breath is vital. The Holy Ghost doth not breathe in us as one through a trunk or trumpet, which is a mere passive instrument; but stirs up our hearts, and actuates our affections in the duty. Prayer is called ‘a pouring out of the soul to God.’ The soul is the well from which the water of prayer is poured; but the Spirit is the spring that feeds this well, and the hand that helps to pour it forth. The well would have no water without the spring, neither could it deliver itself of it without one to draw it. Thus the Spirit of God must fill the heart with praying affections, and enable them also to pour themselves forth. From the words thus sensed, we shall a while dwell upon these two propositions. FIRST. He who will pray acceptably, *must pray in his heart and spirit.* SECOND. He that would pray in his own spirit, *must pray in the Spirit of God.*

### BRANCH FIRST.

*[He who will pray acceptably,  
MUST PRAY IN HIS HEART AND SPIRIT.]*

Praying in the spirit is opposed to lip-labour, ‘they draw near to me with their lips, but their heart is removed far from me;’ like an adulteress, whose heart and spirit is as far from her husband as where her paramour is. It is no prayer in which the heart of the person bears no part. Parisiensis, glossing upon the place of Hosea 14:2, ‘so will we render the calves of our lips,’ compares the duty of prayer to the calves in the legal sacrifices. The composure of the words, saith he, in prayer, is as the skin or hide of the beast, the voice as the hair, the understanding as the flesh, the desires and affections of the heart as the fat of the inwards; this, and this alone, makes it a prayer in God's account. ‘My spirit prayeth,’ saith the apostle, 1 Cor. 14:14; and, ‘I will pray with the spirit,’ ver. 15.


So, ‘God, whom I serve with my spirit,’ Rom. 1:9. The melodious sound which comes from a musical instrument, such as viol or lute, is formed within the belly of the instrument, and the deeper the belly of the instrument the sweeter is its music; the same strings on a flat board, touched by the same hand, would make no music. The melodiousness of prayer comes from within the man, ‘We are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit,’ and the deeper the groans are that come from thence, still the sweeter the melody. There may be outward worship and inward atheism; as Melancthon said, *vos Itali adoratis Deum in pane, quem non creditis in cælo esse*—You Italians worship that God in bread, whom you do not believe to be in heaven. There may be much pomp in the outward ceremony of the performance, when the person neither loves nor believes that God whom he courts with an external devotion. The blemishes which made the sacrifices in the law


rejected, were not only in the outward limbs of the beast, the sick as well as the lame beast was refused, Mal. 1:8. We read of loud praises when never a word was heard spoken. But God owns none for a prayer that hath the vehemency of the voice but not inspirited with the affection of the heart. Separate the spirit from the body, and the man is dead; the heart from the lip, and there is a dissolution of prayer. Now, in handling of this I must first show what it is to pray in our spirit when these three are found in the duty:—FIRST. When we pray *with knowledge*. SECOND. When we pray *in fervency*. THIRD. When we pray *in sincerity*. These three exercise the three powers of the soul and spirit. By knowledge the understanding is set on work; by fervency the affections; and by sincerity the will. All these are required in conjunction to ‘praying in the spirit.’ There may be knowledge without fervency, and this, like the light of the moon, is cold, and quickens not; there may be heat without knowledge, and this is like mettle in a blind horse; there may be knowledge and fervency, and this like a chariot with swift horses, and a skilful driver in the box, but, being dishonest, carries it the wrong way. Neither of these, nor both these together, avail, because sincerity is wanting to touch these affections, and make them stand to the right point, which is the glory of God. He will have little thanks for his zeal that is fervent in spirit, but serving himself with it, not the Lord.

[To pray in the spirit, we must have  
KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING.]

FIRST. To pray acceptably, or in the spirit, it is required that *we pray with knowledge and understanding*. A blind sacrifice was rejected in the law, Mal. 1:8; much more are blind devotions under the gospel. As knowledge aggravates a sin, so ignorance takes from the excellency of an action that is good: ‘I bear them witness,’ saith Paul, ‘they have a zeal, but not according to knowledge.’ The want of an eye disfigures the fairest face, the want of knowledge the devoutest prayer: ‘Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews,’ John 4:22, where we see what a fundamental defect the want of knowledge is in acts of worship, such as brings damnation with it.

*Question First.* But why is knowledge so requisite to acceptable praying?

*Answer First.* Because without this it is not a ‘reasonable service;’ for we know not what we do. God calls for —‘reasonable service,’ Rom. 12:1, which some oppose to the legal sacrifices. They offered up beasts to God; in the gospel we are to offer up ourselves. Now the soul and spirit of a man is the man. Why did not God lay a law on beasts to worship him, but because they have not a rational soul to understand and reflect upon their own actions? And will God accept that service and worship from man, wherein he doth not exercise that faculty that distinguisheth him from a beast? ‘Show yourselves men,’ saith the prophet to those idolaters, Isa. 46:8. And truly he that worships the true God ignorantly is brutish in his knowledge as well as he that prays to a false god.

*Answer Second.* Because the understanding is —the leading faculty of the soul, and so the key of the work. The inward worship of the heart is the chief. Now, the other powers of the soul are disabled if they want this their guide which holds the candle to them. As for those violent passions of seeming zeal, sorrow, and joy, which sometimes appear in ignorant worshippers and their blind devotions, they are spurious. Christ’s sheep, like Jacob’s, conceive by the eye.

1. The saint’s eye is *enlightened to see the majesty and glorious holiness of God*, and then it reveres him, and mourns before him in the sense of his own vileness: ‘Now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes,’ Job 42:6.

2. Again, by an eye of faith he *beholds the goodness and love of God to poor sinners in Christ*, and in particular to him, and this eye affects his heart to love and rely on him, which it is impossible the ignorant soul should do.

*Question First.* But you will say, *what is necessary for the praying soul to know?*

*Answer First.* There is required a knowledge *that he to whom he directs his prayer is the true God*. Religious worship is an incommunicable flower in the crown of the deity, and that both inward and outward. We are religiously to worship him only, who, by reason of his infinite perfections, deserves our supreme love, honour, and trust. He must have the crown that owes the kingdom.

'The kingdom and power' are God's. Therefore 'the glory' of religious worship belongs to him alone, Matt. 6:13. Angels are the highest order of creatures, but we are forbid to 'worship any of the host of heaven,' Deut. 17:3. 'Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee it doth appertain'—where fear is put for religious worship, as appears by the circumstance of the place. The want of this knowledge filled the heathen world with idolatry. For, where they found any virtue or excellency in the creature, presently they adored and worshipped it, like some ignorant rustic, who coming to court, thinks every one he sees in brave clothes to be the king.

*Answer Second.* There is required a knowledge of this true God, *what his nature is*. 'He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' Heb. 11:6. It is confessed, a perfect knowledge of the divine perfections is incomprehensible by a finite being. He answered right who said—when asked *quid est Deus?* what is God?—*si scirem essem ipse Deus*—if I knew, I myself would be God. None indeed knows God thus but God himself; yet a Scripture knowledge of him is necessary to the right performance of this duty. The want of understanding his omniscience and infinite mercy, is the cause of vain babbling, and a conceit to prevail by long prayers, which our Saviour charges upon the heathen, and prevents in his disciples by acquainting them with these attributes, Matt. 6:7, 8. They came rather *narrare* than *rogare*—to inform God than to beg. The ignorance of his high and glorious majesty is the cause why so many are rude and slovenly in their gesture, so saucy and irreverently familiar with God in their expressions. We are bid to 'be sober, watching unto prayer.' Truly there is an insobriety in our very language, when we do not clothe the desires of our hearts with such humble expressions as may signify the awe and dread of his sacred majesty in our hearts. In a word, the reason why men dare come reeking out of the adulterous embraces of their lusts, and stretch forth their unwashed hands to heaven in prayer—whence is it?—but because they know not God to be of such infinite purity as will have no fellowship with the workers of iniquity? 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself,' Ps. 50:21.

*Answer Third.* We must understand *the matter of our prayers*, what we beg, what we deprecate. Without this we cannot in faith say amen to our own prayers, but may soon ask that which neither becomes us to desire, nor is honourable for God to give. This Christ rebuked, when she in the gospel put up her ambitious request for her children to be set one at the right the other at the left hand of Christ in his kingdom. God never gave us leave thus to indite our own prayers by the dictate of our private spirit, but hath bound us up to ask only what he hath promised to give.

*Answer Fourth.* There is required a knowledge of *the manner how we are to pray*; as, in whose name, and what qualifications are required in the prayer and person praying. We find Paul begging prayers, 'that ye strive together with me in your prayers.' In another place he tells us of a lawful striving, II Tim. 2:5. There is a law of prayer which must be observed, or we come at our own adventure. Even in false worship they go by some rule in their addresses to their gods. Therefore those smattering Samaritans, when a plague was on them, concluded the reason to be because they 'knew not the manner of the god of the land,' II Kings 17:26. The true God will be served in due order, or else expect a breach. A word or two for application of this branch.

[*Use or Application.*]

*Use First.* *How few then pray in the spirit!* Were this the only character to try many by, would they not be cast over the bar for mere babblers? As, first, those in the Popish church, where most know not a word what they say in prayer. If it be such a weakness to subscribe a petition to a king, or to a parliament, which we never read or understood, what shall we then think of such brutish prayers as these sent to heaven and indorsed with an *ignoramus* on the back of them? Yea, amongst ourselves, many, who though they pray in their mother language, yet are as ignorant as to the matter of their prayers; how else could they patter over the creed and commandments with their blind devotion instead of prayers? Are there more deplored ruins of mankind to be found among the Indians than such? Yea, when they join with their minister in prayer, neither know that God to

whom the prayer is directed, nor the Mediator under the favour of whose name it is presented. Before Nebuchadnezzar could bless God, he had the understanding of a man given him, which these yet want. Do you not think such ignorant wretches as these might be easily persuaded to kneel before an image gaudily dressed up, or to put their letter into some angel or saint's hand for despatch, being made to believe that it will find a kinder welcome by the mediation of such favourites? O what a darkness is there even at this day upon the face of our waters! on which, had but the pope's instruments opportunity to sit brooding awhile, they might soon bring their desired work to a perfection among the multitude of ignorant souls that are amidst us! We see there is need not only to stir up our people to pray, or else we send them before they have learned their errand, as if we should call a child to read before he hath learned his letters.








*Use Second.* It speaks to all that are at any time the mouth to God for others in prayer, *so to pray, that those who join with them may clearly understand what they put up to God for them.* Who is more to be blamed—he that prayeth in an unknown tongue, or he that with such uncouth phrases and high-flown expressions as are not understood by half the company? Suppose thine own spirit prays, as the apostle saith, yet thy understanding is unfruitful unto them. They, alas! are at a loss, and stand gazing, as the disciples did when the cloud parted Christ from them. Either come down from thy high towering expressions, or help them up to thee. They may say of thee as those of Moses, 'We know not what is become of the man.' No wonder if, while they cannot keep sight of the matter in hand, that their thoughts rove and dance about some object of their own framing. Dost thou pray to be admired for thy rouling tongue, height of gifts, or the like? Perhaps thou mayest have this thy reward of some ignorant ones, and others that would as fain commend themselves upon the same account; but consider what a low and base end thou propoundest in so high a service, unworthy of a Christian's thought. What! no net to fish with for thy credit and applause but a sacred ordinance! The whip which Christ made in the gospel belongs to thy back. Our blessed Saviour, that was all on fire with zeal to see his house of prayer made a house of merchandise,

O how doth his soul loathe the baseness of thy mercenary spirit, who dost the same, though in another dress!

[*To pray in the spirit, we must have FERVENCY.*]

SECOND. We pray in the spirit *when we pray in fervency*. The soul keeps the body warm while it is in it. So much as there is our soul and spirit in a duty, so much heat and fervency. If the prayer be cold, we may certainly conclude the heart is idle, and bears no part in the duty. Our spirit is an active creature: what it doth is with a force, whether bad or good. Hence in Scripture, to set the heart and soul upon a thing, imports vehemency and fervour. Thus the poor labouring man is said to 'set his heart on his wages,' Deut. 24:15. The hopes of what he shall have at night makes him sweat at his work in the day. Darius 'set his heart on Daniel to deliver him;' and it follows, 'He laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him,' Dan. 6:14. When the spirit of a man is set about a work, he will do it to purpose. 'If thou shalt seek the Lord with all thy heart and with all thy soul,' Deut. 4:29, that is, fervently. This consists not in a violent agitation of the bodily spirits. A man may put his body into a sweat in duty, and the prayer be cold. That is the fervent prayer that flows from a warm heart and enkindled affections; like an exhalation which first is set on fire in the cloud, and then breaks forth into thunder. 'My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end,' Ps. 39:3, 4. Now as zeal is not one single affection, but the edge and vehemency of them all; so fervency in prayer is, when all the affections act strongly and suitably to the several parts of prayer.

In confession, then have we fervency, when the soul melts into a holy shame and sorrow for the sins he spreads before the Lord, so that he feels a holy smart and pain within, and doth not act a tragical part with a comical heart. For, as Chrysostom saith, 'To paint tears is worse than to paint the face.' Here is true fervency: 'I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise,' Ps. 55:2. There may be fire in the pan, when none in the piece; a loud wind, but no rain with it. David made a noise with his voice, and mourned in his spirit.

So, in petition we have fervency, when the heart is drawn out with vehement desires of the grace it prays for, not some lazy woundings or wishings, or weak velleities, but passionate breathings and breakings of heart. Sometimes it is set out by the violence of thirst, which is thought more tormenting than that of hunger. As the hunted hart panteth after the cool waters, so did David's soul after God, Ps. 42. Sometimes it is set out by the strainings of a wrestler—so Jacob is said to wrestle with the angel; and of those that run in a race, 'instantly serving God day and night,' Acts 26:7,  ■  ▾    \   —they stretched out themselves. 'My soul breaketh for longing,' Ps. 119:20, as one that with straining breaks a vein.

*[Why we must pray in the spirit fervently.]*

*Question.* But why must we pray in the spirit fervently? *Answer First.* We must pray in the spirit fervently, from the command. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might; and these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart,' Deut. 6:5, 6; which imports the affectionate performance of every command and duty. Sever the outward from the inward part of God's worship, and he owns it not. 'Who hath required this at your hands?' Isa. 1:12. As if he had said, Did I ever command you to give a beast's heart in sacrifice, and keep back your own? Why dost thou pray at all? Wilt thou say, Because he commands it? Then, why not fervently, which the command intends chiefly? When you send for a book, would you be pleased with him that brings you only the cover? And will God accept the skin for the sacrifice? The external part of the duty is but as the cup. Thy love, faith, and joy are the wine he desires to taste of. Without these, thou givest him but an empty cup to drink in. Now, what is this but to mock him?

*Answer Second.* We must pray in the spirit, to comport with the name of God. The common description of prayer is calling on the name of God. Now, as in prayer we call upon the name of God, so it must be with a worship suitable to his name, or else we pollute it and incur his wrath. This is the chief meaning of the third commandment. In the first, God provides that none besides himself, the only true God, be

worshipped; in the second, that he, the true God, be not served with will-worship, but his own institutions; and in the third, that he be not served vainly and slightly in his own worship. There is no attribute in God but calls for this fervency in his worship.

1. He is a *great and glorious God*; and as such it becomes us to approach his presence with our affections in the best array. Are yawning prayers fit for a great God's hearing? Darest thou speak to such a majesty before thou art well awake, and hast such a sacrifice prepared as he will accept? 'Cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen,' Mal. 1:14. See here, first, anything less than the best we have is a corrupt thing. He will accept a little, if the best, but he abhors that thou shouldst save thy best for another. Again he that offers not the best—the strength of his affections—is a deceiver; because he robs him of his due, and he is a great God. It is fit the prince's table should be served with the best that the market affords, and not the refuse. When Jacob intended a present to the governor of the land, he bids his children 'take of the best of the fruit of the land in your vessels.' Lastly, the awful thoughts which God extorts from the very heathen by his mighty works, do reproach us who live in the bosom of the church, and despise his name by our heedless and heartless serving of him.

2. He is the *living God*. Is a dead-hearted prayer a sacrifice suitable to a living God? How can that be accepted of him which never came from him? Lay not your dead prayers by his side. The lively prayer is his, the dead thine own. What the psalmist saith of persons, we may say of prayers, The living, the living they shall praise him.' The glorious angels, who for their zeal are called seraphims, and a flame of fire, these he chooseth to minister to him in heaven; and the saints below—who, though they sojourn on earth, yet have their extraction from heaven, and so have spirits raised and refined from the dulness of their earthly constitution—these he sets apart for himself as priests to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto him. The quicker any one is himself, the more offensive is a dull leaden heeled messenger or slow-handed work-

man to him. How then can God, who is all life, brook thy lazy listless devotions? When he commanded the neck of an ass to be broke, and not offered up unto him, was it because he was angry with the beast? No sure, it was his own workmanship; no other than himself made it; but to teach us how unpleasant a dull heart is to him in his service.

3. He is a *loving God*, and love will be paid in no coin but its own. Give God love for love, or he accounts you give him nothing. 'If ye love me, keep my commandments,' John 14:15. And, 'If a man would give the substance of his house for love, it would be contemned,' Song 8:7. So, if a man thinks to commute with God, and give him anything in prayer instead of his love and fervent affection, it will be contemned. Let the prayer be never so pithy, the posture of the body never so devout, the voice never so loud, if the affections of the heart be not drawn out after God in the duty, he disdains and rejects it, because it doth not correspond with the dear affections which God expresseth to us. He draws out the heart with his purse, and gives his very soul and self with all his gifts to his people. Therefore he expects our hearts should come with all our services to him. It is no wonder to see the servant, whose master is hard and cruel, have no heart to or mettle in his work; but love in the master useth to put life into the servant. And therefore God, who is incomparably the best master, disdains to be served as none but the worst among men use to be.

*Answer Third.* We must pray in the spirit, *because the promise is only to fervent prayer*. A still-born child is no heir, neither is a prayer that wants life heir to any promise. Fervency is to prayer what fire was to the spices in the censer—without this it cannot ascend as incense before God. Some have attempted a shorter cut to the Indies by the north, but were ever frozen up in their way; and so will all sluggish prayers be served. It were an easy voyage indeed to heaven if such prayers might find the way thither. But never could they show any of that good land's gold who prayed thus, though he were a saint. The righteous man indeed is declared heir, as to all other promises, so to this of having his prayer heard; but if he hath not *aptitudinem inrandi*—he is not in a fit posture to enter into the possession of this promise, or claim present benefit from it, while

his heart remains cold and formal in the duty. There is a qualification to the act of prayer as necessary as of the person praying: 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' When God intends a mercy for his people, he stirs up a spirit of prayer in them: 'I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain,' Isa. 45:19; that is, I never stirred them up to it, and helped them in it, and then let them lose their labour. 'Then ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you: and ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart,' Jer. 29:12, 13. Feeble desires, like weak pangs, go over, and bring not a mercy to the birth. As the full time grows nearer, so the spirit of prayer grows stronger. 'Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, I tell you that he will avenge them speedily,' Luke 18:7, 8. None in the house perhaps will stir for a little knock at the door; they think he is some idle beggar, or one in no great haste; but if he raps thick and loud, then they go, yea, out of their beds. 'Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity,' Luke 11:8.

[*Use or Application.*]

*Use First.* This sadly shows there is *little true praying to be found among us, because few that pray fervently*. Let us sort men into their several ranks.

1. The *ignorant*, do these pray fervently? Their hearts, alas! must needs be frozen up in the duty; they dwell too far from the sun to have any of this divine heat in their devotions.

2. The *profane person*, that is debauched with his filthy lusts, his heat runs out another way. Can the heart which is inflamed with lusts be any other than cold in prayer? Hell-fire must be quenched before this from heaven can be kindled.

3. The soul *under the power of roving thoughts*—whose mind, like Satan, is walking to and fro the earth, while his eyes seem nailed to heaven—can he be fervent? Can the affections be intended and the mind inattentive? Fervency unites the soul and gathers in the thoughts to the work in hand. It will not suffer diversions, but answers all foreign thoughts, as Nehemiah, in another case, did them that would have called him off from building, 'I am doing a great work,

so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease?' Neh. 6:3. It is said of Elias {Elijah}, 'He prayed earnestly,' he prayed in praying, so the Greek. As in Ezekiel's vision, there was 'a wheel in a wheel,' so a prayer in his prayer. Whereas the roving soul is prayerless, his lips pray and his mind plays; his eye is up to heaven, as if that were his mark, but he shoots his thoughts down to the earth.

4. He *to whom the duty is tedious and wearisome*, who doth not sigh and groan in the duty, but under it; who prays as a sick man works in his calling, finding no delight or joy in it. True fervency suffers no weariness, feels no pain. The tradesman, when hot at his work, and the soldier in fight, the one feels not his weariness nor the other his wounds. Affections are strong things, able to pull up a weak body. Therefore, he that shrugs at a duty, and turns this way and that way, as a sick man from one side of his bed to the other for ease, shows he hath little content in the duty, and therefore less zeal. These aches of the spirit in prayer—though he be a saint—come of some cold he hath gotten, and declare him to be under a great distemper. A man in health finds not more savour in his food and refreshing from it, than the Christian doth in the offices of religion, when his heart is in the right temper.

*Use Second. For exhortation.* Dost thou pray? Pray fervently, or thou dost nothing. Cold prayer is no more prayer than painted fire is fire. That prayer which warms not thine own heart, will it, thinkest thou, move God's? Thou drawest the tap, but the vessel is frozen. A man hath not the use of his hand clung up with cold, neither canst thou have the use of thy spirit in duty till thy heart chafed into some sense and feeling of what thou prayest for. Now to bring thy cold heart into some spiritual heat,

*[Arguments to enkindle our zeal  
and fervency in prayer.]*

*Argument 1. Consider the excellency of zeal and fervency.* If a saint, thou hast a principle that inclines thee to approve of things that are excellent; and such is this. Life is the excellency of beings, yea, even in inanimate creatures there is an analogical life, and therein consists its excellency. The spirits of wine commend it; what is it worth when dead and flat? In the

diamond, the sparkle gives the worth; in fountain water, that which makes it more excellent than other is its motion, called therefore 'living water.' Much more in beings that have true life; for this the flea or fly are counted nobler creatures than the sun. The higher kind of life that beings have, their nature is thereby the more advanced—beasts above plants, men above beasts, and angels above men. Now as life gives the excellency to being, so vivacity and vigour in operating gives excellency to life. Indeed the nobler the life of the creature is, the greater energy is in its actings. The apprehension of an angel is quicker, and zeal stronger, than in a man. So that, the more lively thou art in thy duty, and the more zeal thou expressest therein, the nearer thou comest to the nature of those glorious spirits who, for their zeal in service of God, are called 'a flame of fire.' I confess, to be calm and cool in inferior things, and in our own matters betwixt man and man, is better than zeal. So Solomon saith, 'A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit,' Prov. 17:27. In the Hebrew it is a cool spirit. Injuries do not put him into a flame, neither do any occurrences in the world heat him to any height of joy, grief, or anger. Who more temperate in these than Moses? but set this holy man to pray, he is fire and tow, all life and zeal. Indeed it is one excellency of this fervency of spirit in prayer, that it allays all sinful passions. David's fervency in praying for his child when alive, made him bear the tidings of his death so calmly and patiently. We hear not an angry word that Hannah replies to her scolding companion Peninnah. And why, but because she had found the art of easing her troubled spirit in prayer? What need she contend with her adversary, who could, by wrestling with God, persuade him to espouse her quarrel? And truly were there nothing else to commend fervency of spirit in prayer, this is enough—that, like David's harp, it can charm the evil spirit of our passions, which in their excess the saint counts great sins, and I am sure finds them grievous troubles. When are you more placate and serene, than when the most life and fervour your souls can mount up in the flame of your sacrifices into the bosom of God? Possibly you may come, like Moses, down the mount with greater heat, but it will be against sin, not for self; whereas a formal prayer, like a plaster, which hath good ingredients in it, yet being laid



cold upon the wound, hurts it rather than heals it.

*Argument 2. God deserves the prime and strength of thy soul should be bestowed on him in thy prayers.*

(1.) *He gave thee the powers of thy soul and all thy affections.* According to the mould so is the statue that is cast in it; such thou art as thou wert in the idea of the divine mind. Now, may not thy Maker call for that which was his gift? He that made the stone an inanimate being, and confined the narrow souls of brutes to act upon low sensitive good, ennobleth thee with a rational appetite and spiritual affections. Now, wilt thou not employ those divine powers in the worship of thy God, from whom, thou hadst them? This were hard indeed—that God should be denied what himself gave, and not suffered to taste of his own cost. ‘I came unto my own,’ saith Christ, ‘and they would not receive me.’ Thus here, I came to my own creature; he had his life from me, and brings a dead heart unto me! Suppose a friend should give you notice that he will ere long be at your house, and sends you in beforehand a vessel of rich wine; which you, when he comes, grudge to broach it for his entertainment, and put him off with that which is dead and flat? Expectest thou a better friend to be thy guest than thy God? The psalmist calls upon us to ‘serve the Lord with gladness,’ and what is his enforcement? ‘Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us,’ Ps. 100:2, 3. Who plants a vineyard and looks not to drink of the wine? If God calls our corn and wine his, he therefore expects to be served with them; much more with our love and joy, for surely he allows us not to alienate the best of his gifts from him. When thou art therefore going to pray, call up thy affections, which haply are asleep on some creature’s lap, as Jonah in the sides of the ship: ‘What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God.’

(2.) *He deserves thy affections because he gives thee his.* He is jealous of thee because he is zealous for thee. Well may he complain of thy cold dreaming prayers whose heart is on a flame of love to thee. High and admirable are the expressions with which he sets forth his dear love to his people; whatever he doth for them is with a zeal. In protecting of them, ‘as birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem,’ that is, swiftly, as a bird flies full speed to her nest when

she perceives her young is in danger; in avenging them of their enemies, ‘the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this;’ in hearing their prayers he doth it ‘with delight;’ in forgiving their sins he is ready to forgive, ‘multiplies to pardon;’ when they ask one talent he gives them two. Jacob desires a safe egress and regress. He doth this and more than he desired, for he brings him home with two bands. Not the least mercy he gives but he draws forth his souls and heart with it; even in his afflicting providences, where he seems to show least love, there his heart overflows with it. ‘O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? mine heart is turned within me.’

(3.) *He is a good pay-master for his people’s zeal.* ‘He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,’ Heb. 11:6. Never did fervent prayer find cold welcome with him. Elias’ {Elijah’s} prayer fetched fire from heaven because it carried fire to heaven. The tribe of Levi for their zeal were preferred to the priesthood. And why? Surely they who were so zealous in doing justice on their brethren would be no less zealous in making atonement for them by their sacrifices. Most men lose their fervency and strength of their desires by misplacing them; they are zealous for such things as cannot, and persons that oft will not, pay them for their pains. O how hot is the covetous man in his chase after the world’s pelf! He ‘pants after the dust of the earth,’ and that ‘on the head of the poor.’ But what reward hath he for his labour? After all his getting, like the dogs in pursuit of the hare, he misseth his game, and at last goes often poor and supperless to bed in his grave; to be sure he dies ‘a fool,’ Jer. 17:11. How many court-spaniels—that have fawned and flattered, yea, licked up their master’s spittle, and all for some scraps of preferment—have befooled themselves, when at last they have seen their creeping sordid practices rewarded with the fatal stroke of the headsman, or a lingering consumptive death in their prince’s favour? Which made that ambitious cardinal say too late, If he had been as observant of his heavenly Master as he had been of his earthly, he could not have been left so miserable at last. In a word, do we not see the superstitious person knocking his breast and cutting his own flesh, out of a zeal to his wooden god, that hath neither ear to hear nor hand to help him? Now, doth not the living God, thy loving Father, deserve thy zeal more than

their dead and dumb idols do theirs? For shame! Let not us be cold in his worship when the idolater sweats before his god of clouts<sup>ccxxiii</sup>; let not the worldling's zeal in pursuit of his earthly mammon leave thee lagging behind with a heedless heartless serving of thy God. Neither fear the world's hooting at thee for thy zeal; they *think* thee a fool, but thou *knowest* them to be so.

*[How to raise our affections to fervency in prayer.]*

*Question.* But how may we get this fervency of spirit in prayer?

*Answer (a).* Thou who propoundest the question art a saint or not; if not, there is another question must precede this. How thou, that art at present in a state of spiritual death, mayest have spiritual life? *There must be life in the soul before there can be life in the duty.* All the rugs in the upholsterer's shop will not fetch a dead man to warmth, nor any arguments, though taken from the most moving topics in the Scripture, will make thee pray fervently while thy soul lies in a dead state. Go first to Christ that thou mayest have life, and having life, then there is hope to chafe thee into some heat. But,

*Answer (b).* If thou beest a saint, it yet *calls for thy utmost care to get, and when thou hast got, to keep, thy soul in a kindly heat.* As the stone cannot of itself mount up into the air, so the bird—though it can do this, yet—cannot stay there long without some labour and motion with its wings. The saints have a spark of heavenly fire in their bosom, but this needs the bellows of their care and diligence to keep it alive. There is a rust that breeds from the gold, a worm from the wood, a moth from the garment, that in time waste them; and ashes from the coal that choke the fire; yea, and in the saint too, which will damp his zeal if not cleared by daily watchfulness. Observe therefore what is thy chief impediment to fervency in prayer, and set thyself vigorously against it. If thou beest remiss in this precedaneous<sup>ccxxiv</sup> duty thou wilt be much more remiss in prayer itself. He that knows of a slough in the way, and mends it not before he takes his journey, hath no cause to wonder when his chariot is laid fast in it.

*Answer (c).* Now this is not the same in all, and therefore it is *necessary that thou beest so much acquainted with thine own estate as to know*

*what is thy great clog in this duty.* Certainly, were not the firmament of the saint's soul cooled with some malignant vapours that arise from his own breast, and weaken the force of divine grace in him, it would be summer all the year long with him, his heart would be ever warm, and his affections lively in duty. Look therefore narrowly whence thy cooling comes. Perhaps thy heart is too much let out upon the world in the day, and at night thy spirits are spent, when thou shouldst come before the Lord in prayer. If thou wilt be hotter in duty thou must be colder towards the world. A horse that carrieth a pack all day is unfit to go post at night. Wood that hath the sap in it will not burn easily; neither will thy heart readily take fire in holy duties who comest so sopped in the world to them. Drain, therefore, thy heart of these eager affections to that, if thou meanest to have them warm and lively in this. Now, no better way for this than to set thy soul under the frequent meditation of Christ's love to thee, thy relation to him, with the great and glorious things thou expectest from him in another world. This, or nothing, will dry up thy love to this world, as your wood which is laid a sunning is made fit for the fire. Whereas, let your hearts continue soaking in the thoughts of an inordinate love to the world, and you will find, when you come to pray, that thy heart will be in a duty even as a foggy wet log at the back of a fire, long in kindling, and soon out again. Haply the deadness of thy heart in prayer ariseth from want of a deep sense of thy wants and mercies thou desirest to have supplied. Couldst thou but pray feelingly no doubt but thou wouldst pray fervently. The hungry man needs no help from art to learn him how to beg; his pinched bowels make him earnest and eloquent.

Is it pardon of sin thou wouldst pray for? First see what anguish of spirit they put thee to. Do with thy soul as the chirurgeon with his patient's wounds, who syringeth them with some sharp searching water to try what sense he hath of them. Apply such considerations to thy soul as may make thee feel their smart, and be sensible of thy deplored estate by reason of them; then go and sleep at prayer if thou canst. We have David first affecting his heart, and expressing the dolor of his soul for his sin: 'Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me,' Ps. 38:4. Now when his heart is sick with these thoughts, as

one with strong physic working in his stomach, he pours out his soul in prayer to God, 'All my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee,' ver. 9.

Art thou to pray for others? First pierce thy heart through with their sorrows, and, by a spirit of sympathy, bring thyself to feel their miseries as if thou wert in their case. Then will thy heart be warm in prayer for them when it flows from a heart melted in compassion to them. Thus we read Christ troubled himself for Lazarus before he lifted up his eyes to heaven for him, John 11:33, 38, compared.

Again, it may be thy want of zeal proceeds from a defect in thy faith. Faith is the back of steel to the bow of prayer; this sends the arrow with a force to heaven. Where faith is weak the cry will not be strong. He that goes about a business with little hope to speed will do it but faintly; he works, as we say, for a dead horse. It is a true axiom, *voluntas non fertur in impossibilia*—the less we hope the less we endeavour. We read of strong cries that Christ put up in the days of his flesh. Now mark what enforced his prayer—'unto him that was able to save him;' and not only so, but if you look into that prayer to which this refers, you shall find that he clasped about God as his God—'My God, my God.' His hold on God held up his spirit in prayer. So in the several precedents of praying saints upon Scripture record, you may see how the spirit of prayer ebbed and flowed, fell and rose, as their faith was up and down. This made David press so hard upon God in the day of his distress: 'I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted,' Ps. 116:10. This made the woman of Canaan so invincibly importunate. Let Christ frown and chide, deny and rebuke her, she yet makes her approaches nearer and nearer, gathering arguments from his very denials, as if a soldier should shoot his enemy's bullets back upon him again; and Christ tells us what kept her spirit undaunted, 'O woman, great is thy faith!'

Again, may be it proceeds from some distaste thou hast given to the Holy Spirit, who alone can blow up thy affections; and then, no wonder thou art cold in prayer when he is gone that should keep thy heart warm at it. What is the body without the soul but cold clay, dead earth? and what the soul without the Spirit? truly no better. O invite him back to thy soul, or else

thy praying work is at an end. And, if thou wouldst persuade him to return, observe what was the thing that distasted him, and remove it. That which makes this dove forsake its lockyers will hinder his return if not taken away.

[*To pray in the spirit, we must have SINCERITY.*]

THIRD. We pray in the spirit *when we pray in sincerity*. There may be much fervour where there is little or no sincerity. And this is strange fire; the heat of a distemper, not the kindly natural heat of the new creature, which both comes from God and acts for God; whereas the other is from self, and ends in self. Indeed the fire which self kindles serves only to warm the man's own hands by it that makes it: 'Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks,' Isa. 50:11; the prophet represents them as sitting down about the fire they had made. Self-acting and self-aiming ever go together; therefore our Saviour with spirit requires truth. He 'seeketh such to worship him' as will 'worship him in spirit and in truth,' John 4:23, 24.

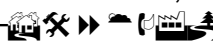
*Question.* But wherein consists this sincere fervency?

*Answer.* Zeal intends the affections, sincerity directs their end, and consists in their purity and incorruption. The blood is oft hot when none of the purest, and affections strong when the heart insincere; therefore the apostle exhorts us that we 'love one another out of a pure heart fervently,' 1 Peter 1:22, and speaks in another place of 'sorrowing after a godly sort,' that is, sincerely. Now the sincerity of the heart in prayer then appears when a person is real in his prayers, and that *from pure principles to pure ends*.

*First.* When he is *real in what he presents to God in prayer*. The index of his tongue without and the clockwork of his heart within go together; he doth not declaim against a sin with his lips which he favours with his heart; he doth not make a loud cry for that grace which he would be sorry to have granted him. This is the true badge of a hypocrite, who oft would be loath {that} God should take him at his word. A dismal day it would be to such when God shall bring in their own conscience to witness against them that their hearts never signed and sealed the requests which they made. There is a state-policy used sometimes by princes to send

ambassadors, and set treaties on foot, when nothing *less* than peace is intended. Such a deceit is to be found in the false heart of man, to blind and cover secret purposes of war and rebellion against God with fair overtures in prayer to him for peace.

*Second.* When the person is not only real in what he desires, but this *from a pure principle to a pure end*. I doubt not but a hypocrite in confession may have a real trouble upon his spirit for his sins, and cordially, yea passionately, desire his pardoning mercy; but not from a pure principle—a hatred of sin—but an abhorrency of wrath he sees hastening to him for it; not for a pure end, that the glory of God’s mercy may be magnified in and by him, but that himself may not be tormented by God’s just wrath. He may desire the graces of his Spirit, but not out of any love to them, but only as an expedient, without which he knows to hell he must go; as a sick man in exquisite torture—suppose of the stone or some other acute disease—calls for some potion he loathes, because he knows he cannot have ease except he drinks it. Whereas the sincere soul desires grace, not only as physic, but food. He craves it not only as necessary but as sweet to his palate. The intrinsical bounty and excellency of holiness inflames him with such a love to it, that, as one taken with the beauty of a virgin, saith he will marry her though he hath nothing with her but the clothes to her back; so the sincere heart would have holiness though it brought no other advantages with it than what is found in its own lovely nature. So much to show what sincerity in prayer is.

Now he that would pray acceptably must pray thus in his spirit, that is, with the sincerity of his spirit. ‘The prayer of the upright is his delight.’ Nadab and Abihu brought fire, and had fire, ‘a strange fire,’ to destroy them for the ‘strange fire’ they offered; and such is all fervency and zeal that is not taken from the altar of a sincere heart, Lev. 10:1. ‘The fervent prayer’——‘availeth much.’ It can do much, but it must be of a righteous man, and such the sincere man only is. And no wonder that God stands so much upon sincerity in prayer, seeing the lip of truth is so prized even among men. Nature hath taught men to commend their words to others by laying their hands on their breasts, as an assurance that

what they say or promise is true and cordial; which the penitent publican it is like aimed at, he ‘smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner,’ Luke 18:13, thereby declaring whence his sorrowful confession came. That light which told the heathens that God must be worshipped, informed them also this worship must come from the inward recesses of the heart. *In sancto quid facit aurum—quin damnus id superis*, &c.—what care the gods for gold! let us offer that which is more worth than all treasures, *sanctos recessus animi*—the heart and inward affections of it. It is a strange custom Benzo, in his *Historia Novi Orbis*, relates of the natives there: *Indi occidentales dum sacra faciunt, dimisso in guttur bacillo, vomitum cient, ut idolo ostendant nihil se in pectore mali occultum gerere*—the West Indians, when worshipping their gods, used, by putting a little stick down their throat, to provoke themselves to vomit, thereby showing their idol that they carried no secret evil within them. I should not have named this barbarous custom but to show how deeply this notion is engraven in the natural conscience—that we must be sincere in the worship of God.

*Use.* Let it put us upon the trial *whether we thus pray in the spirit*—whether you can find sincerity stamped on your fervency. If the prayer be not fervent it cannot be sincere, but it may have a fervour without this. This is a very fine sieve; approve thyself here, and thou mayest without presumption write thyself a saint. But how fervent soever thou art without sincerity, it matters not. Nay, zeal without uprightness is worse than key-cold; none will go to hell with more shame than the false-hearted zealot, who mounts up towards heaven in the fiery chariot, a seeming zeal, but at last is found a devil in Samuel’s mantle, and so is thrown down like lightning from heaven, whither he would have been thought by his neighbours to be going. Be not loath to be searched. Then there will then need no further search to prove thee unsound. If God’s officer be denied entrance, all is not right within. Now to help thee in the work, inquire—

[RULES for trying the sincerity of our hearts in prayer.]

*Rule 1.* What is thy care in performing this duty of prayer in secret? If thy heart be sincere, it will delight in privacy. A false heart calls others to

see his zeal for God. May be he is forward to put himself upon duty where he hath spectators to applaud him, and can be very hot and earnest at the work; but wither he is wholly a stranger to secret prayer, or else he is cold in the performance; he finds himself becalmed now he wants the breath of others to fill his sails. The plummets are off which quickened his motion, and he moves heavily to what he did before company. Whereas a sincere Christian never finds more freedom of spirit, and liquefactions of soul, than in his solitary addresses to God. Joseph, when he would give full vent to his passion, sought some secret place where to weep, and therefore retired himself into his chamber, Gen. 43:30. So the sincere Christian goes to his closet, and there easeth his heart into the bosom of God, and lets his passions of sorrow for sin, and love to Christ, burst forth and have their full scope, which in public prayer he restrains—as to the outward expression of them—out of a holy modesty, and fear of being observed by others, which he hunts not for. Now speak, Christian, what is thy temper? Can thy closet witness for thee in this particular? It is the trick of a hypocrite to strain himself to the utmost in duty when he hath spectators, and to draw loose in his gears when alone; like some that carry their best meat to market, and save the worst for their own food at home; and others that draw their best wine to their customers, but drink the dead and flat themselves at their own private table.

*Rule 2. Observe thyself in thy more public addresses to the throne of grace:* and that in two particulars. (1.) When thou prayest before others. (2.) When thou joinest with others that pray.

(1.) *When thou prayest before others*, observe on what thou bestowest thy chief care and zeal, whether in the externals or internals of prayer—that which is exposed to the eye and ear of men, or that which should be prepared for the eye and ear of God; the devout posture of thy body, or the inward devotion of thy soul; the pomp of thy words, or the power of thy faith; the agitation of thy bodily spirits in the vehemency of thy voice, or the fervency of thy spirit in heart-breaking affections. These inward workings of the soul in prayer are the very soul of prayer; and all the care about the other without this, is like the trimming bestowed upon a dead body—that will not make the carcass sweet, nor these thy

prayer to God's nostrils. It is the faith, love, brokenness of heart for sin, and the inward affections exerted in prayer, that, like Elijah in his fiery chariot, mount up to God in the heavens, while the other, with the prophet's mantle, fall to the ground. The sincere soul dares not be rude in his outward posture. He is careful of his very words and phrase, that they may be grave and pertinent. Neither would he pray them asleep that joins with him, by a cold, dreaming, and lazy manner of delivering of it; but still, it is the inward disposition of his heart he principally looks to, knowing well, that by the other he is but cook to others, and may fast himself if his own heart be idle in the duty; and therefore he doth not count he prays well—though to the affecting of their hearts—except he finds his own affections drawn out in the duty. Whereas the hypocrite, if he may but come off the duty with the applause of others in the external performance, is very well pleased, though he be conscious of the deadness and naughtiness of his own heart therein.

(2.) *When thou joinest with others that pray.* Do the gifts and graces that breathe from others in prayer warm thy affections, and draw out thy soul to bear them company to heaven in the petitions they put up? Or do they stir up a secret envying and repining at the gifts of God bestowed on them? This would discover much pride and unsoundness in thy spirit. The hypocrite is proud, and thinks all the water is spilt and lost that runs beside his own mill; whereas the sincere soul prizeth the gifts of others, can heartily bless God for them, and make a humble and holy use of them. His heart is as much affected with the holy savoury requests that another puts up, as when they come out of his own mouth. But the hypocrite's eye is evil, because God's is good.

*Rule 3. Observe whether thy fervency in prayer be uniform.* A false heart may seem very hot in praying against one sin; but he can skip over another, and either leave it out of his confession, or handles it very gently. As a partial witness, that would fain save the prisoner's life he comes against, will not speak all he knows, but minceth his evidence; thus doth the hypocrite deal with his darling lust. He is like one that mows grass with a gapped scythe; some he cuts down, and other he leaves standing; vehement against this, and favourable

to that lust; whereas sincerity makes clear work as it goes. 'Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me,' Ps. 119:133.

Again the false heart is as uneven in his petitions as in his deprecations. Very earnest he is for some mercies, and they are commonly of an inferior nature, but more indifferent in his desires for those that are greater; he tithes mint and cummin in his prayers —temporal mercies, I mean—but neglects the weightier things of the promise—the sanctifying graces of the Spirit, humility, heavenly-mindedness, contentment, self-denial; a little of these upon a knife's point will content him.

*Rule 4. Observe whether thy endeavours correspond with thy prayers.* The false heart seems hot in prayer, but you will find him cold enough at work. He prays very fiercely against his sins, as if he desired them to be all slain upon the place; but what doth he towards the speeding of them with his own hands? Doth he set himself upon the work of mortification? doth he withdraw the fuel that feeds them? is he careful to shun occasions that may ensnare him? When temptations come, do they find him in arms upon his guard, resolved to resist their motion? Alas! no such matter. If a few good words in prayer will do the work, well and good; but as for any more, he is too lazy to go about it. Whereas the sincere heart is not idle after prayer; when it hath given heaven the alarm, and called God in to his help, then he takes the field himself, and opposeth his lusts with all his might, watching their motions, and taking every advantage he meets with to fall upon them. Every mercy he receives, he beats it out into a weapon, to knock down all thoughts of sinning again. Thus, 'Seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break thy commandments?' Ezra 9:13, 14. O God forbid, saith the holy soul, that he should bid such a thought welcome! Every promise he reads, he lifts it up as a sword for his defence against this enemy. 'Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves,' II Cor. 7:1. I shall shut up this head with a few directions how we may get this sincere heart in prayer.

*[How we may get this sincerity in prayer.]*

(1.) *Get thy heart united by faith to Christ.* It is faith that purifies the heart from its false principles and ends in duty. 'God made man upright;' and, while he stood so, his eye and foot went right; neither did his eye look or his foot tread awry. But after Eve had talked with the serpent, she and all mankind after her learned the serpent's crooked motion, to look one way and go another. 'God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions,' Ecc. 7:29. O beg therefore, with David, that God would 'renew a right spirit within thee,' Ps. 51:10. What the evil spirit hath perverted the Holy Spirit alone can set right. If the cause why a piece carries wrong be in its make and mould, it must be new cast, or it will never carry right. Hypocrisy in duty comes from the falseness of man's depraved nature; the heart therefore must be made new before it can be sincere. The new heart is the single heart, 'I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you,' Eze. 11:19. He that loves 'truth in the inward parts' can put it there.

(2.) *Make hypocrisy in prayer appear as odious to thee as possibly thou canst;* and thou needest not dress it up in any other than its own clothes to do this. Consider but how grievous a sin and how great a folly it is, and methinks it were enough to set thee against it.

(a) *Consider what a grievous sin it is.* A lie spoken by one man to another is a sin capable of high aggravations; what then is that lie which is uttered in prayer to God? Surely this must be much more horrid, for here is blasphemy in the untruth. God spares not to give the hypocrite the lie, 'Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit,' Hosea 11:12; so many lies they told to God, as prayers they put up. O the patience of a God that doth not strike the hypocrite dead upon the place, while the lie is in his throat, as he did Ananias and Sapphira.

(b) *Consider what a great folly it is.* [1.] As it is *infeasible*. Who but a fool can think to blind the eyes of the Almighty? Canst thou cover the eye of the sun with thy hand or hat, that it shall not shine? as unable art thou to hide thy secret designs so close that the great God should not see them. [2.] As it is *impossible to deceive God*, so thou puttest a woful cheat upon thyself. Thou thinkest thou mendest the matter by praying,

and thou makest it worse. When thou comest on thy trial for thy life, thy hypocrisy in prayer will cost thee dearer than thy other sins. Thou takest pains to increase thy condemnation; thou dost, as Solomon saith of another kind of hypocrite, Prov. 1:18, 'lay wait for thy own blood; they lurk privily for thy own life.' Of all sinners, the hypocrite hath the precedency in God's purposes and preparations of wrath. Hell is prepared for them as the firstborn of damnation. Other sinners are said to have their 'portion with hypocrites,' as the younger brethren with their elder, who is the heir, Matt. 24:51.

(3.) *Crucify thy affections to the world.* Hypocrisy in religion springs from the bitter root of some carnal affections unmortified. So long as thy prey lies below, thy eye will be to the earth, even when thou seemest like an eagle to mount in thy prayers to heaven. The false heart does *uti Deo ut fruatur mundo*—he useth religion for secular ends, and makes his seeming piety to God but as a horsing-block to get into the creature's saddle. God is in his mouth, but the world is in his heart; which he projects to attain more easily by the reputation that this will gain him. I have read of one that offered his prince a great sum of money for no more but to have his leave once or twice a day to come into his presence, and only say, 'God save your majesty.' The prince, wondering at this large offer for so small a favour, asked him what this would advantage him? O sir, saith he, this, though I have nothing else at your hands, will get me a name in the country for one that is a great favourite at court, and such an opinion will help me to more by the year's end than I am out for the purchase. Thus some, it is to be feared, by the very name which they get for great saints among their neighbours, from their acquaintance with religious duties, do facilitate their carnal projects, and advance their worldly interest, that lie at the bottom of all their goodly profession. Well, Christian, this is but to play at small game—to fish for any of the world's petty enjoyments with religion's golden hook. As thou lovest thy soul, and wouldst not lose this for ever, to get that which thou must lose after thou hast got it, mortify those carnal affections which thou findest most likely to withdraw thy heart from God. Thou knowest not God, if thou seest not enough in him to make thee happy without the world's contributions. This, thoroughly

believed, will make thee sincere in his service. 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect,' Gen. 17:1.

## BRANCH SECOND.

[*He that would pray in his own spirit,*  
MUST PRAY IN THE SPIRIT OF GOD.]

Having despatched the first importance of this phrase, '*praying in the spirit*,' viz. the spirit of the person that prayeth, and shown that then a person prays in the spirit *when his own soul and spirit acts in the duty—when he prays with understanding, fervency, and sincerity*; now we proceed to the second importance of the phrase. To pray '*in the Spirit*' is to pray in, or with, the Spirit of God; 'praying in the Holy Ghost,' Jude 20. So that the note or doctrine to be insisted on will be this,

DOCTRINE. That to right praying, *it is necessary that we pray in, or by, the Spirit of God.* Prayer is the creature's act, but the Spirit's gift. There is a concurrence both of the Spirit of God and the soul or spirit of the Christian to the performance of it. Hence we find both the Holy Spirit is said to pray in us, Rom. 8:26, and we said to pray in him, Jude 20. By the first is meant is his inspiration, whereby he excites and assists the creature to and in the work; by the latter the concurrence of the saint's faculties. The Spirit doth not so pray in him as that the Christian doth not exercise his own faculties in the duty, as the Familists<sup>ccxxv</sup> Niclaes gained many followers, among them the great publisher Christophe Plantin, who surreptitiously printed a number of Niclaes' works. Niclaes apparently made two visits to England, where his sect had the largest following. Elizabeth I issued a proclamation against the Family of Love in 1580, and James I believed it to have been the source of Puritanism. The sect did not survive after the Restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, but according to George Fox, a British preacher and the founder of the Society of Friends (or Quakers), some remaining Familists later became associated with the Quakers.—From *Encyclopædia Britannica*. fondly conceive. In handling this point I shall endeavour to do these three things: FIRST. I shall assert the point, and prove the truth of it. SECOND. Explicate what it is to pray by the Spirit of God. THIRD. Make some application of the point.

FIRST. I shall assert the truth of the point, *that to right praying it is necessary we pray by the Spirit of God.* This is clear from Eph. 2:18, 'Through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.' Mark those words, 'by one Spirit.' As there is but one Mediator to appear and pray for us in heaven, so but one Spirit that can pray in us, and we by it, on earth. We may as well venture to come to the Father through another Mediator than his Son, as pray by another Spirit than by the Holy Ghost. Therefore our Saviour, when he would show his dislike of the disciples rash motion, he doth it by telling them, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,' Luke 9:55. As if he had said, It behoves you to be well acquainted with the spirit that acts you in prayer; if your prayers be not breathed in and out by my Holy Spirit, they are abominable to me and my Father also. The name of Christ is not more necessary that the Spirit of Christ is in prayer. Christ's name fits only the Spirit's mouth; it is too great a word for any to speak as he ought, that hath not the Spirit to help him. 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost,' 1 Cor. 12:3. One may say the words without any special work of the Spirit in him, and so may a parrot; but, to say Christ is Lord believingly, with thoughts and affections comporting with the greatness and sweetness thereof, requires the Spirit of God to be in his heart and tongue. Now it is not the bare naming of Christ in prayer, and saying, 'For the Lord's sake,' that procure's our welcome with God; but saying it in faith, and none can do this without the Spirit. Christ is the door that opens into God's presence, and lets the soul into his very bosom; faith is the key that unlocks the door; but the Spirit is he that both makes this key, and helps the Christian to turn it in prayer, so as to get any access to God. You know in the law it was a sin, not only to offer 'strange incense,' but also to bring 'strange fire,' Lev. 10:1. By the incense, which was a composition of sweet spices appointed by God to be burned as a sweet perfume in his nostrils, was signified the merit and satisfaction of Christ, who being bruised by his Father's wrath, did offer up himself a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. By the fire that was put to the incense—which also was appointed to be taken from the altar, and not any common hearth—was signified the Spirit of God, by which we are to offer up all our

prayers and praises, even as Christ offered himself up by the eternal Spirit. To plead Christ's merits in prayer and not by the Spirit, is to bring right incense but strange fire, and so our prayers are but smoke, offensive to his pure eyes, not incense, a sweet savour to his nostrils.

SECOND. I proceed to explicate *what it is to pray by the Spirit of God.* To the better opening of this, we must know that there are two ways that the Spirit of God helps persons in prayer; one way is by his gifts, the other by his grace.

*First.* The Spirit of God helps in prayer *by his gifts.* Now those gifts which he furnisheth a person with for prayer are either extraordinary or ordinary. The extraordinary gifts of the Spirit in prayer were, in the primitive times, shed forth, whereby the apostles and others were able in a miraculous manner to pray as well as preach on a sudden in a language that they never had learned. Of this gift interpreters understand that passage of Paul, 'I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also,' 1 Cor. 14:15. That is, he would make use of this extraordinary gift Christ had furnished him with, but so as he might edify the church by it, and no otherwise. This extraordinary gift was fitted for the infancy of the gospel church, and ceased—as others of the like nature did—with it. The ordinary gift of the Spirit in prayer is that special faculty whereby persons are enabled on a sudden to form the conceptions of their minds and desires of their hearts into apt words before the Lord in prayer. This is a common gift, and is bestowed on those that are none of the best men. The hypocrite may have more of this gift than some sincere Christian. It is a gift that commonly bears proportion to natural endowments, a ready apprehension, fruitful fancy, voluble tongue, and audacity of spirit, which are all gifts of the Spirit, and do dispose a person for this. Now we see that the head may be ripe and the heart rotten; and, on the contrary, the heart sound and sincere where the head is low-parted.

*Second.* The Spirit helps in prayer *by his grace.* His gifts help to the outward expression, but his grace to the inward affection. By the gifts of the Spirit a person is enabled to take the ear and affect the heart of men that hear him; but by the grace of the Spirit acting a soul in prayer, he is enabled to move his own heart and the heart of God also; and this is the man that indeed prays 'in the Spirit.' The other hath the *gift*, but



this hath the *spirit*, of prayer. Now, there is a twofold grace necessary to pray thus in the Spirit. 1. Grace from the Spirit to sanctify the person that prays. 2. Grace to act and assist this person sanctified in prayer. By the first, the Spirit dwells in the soul; by the second, he acts the soul.

1. There is necessary to this praying in the Spirit, *grace to sanctify the person that prays*. Before the creature is renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, it can neither apprehend nor desire things aright. 'The carnal mind receiveth not the things of God,' nay, 'it is enmity to God.' And is how such a one fit to pray in an acceptable manner? First, then, the Spirit renews the creature by infusing those supernatural qualities, or habits of saving sanctifying graces, which makes him a new creature; by these he comes to dwell and live in him, and then he acts his own graces thus infused. The soul is in the body before it acts and moves it. We read of living in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit, Gal. 5:25: 'If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.' Walking supposeth life. To pray, hear, or perform any other holy action in a holy manner, is to walk in the Spirit; but we must live in the Spirit, or the Spirit live in us—which is all one—before we can thus walk in the Spirit. There are some acts indeed the Spirit of God puts forth upon souls that are not thus sanctified—acts of common illumination, restraining grace, and assisting also. Thus many hypocrites are enabled to pray in excellent expressions. But he never did assist hypocrite, or any unsanctified person, to perform the inward part of prayer, to mourn sincerely for sin, to pant after Christ and his grace, or to cry, 'Abba Father,' believingly; these are the vital acts of the new creature, and flow from a Spirit of grace infused into the soul, which follows this 'spirit of supplication,' Zech. 12:10.

2. As habitual grace is required to sanctify the person, so *actual grace to assist him as oft as he prays*. The Spirit of God may dwell in a soul by his habitual grace, yet deny actual assistance to this or that particular duty, and then the poor Christian is becalmed, as a ship at sea when no wind is stirring. For as grace cannot evidence itself, so neither can it act itself. Hence it is that sometimes the saint's prayers speed no better, because he is not acted by the Spirit in it. Samson, when his lock was cut, was 'weak like

another man.' A saint, when the Spirit of God denies his help, prays no better than a carnal man. The Spirit of God is a free agent: 'Uphold me,' saith David, 'with thy free spirit,' Ps. 51:12. He is not as a prisoner tied to the oar, that must needs work when we will have him; but, as a prince, when he pleaseth he comes forth and shows himself to the soul, and when he pleaseth he retires and will not be seen. What freer than the wind? not the greatest king on earth can command it to rise for his pleasure; to this the Spirit of God is compared, John 3:8. He is not only free to breathe where he lists, in this soul and not that, but when he pleaseth also.

[What assistance the Holy Ghost gives to a saint more than to any other in prayer.]

*Question.* But the question will here be, What assistance doth the Spirit of God give a saint in prayer more than another person?

*Answer.* The assistance which the Spirit of God gives a saint in prayer above another lies deep; *it is laid out upon the inward man, and inward part of the duty*. So that a person may come to know whether himself prays in the Spirit, but he cannot judge so easily of another. Now this special assistance consists in these three particulars.

1. The Spirit puts forth *an act of exsuscitation*<sup>ccxxvi</sup> *upon the soul, to stir up his affections*. Never was any formal prayer of the Holy Spirit's making. When the Spirit comes, it is a time of life. The Christian's affections spring in his bosom at his voice, as the babe in Elizabeth at the salutation of the Virgin Mary. Or, as the strings under the musician's hand stir and speak harmoniously, so doth all the saint's affections at the secret touch of the Spirit. He excite's the saint's fear, filling it with such a sense of God's greatness, his own nothingness and baseness, as makes him with awful thoughts reverence the divine majesty he speaks unto, and deliver every petition with a holy trembling upon his spirit. Such a fear was upon Abraham's spirit, when, in his prayer for Sodom, he expressed how great an adventure he made, being but 'dust and ashes, to take upon him to speak unto the Lord.' He excites the Christian's mourning affections. By his divine breath he raiseth the clouds of the saint's past sins, and when he hath overspread his soul

in meditation with the sad remembrance of them, then in prayer he melts the cloud, and dissolves his heart into soft showers of evangelical mourning, that the Christian sighs and groans, weeps and mourns, like a child that is beaten, though he sees the rod laid out of his heavenly Father's hand, and fears no wrath from him for them.

The apostle tells us the groans and sighs which the Spirit helps the saint to are such as 'cannot be uttered,' Rom. 8:26; no, not by the saint himself, who, being unable to translate the inward grief he conceives into words, is fain sometimes to send it with this inarticulate voice to heaven, yet it is a voice that is well understood there, and more musical in God's ear than the most ravishing music can be to ours. In a word, he stirs up affections suitable to every part of prayer, enabling the gracious soul to confess sin with an aching heart, as if he felt so many swords raking in it; to supplicate mercy and grace, as with inward feeling of his wants, so with vehement desires to have them satisfied; and to praise God with a heart enlarged and carried on high upon the wings of love and joy. Parts may art it in the phrase and composure of the words—as a statuary may carve a goodly image, with all the outward lineaments and beautiful proportions in every part—but still it is but the counterfeit and image of a true prayer, for want of that *aliquid intus*—something within, which should give life and energy to it. This the Spirit of God alone can effect.

2. As the Spirit of God doth excite the Christian's affections in prayer, so he *regulates and directs them*. Who indeed but the Spirit of God can guide and rein these fiery steeds? He is said in this respect to 'help our infirmities: for we know not what to pray for as we ought,' Rom. 8:26. We, alas! are prone to over-bend the bow in some petitions, and want strength to bend it enough in some other. One while we overshoot the butt, praying absolutely for that which we should ask conditionally; another time we shoot beside the mark, either by praying for what God hath not promised, or too selfishly that which is promised. Now the Spirit helps the Christian's infirmity in this respect, for he 'maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God' ver. 27, that is, he so holds the reins of their affections and directs them, that they keep their right way and due order, not flying out to

unwarrantable heats and inordinate desires. He, by his secret whispers, instructs them when to let out their affections full speed, and when to take them up again. He teacheth them the law of prayer, that striving lawfully they may not lose the prize. Just as the Spirit was in the 'living creatures' to direct their motion, of whom it is said, 'They went every one straight forward: whither the Spirit was to go, they went; and they turned not when they went,' Eze. 1:12: so the Spirit, acting his saints in prayer, keeps them that they lash out neither on this hand nor on that, but go straightforward, and draw their requests by his rule.

3. He *fills the Christian with a holy confidence and humble boldness in prayer*. Sin makes the face of God dreadful to the sinner. Guilty Adam shuns his presence, and tells the reason, 'I heard thy voice and was afraid.' If the patriarchs—being conscious how barbarously they had used their brother Joseph—were terrified at his presence, and so abashed that they could not answer him; how much more confounded must the sinner be to draw near to the great God, when he remembers the horrid sins he hath perpetrated against him? Now the Spirit easeth the Christian's heart of this fear, assuring him that God's heart meditates no revenge upon him, but freely forgives what wrong he hath done him; yea, which is more, that he takes him for his dear child; and, that the Christian may not stand in doubt thereof, he seals it with a kiss of love upon his heart, leaving there the impression of God's fatherly love fairly stamped, whereby the Christian comes to have amiable thoughts of God, is able to call God Father, and expect the kind welcome of a child at his hands. This is the Spirit of adoption which the apostle speaks of, that chaseth away all servile fear and dread of God from the soul: 'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father,' Rom. 8:15. And, 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father,' Gal. 4:6.

#### USE OR APPLICATION.

THIRD. I shall make some *application of the point that it is necessary that we pray in or by the 'Spirit of God.'*

*[Reproof of those that mock at the need of the Spirit in prayer, with a trial whether we have him or no.]*

*Use First.* Take heed of blaspheming the Holy Spirit as to this work of his in his saints. Some are so desperately profane, that they dare flout and jeer at those who show any strictness in their lives, or zeal in the worship of God, especially in this duty of prayer, with this—‘These are they that have the Spirit, that pray, forsooth, by the Spirit.’ Nay more—I tremble to speak it—some have called their praying by the Spirit praying by the devil. That every gracious soul hath the Spirit of God dwelling in him the Scripture tells us, ‘If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,’ Rom. 8:9. That God hath promised his Spirit to help his saints in prayer is undeniable, and that he accepts no prayer but what is put up by his Spirit is as sure. Now mayest thou not know, bold wretch, what spirit thou art acted by, who makest a mock of having the Spirit and praying by the Spirit? Who but the devil would set thee on work to blaspheme the Spirit of God? But why should we wonder that the actings of the Holy Spirit in the saints should be thus scorned and blasphemed, seeing we find that the Spirit of God, working so mightily in Christ himself, was maliciously interpreted by the wicked Pharisees to be from the devil? Matt. 12:24. But let such know to their terror, that to make a jeer of the Spirit, or to attribute his works to the devil, if it be maliciously done, will be found to come near to the blasphemy of the Spirit which is unpardonable, see ver. 32, ‘Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.’ And this our Saviour spake upon their attributing what he did by the Spirit of God to the spirit of the devil.

*Use Second.* Try whether you have the Spirit of God or no. A prayerless state is a sad state to live in. Now thou canst not pray acceptably except thou prayest in the Spirit, and thou canst not pray in the Spirit except thou hast the Spirit in thee.


















*Question.* But how may I know whether I have the Spirit of God or no?

I shall answer. 1. *Negatively*, by what thou must not conclude that thou hast the Spirit. 2. *Affirmatively*, by what thou mayest.

*Answer 1. Negatively;* thou canst not know, because thou hast now and then some good motions from the Holy Spirit stirred in thee. The evil spirit is found oft stirring evil motions in souls where he doth not dwell. A foul stir he makes oft in the bosom of a saint; yet dwells not there, because he is not there *per modum quietis*—he finds no rest in these dry places. Therefore he is brought in saying, ‘I will return to my house,’ viz. to those that are yet in a carnal state, where he can rule the roost, and command as a master doth all in his house. Truly thus the Holy Spirit is often moving in the consciences and affections of carnal creatures, counselling, rebuking, and exciting them; so that, upon his suggestions, some flashy short pangs of affections are raised in them to that which is good, but presently all is quashed and comes to nothing, and the Spirit driven away by the churlish entertainment he finds.

Again, thou canst not know by the common gifts of the Spirit, illumination, conviction, restraining grace, and assistance to perform the external part of religious duties, even to the admiration sometimes of others that hear them. These are gifts of the Spirit, but such as do not prove he hath the Spirit that hath them. They are like the brightness or radiancy which we see the clouds gilt with in the morning before the body of the sun is above the horizon—they show the sun is near, but it is not yet risen for all this radiancy that is seen; so these gifts are beamed from the Spirit of God, and show the kingdom of God is come nigh such a one; but they do not demonstrate that the Spirit of God is come into that soul and taken possession of it for his house and temple. Or they are like the tokens which a suitor sends to a person whom he is wooing to be his wife—the more to insinuate upon her; but the match breaking off, all are required again. Many have these gifts sent them by the Spirit of God, with whom the match betwixt Christ and them was never made up; and if they be not called for back in this life, they shall however be accountable for them at the great day.

*Answer 2. Affirmatively;* by what thou mayest conclude that thou hast the Spirit of God; and that in two particulars; though here I might multiply.

(1.) If thou beest *regenerated by the Spirit*. The Spirit of God dwells only in a new creature. So long as a man continues in his carnal natural state he is destitute of the Spirit. 'Sensual, having not the Spirit,' Jude 19. The word is     , such as have no more but a reasonable soul, without a higher principle of life than nature gives to all men. St. Paul useth the word to set out a man in his mere naturals, as opposed to another that hath a principle of supernatural life from the Spirit of God;     , 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit,' I Cor. 2:14. But here the question will be, How shall I know I am regenerate? To this I answer, Every regenerate soul hath *divinam indolem*—a divine nature and disposition like unto the Spirit of God that regenerates him. 'That which is born of the Spirit is spirit,' John 3:6, viz. is spiritual, the abstract being put for the concrete, to increase the force of the words. He hath a soul raised as far above natural men as they are above the nature of beasts. When Nebuchadnezzar had the understanding of a man given him he grazed no longer among the beasts of the field, but returned to his princely throne and life. Thus the regenerate soul returns to that high and heavenly disposition which man in his primitive holy state once had. Now God and the things of God take up his thoughts; he hath a new eye to see vanity where before he placed felicity; a new gust and taste, which makes him spit out those sinful pleasures as poison that once were pleasant morsels, and count all earthly enjoyments, that before were his only feast, but dung and dross in comparison of Christ and his grace. He can no more make a meal on them than a man can with dogs' meat. 'They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit,' Rom. 8:5,       , they do *sapere*, savour the things of the Spirit. Find therefore what thy gust is, and thou sayest know what thy life is, whether spiritual, or natural.

(2.) If thou beest *led by the Spirit*. The Spirit is the saints' guide, 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God,' Rom. 8:14. As the soul is in the body, to direct and move it, so is the Spirit in their soul: 'Thou hast holden me by my right hand, thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,' Ps. 73:23, 24. Even as the child is led by his father's hand, so the saint by

the manuduction of the Spirit. Now, to be led by the Spirit of God imports these three things:

(a) *A sense of our own weakness and ignorance*. He that thinks he knows his way, or that he is able to direct his own steps, will not accept of a guide. It is the weak child or the blind man that calls to be led. First Saul was struck blind, and then he gives his hand to be led to Damascus, Acts 9. Inquire therefore whether God hath made thee sensible of thy own ignorance and impotency. Man by nature is proud and self-conceited; he leans much to his own understanding, and stands upon his own strength, very loath to be thought out of the way or unable to go of himself in it. 'A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident,' Prov. 14:16. Tell a soul spiritually wise he is out of his way, he fears himself, hearkens to the counsel, and turns back; but a fool—and such is every carnal man—he falls out with him that counsels or reproves him, and is confident he is right, as if he knew the way to heaven as well as he doth the way from his house to the market. The first thing that the Spirit doth is to dismount the soul from his high opinion he hath of himself, thereby to make him teachable and tractable. 'Men and brethren,' say those converts, after God with one prick in their hearts had let out this wind of pride, 'what shall we do?' Acts 2:37. Their spirit now comes down, willing they are to be directed, so meek and humble that a child may lead them.

(b) He that is led by another is *ruled and determined by him that is his guide which way he should go*. Inquire, therefore, whether the Spirit of God doth thus determine thy soul in its actings and motions. If thou beest led by the Spirit, thou walkest after the Spirit, and goest the way he goes. Now you know which is the Spirit's walk. He is a Spirit of truth and leads into truth. The word of God is the road he keeps; if thou walkest not by this rule he is not thy guide. Speak therefore, what authority and sway bears the word with thee? Dost thou consult with it and hearken to it? or is it to thee as Micaiah was to Ahab, art thou afraid to advise with it? Or, when thou dost, canst thou cast its counsel at thy heels, and venture to break its hedge, to pursue thy ambitious or covetous projects? If a word lying in thy way will not stop thee, thou art not led by the Spirit of God thou mayest be sure.

(c) To be led imports *spontaneity and willingness*. This is the difference betwixt leading and driving. The carnal heart may be driven by the rebukes and convictions of the Spirit, as a beast by switch and spur; but the gracious soul follows the Spirit as a child his father that holds him by the hand, yea, that cries after his father to take him along with him. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' The Spirit indeed 'draws,' but then the soul 'runs after him.' Mary chose the 'better part;' it was not imposed on her against her liking. The obedience of the saints is compared to a sacrifice, 'Present your bodies a living sacrifice,' &c., Rom. 12:1; and it is no acceptable sacrifice that is not offered willingly. The Spirit of God makes the soul 'willing in the day of his power.' 'I will go with this man,' said Rebekah; she was as willing to have Isaac as he to have her. The gracious soul answers the Spirit's call as the echo the voice: 'Seek ye my face. Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' Now, this use of trial calls for a double word of exhortation.

*[Exhortation to those who  
WANT THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER.]*

1. O labour to *get this heavenly guest to come and dwell in your hearts*. Better it were thou hadst not the spirit of a man than to want the Spirit of God. If the Holy Spirit be not in thee, assure thyself the evil spirit is; and no way is there for thee to turn this troublesome guest out of doors but by getting the Spirit of God in. Thou mayest know where thy eternal mansion will be, in heaven or hell, hereafter, by the spirit that fills and acts thy soul here. If God takes not up thy soul as a mansion for his Spirit on earth, it shows that he prepares no mansion for thy soul in heaven, but leaves thee to be entertained by him in the other world that is thy guest in this. Thus thou seest how thy soul hangs over the infernal pit. What course canst thou take to prevent this thy endless misery that is coming upon thee? Wilt thou stand up as Haman to make request for the life of thy soul? Alas! thou canst not pray though thy life lies on it; thou wantest the Spirit of God that should help thee to groans and sighs; thou must live before thou canst breathe. Prayer, you see, is not a work of nature, but a gift of grace; not a matter of will and parts, got by human skill and art, but taught and inspired by the Holy Ghost. At the bar of

man the orator's tongue may so smooth over a cause as to carry it. Rhetoric hath a kind of spell in it that charms the ears of men, he is called the 'the eloquent orator,' {Hebrew Characters Omitted}—*nek«n lchash*—he that is skilful in a charm, Isa. 3:3. Thus Abigail charmed David's passion with a well-set speech, and returned his sword into his scabbard that was drawn to cut off her husband and his family. But words, alas! how handsomely soever they chime, make no music in God's ear; they avail no more with him when his Holy Spirit is not with them, than Esau's prayers and tears did with old Isaac for the blessing. The same rod which wrought miracles in Moses' hand would have done no such thing in the hand of another, because not acted with the Spirit that Moses had. The same words put up in prayer by a man's own private spirit are weak and ineffectual, yea, distasteful and abominable; which, delivered by the Spirit of God in another, are mighty with God and exceedingly acceptable to him. Kings have their cooks, and eat not but what is dressed by their hands. The great God, I am sure, will not like that sacrifice which his Spirit doth not prepare and offer. Those prayers which are highly esteemed and applauded by men are sometimes a great abomination to the Lord, who sees the heart to be naught and wholly void of his Spirit and grace. And on the contrary, those prayers which are despised and harshly censured by man may be highly pleasing to God. Eli was offended with Hannah and took her for a drunken woman; but God knew her better, that she was not drunk with wine, but filled with the Spirit in prayer, and therefore answered graciously her request. It was wisely done of that Grecian, who, being sent ambassador to a foreign prince, studied the language of the country that he might the more effectually persuade the king by delivering his embassy in his own tongue. O, get thou the Spirit of God, that thou mayest pray to God in the language of heaven, and no fear but thou shalt speed. Now, if thou wouldst obtain the Spirit,

(1.) Labour to be *deeply sensible of thy deplorable state while without the Spirit*. An unsavoury sapless creature thou art, God knows, unable for any duty, incapable of any comfort. The Spirit is oft in Scripture compared to water, rain, and dew. Now, as the earth is barren and can bring forth no fruit without these, so is the heart of

man without the Spirit of God. O get thy soul affected with this! When the fields are burned up for want of rain, man and beast make a moan; yea, the very earth itself, cleft with drought, by opening its thirsty mouth expresseth its extreme need of some kind showers from the heavens to refresh it. And hast thou no sense of thy woeful condition? Which is worse, thinkest thou—to have the earth iron or thy heart stone? that the fruits and beasts of the field should perish for want of water, or thy soul for want of the Spirit? O couldst thou but be brought to lament thy want, there were hope for having it supplied. 'For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed,' Isa. 44:3.

(2.) When thou art inwardly scorched with the sense of thy spiritless graceless condition, *go and earnestly beg this gift of God*. Now thou goest in a good time and mayest hope to speed. Possibly thou hast heretofore prayed for the Spirit, but so slightly and indifferently that thou hast grieved his Spirit while thou hast been praying for him. But now thou seest thy need of him, and thyself undone except thou mayest get him; and therefore, I hope, thou wilt not now shut the door upon thy own prayers by being a cold suitor; which if thou dost not, thou art sure to bring him away with thee. Christ himself assures thee as much. Take it from his own mouth, 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?' Luke 11:13. A father may deny his wanton child bread to play with and throw under his feet, but not his starving child that cries for bread to preserve his life. God can, and will, deny him that asks the Spirit to pride himself with his gifts, but not the hungry soul, that pinched with his want of grace, humbly yet vehemently cries, 'Lord, give me thy Spirit, or else I starve, I die.' Nay, let me tell thee, thy strong cries and earnest prayers for the Spirit would be a sweet evidence to thee that thou hast him already within thee.

(3.) *Plant thyself under the word preached*. This is *vehiculum Spiritus*—the Spirit's chariot in which he rides, called therefore 'the ministration of the Spirit.' The serpent, that evil spirit, wriggled into Eve's heart by her ear; and the Holy Spirit ordinarily enters in at the same door, for he is received 'by the hearing of faith,' Gal. 3:2.

They that cast off hearing the word to meet with the Spirit do as if a man should turn his back off the sun that it may shine on his face. The poor do not stay at home for the rich to bring their alms to their house, but go to their door and there wait for relief. It becomes thee, poor creature, to wait at the posts of wisdom, and not expect the Spirit should lacquey after thee. If the master come to the truant scholar's house it is to whip him to school.

(4.) *Take heed of resisting the Spirit when he makes his approaches to thee in the word*. Sometimes he knocks, and, meeting a repulse, goes from the sinner's door. This is dangerous. He that hath promised to come in if we open, hath not promised to come again though we unkindly send him away. He doth indeed oft return after repulses; but sometimes, to show his liberty, he doth not, nay, leaves a padlock, as I may so say, on the door, a judiciary hardness and unbelief, which no minister's key can open. Thus Christ dealt with them that so mannerly excused themselves to his messengers that invited them. 'None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper,' Luke 14:24. Doth the Spirit move on thy heart in an ordinance? Haply it is by some secret rebukes directing the minister's finger unawares to touch thy sore plat. O beware how thou now behavest thyself towards the Spirit. Quarrel not with the preacher, as if he had a spite against thee and came for a spy to find out the nakedness of thy soul. Struggle not with thy convictions, smother not the motions of the Holy Spirit in thy next pillow at night, but rather cherish and improve them. It is no little mercy that, as the Spirit went by in his chariot, he would call at thy door and give thee so merciful a warning, which, if kindly received, may bring on a treaty of peace betwixt God and thee that may end in thy conversion here and salvation hereafter. It heightened the favour which God bestowed on the widow of Sarepta that there were many other widows in Israel at the same time, but the prophet was sent to her and not to them. So it enhanceth this mercy vouchsafed to thee, that there should be many other sinners in the congregation, and yet the Spirit not sent to them, but to thee; that his arrows should fly over their heads, and be shot at thy window with a secret message from heaven, to rouse thy sleepy conscience and woo thy affections from sin to Christ. Verily the king-

dom of heaven is come nigh unto thee. Be but friendly to these his motions and thou shalt have more of his company.

(5.) *Converse with the saints that have the Spirit of God in them.* They that would learn a foreign language associate with men of that country whose natural tongue it is. Wouldst thou have the Spirit, and so learn to speak to God in heaven's language? Consort with those who by reason of their heavenly nature will be speaking of God and the things of God unto thee. It is true, they cannot derive and propagate this their spiritual nature; but it is as true, that the Spirit of God may make the gracious discourses which they breathe forth vital and quickening to thee. While thou art with such, thou walkest in the Spirit's company. Joseph and Mary sought Christ among his kindred, supposing it most likely to find him among them. And it is more probable to find the Spirit of Christ among the saints, his spiritual kindred, than among strangers. The Spirit of God came upon Saul when among the prophets; at the hearing of them prophesy and praise God, his spirit was moved also to do the same. Who knows but thy heart may be warmed at their fire, and from the savour of their graces be drawn thyself to the love of holiness? But, above all, take heed of profane company; this is a great quencher to the Spirit's work. When David resolves for God and a holy life, he packs the wicked from him: 'Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God,' Ps. 119:115. The husbandman busheth his young plants about to keep the cattle off. If there be any buddings and puttings forth of the Spirit of grace in thee, as thou wouldst not have all cropped and bit off, choose not men of a profane spirit for thy associates. They are like the north wind that blows away the rain. When the Spirit of God hath been moving on a soul, the clouds begin to gather in his bosom, and some hopes of a shower of repentance to follow; then comes wicked company and drives all these clouds away, till there be no show left upon his heart of what before there was great hopes.

[Exhortation to those who by the rules of trial  
FIND THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS IN THEM.]

2. *To the saints;* the word I have for you is to beseech you *not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit*

*in your bosoms.* Thou canst not fadge to live long without prayer if a saint, nor art thou able to pray to purpose without him. When he withdraws, thy hand presently will forget its cunning. Such a chillness will invade thy soul, that thou wilt have little list to pray, for it is he that stirs thee up to the duty; and if thou creepest to it, thou wilt not be warm in the work, for it is his divine breath that must make thy green-wood burn, thy affections enkindle. Clothes do not warm the body, till the body warm them; and the body cannot warm them, except the soul, which is the principle of life, warm it. If there be no warmth in the heart, there can be no fervency in the prayer; and without the Spirit of God—who is the Christian's soul and what his soul is to his body—no kindly heat can be in the soul. O take heed therefore thou dost not grieve him, lest being distasted he refuse to assist thee. Now three ways the Spirit of God may be distasted by a saint, so as to cause him to deny his wonted assistance in prayer.

(1.) *By some sin secretly harboured in the heart.* 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me,' Ps. 66:18. Now when God refuseth to hear, we may be sure the Spirit refuseth to assist, for God never rejects a prayer that his Spirit indites and his Son presents. Sin is so offensive to the Holy Spirit, that wherever it is bid welcome he will show his distaste. If you would have this pure dove stay with you, be sure you keep his lodging clean. Hast thou defiled thyself with any known sin? think not to have him help thee in prayer till he hath helped thee to repent of it. He will carry thee to the laver before he go with thee to the altar. The musician wipes his instrument that hath fallen into the dirt before he will set it to his mouth. If thou wouldst have the Spirit of God breathe in thy soul at prayer, present it not to him besmeared with any sin unrepented of.

(2.) *By frequent resisting or putting off his motions.* As the Spirit helps in prayer, so he stirs up to prayer; he is the saint's remembrancer and monitor: 'He shall bring all things,' saith Christ of the Spirit, 'to your remembrance,' John 14:26. God called Jacob up to Bethel, so the Spirit prompts the saint to duty. Such a mercy thou hast received—up, Christian, praise thy God for it while it is fresh in thy memory and warm in thy heart. Such a temptation lies before thee—go pray thou mayest not be led into it. Thy God

waits for thy company, and expects thy attendance; now is a fit time for thy withdrawing thyself to hold communion with him, and pay thy homage to him. Now, when the Christian shall shift off these motions and not take the hint he gives, but from time to time neglect his counsel, and discontinue his acquaintance with God, notwithstanding these his mementos, he is exceedingly distasted, and, taking himself to be slighted, he gives over calling upon him, and leaves the soul for a time, till his absence, and the sad consequences of it, bring him to see his folly, and prepare him to entertain his motions more kindly for the future. Thus Christ leaves the spouse in her bed, when she would not rise at his knock, and makes her trot after him with many a weary step before he will be seen of her. It is just that God should raise the price of his mercy, when we may have it at an easy rate and will not. Christ thrice calls up his drowsy disciples to 'watch and pray,' that they might not 'enter into temptation,' but finds them still asleep when he comes; what saith he then? Truly he bids them 'sleep on,' as if he had said, 'Take your course and see what will become of it.' Indeed they soon saw it to their sorrow, for they all presently fell into that very temptation which their master had so seasonably alarmed them by prayer to prevent, and this waked them to purpose.

(3.) By *priding ourselves in and with the assistances he gives*. Pride is a sin that God resists wherever he meets with it; for indeed it is a sin that justles with God himself for the wall. It is time for the Spirit to be gone when his house is left over his head. He takes it as a giving him warning to be gone, when the soul lifts up itself into his seat; if he may not have the honour of the work he will have no hand in it. Now the proud man makes the Spirit an underling to himself, he useth his gifts to set up himself with them. Three ways pride discovers itself in prayer, and all to be resisted if we mean to have the Spirit's company.

(a) When the creature ascribes the Spirit's work to himself, and sets his own name upon the duty, where he should write the Spirit's; like Caligula, who set the figure of his own head on the statue of Jupiter. Instead of blessing God for assisting, he applauds himself, and hath a high opinion of his own abilities, pleasing himself with what expressions and enlargements of affection

he had in the duty. This is plain felony, a sin which every gracious soul must needs tremble at. Church robbery is a great wickedness: O what then is spirit robbery! 'I live,' saith Paul, 'yet not I,' Gal. 2:20. 'I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,' 1 Cor. 15:10. Thus shouldst thou, Christian, say, 'I prayed, yet not I; I laboured and wrestled, yet not I, but the Spirit of God that was with me.' Applaud not thyself, but humbly admire the grace and dignation of God, to help such a poor creature as thou art. Thus David did: 'Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee,' 1 Chr. 29:14. That steward deserves to be put out of his office, that brags of his master's money as his own.

(b) When we go to duty in *confidence of the gifts and grace we have already received*, and do not acknowledge our dependence on the Spirit, by casting ourselves after all our preparations upon him for present assistance. As we must pray by the Spirit, so we must ask for him that we may pray by him: 'How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him,' Luke 11:13. And it is not once asking for all will serve the turn. Thou mayest have his help in the morning and want it at night, if thou dost not humbly ask again for his aid. You know how Samson was served when he thought to go out as he used to do. Alas! poor man, the case was altered, he was weak as water; the Spirit was gone and he had carried away his strength with him. God will have thee, O Christian, know the key to thy heart hangs at his girdle, and not thy own, that thou shouldst be able to open and enlarge it at thy pleasure. Acknowledge God, and his Spirit shall help thee; but 'lean to thy own understanding,' and thou art sure to catch a fall. When pride is in the saddle, shame is in the crupper; if pride be at the beginning of a duty, shame will be at the end of it.

(c) When we *rely on our prayers, and not entirely on Christ's mediation, for acceptance and audience*; this is pride with a witness, and highly derogatory to the honour of Christ. God indeed accepts the saints in prayer, but not for their prayer, but for Christ's sake. Now the Spirit, who is Christ's messenger, will not, you may be sure, give his assistance to rob Christ of his glory. When he helps thee to pray, if thou



wouldst harken to his voice, thou mayest hear Christ. Wrong Christ, and you are sure to grieve him calling thee out of thyself, and confidence of his Spirit.  
thy prayers, to rely wholly on the mediation of

## DIVISION FOURTH.—THE GUARD OF PRAYER.

*‘And watching thereunto.’*

These words present us with the fourth branch in the apostle’s directory for prayer, which I called *prayer’s guard*. Prayer to the saints is as the great artillery to an army—of great use to defend them, and of as great force to do execution upon their enemies; it therefore needs the stronger guard to be set about it, lest it be taken from them, or turned against them by the enemy. Now the guard which the Spirit of God here appoints this great ordinance of prayer, is watching—*‘watching thereunto.’* Watching is either or improper, literal or metaphorical. FIRST. Watching, literally taken, is an affection of the body. But, SECOND. Watching is taken metaphorically for the vigilancy or watchfulness of the soul.

*[The duty of watching unto prayer.]*

FIRST. Watching, *literally taken, is an affection of the body*. That only can properly be said to watch which is subject to sleep; and so the body is, but not the soul. Thus, to watch in a religious sense is a voluntary denying of our bodies sleep, that we may spend either the whole or part of the night in pious exercises. Thus the Jews kept the night of the passover holy, Ex. 12:42. Our Saviour oft spent the night in prayer, Matt. 14:23; 26:38. We find Paul treading in his Lord and Master’s steps, ‘In watchings, in fastings,’ II Cor. 6:5. Many a sweet spiritual junket holy David’s devout soul got in the night, when others lay in their bed: ‘My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,...when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches,’ Ps. 63:5, 6. No doubt, for a devout soul, upon some extraordinary occasions—so superstition be avoided and health regarded—thus to watch unto prayer is not only laudable but delectable. *Vigiliæ in quantum valetudinem non perturbant, si orando, psallendo, legendo sumantur, in delicias spirituales convertuntur*—happy soul, that can thus steal in the dark into the arms of his beloved, and watch for devotion while others watch to do mischief or fill themselves with impure delights (Augustinus). This is the Christian, whose soul, like Gideon’s fleece, shall be filled with the dews and influences of heaven above others. But,

SECOND. Watching is taken *metaphorically for the vigilancy or watchfulness of the soul*. This is principally meant here, and in other scriptures, where we are commanded to watch, Mark 13:35; Rev. 16:15; I Thes. 5:6; I Peter 5:8; *cum multis aliis*—with many others. Now we shall the better understand what duty is imposed upon the

Christian under this word [watching], if we consider what bodily watching is. Two things it imports—waking and working. When a man wakes in the night to attend some business then to be done, such a one only truly watcheth; a man that sleeps not in the night, but to no purpose, for no business he hath to despatch, he may be said to wake but not to watch, for this relates to some employment he hath in charge to look to. Thus the shepherds are said to ‘keep watch over their flock by night,’ Luke 2:8, and the disciples ‘watched’ with Christ while they sat up to wait on him the night before his passion, Matt. 26:40. So that, for a Christian to watch in a spiritual sense is to preserve his soul awake from sin in the height of this world, that he may keep the Lord’s charge and do the duty imposed upon him as a Christian. Now prayer being one principal duty he is to attend and intend with all his might, therefore watching is very often joined with it, Matt. 26:41; Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36; Col. 4:2; I Peter 4:7. In handling this duty of watching unto prayer, I shall show, *First*. Why the Christian is to watch unto prayer. *Second*. Wherein the duty of watchfulness, in reference to prayer, consists. *Third*. I shall set the Christian’s watch for him, by giving some little counsel and help towards his performing this duty of watchfulness; for it is not a temporary duty, but for his whole lifetime.

*[WHY the Christian is to watch unto prayer.]*

*First*. I shall show *why the Christian is to watch unto prayer*.

1. *Reason*. Because of the *importance of the duty of prayer*. No one action doth a Christian meet with in his whole life of greater weight and moment than this of prayer is; and that in regard of God or himself.

(1.) In regard of *God*. Prayer is an act of religious worship; we have immediately to do with the great God, to whom we approach in prayer. Now religion is as tender as the eye; it is not a thing to be played with or handled without great care and heedfulness. Prayer is too sacred a duty to be performed between sleeping and waking, with a heavy eye or a drowsy heart. This God complained of, 'There is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of me,' Isa. 64:7. He counts it no prayer where the heart is not stirred up and awake. No way can we more honour or dishonour God than in prayer. O how then ought we to watch to this duty!

(2.) Again, in regard of *ourselves*; for our behaviour in prayer hath a universal influence into all the passages of our whole life. As a man is in this duty so he likely to be in all the rest. If careless in praying, then slighty in hearing, loose in his walking; he shall find that he miscarries in all his enterprises, is ensnared in all his enjoyments, baffled with every temptation, and discomposed at every affliction that meets him. And the reason of all this is—because our strength both to do and suffer comes from God. Now God communicates his assistance to his children in a way of communion with them. They ask, and they have; they seek, and find; knock, and the treasury of mercy is opened to them. Prayer is the channel in which the stream of divine grace, blessing, and comfort runs from God the fountain into the cistern of their hearts. Dam up the channel and the stream is stopped. If the stomach doth not its office all the members want their nourishment. If the trade fails in the shop there is but a poor house kept within.

2. *Reason*. Watchfulness is of as great importance to prayer as prayer is to all our other duties. No duty can be despatched well without prayer, nor prayer without watching; for it is not prayer, but prayer performed in a holy spiritual manner, that is effectual. Now, this cannot be done when the is off his watch. Take the Christian a napping, with his grace in a slumber, and he is no fitter to pray than a man is to work that is asleep. Whatever a man is doing, sleep, when it comes, puts an end to it. Sleep is the great leveller of the world, it makes all men alike. The strong man is as unable to defend himself from an enemy in his sleep as the child. The rich man asleep and the poor man are alike; he

enjoys his estate no more than if he had none. Thus the Christian, while his graces are asleep, is even like another that hath no grace—as to the present use of them, I mean—he will pray as the carnal man doth, enjoy God no more in the duty than such a one would do. O how sad is this! and yet how prone are we to give way unto this drowsiness of spirit in prayer! It creeps insensibly upon the soul, as sleep doth upon the body; the heart is gone before the Christian is well aware. The more need therefore there is to watch against it.

3. *Reason*. Because *Satan is so watchful against prayer*, therefore it behoves the Christian to watch unto prayer. Where should the strongest guard be set but where the enemy maketh his fiercest assault? This is the fort he batters and labours with all his might to beat the Christian from, well knowing the shot which gall him most come out of it. What he doth otherwise against the Christian is on a design to hinder his prayers, 1 Peter 3:7, as an enemy falls upon one part of the city to draw their forces from another place which he chiefly desires to gain. Indeed the soul never falls fully into his hands till it throws up this duty. 'Pray that ye enter not into temptation.' Sometimes the city is taken, and the enemy is forced back again, by those in the castle which commands the city. Prayer is like such a castle. Sometimes the Christian hath nothing left him but a spirit of prayer, and with this he beats back the devil out of all his advantages, and wrings out of his hands his new-gotten victories.

[WHEREIN watchfulness unto prayer consists.]

*Second*. The second thing I promised was to show wherein the Christian is to express his watchfulness in reference to this duty of prayer. Take it in these three particulars. 1. He is to watch before prayer. 2. He is to watch in prayer. 3. He is to watch after prayer.

1. The Christian is to show his watchfulness before prayer; and that,

(1.) By watching for the *fit season to pray in*. We cannot be always on our knees. We may serve God all the day, but worship him we cannot; this is a duty that requires some set times for its exercises. Now it is our duty to watch for the season of prayer as the merchant watcheth for the exchange hour; he orders his

other occasions so that by no means he may miss that. Thus the Christian should endeavour to dispose his occasions so that his devotions be not shut out or crowded up into straits of time by his improvidence; no, nor interfere with other necessary duties. Many a fair child is lost by an untimely birth, and good duty spoiled by being unseasonably performed.

(2.) By keeping a *strict watch over himself in his whole course*.

(a) By *shunning all that may defile his conscience*, and so render him unmeet for communion with God. Thus the priest was to watch himself that he touched no unclean thing, God thereby signifying that he will have them to be holy in their lives that approach near to him in the duties of his worship.

(b) By a *holy care to observe and lay up the most remarkable passages of God's providence to him*, as also the frame and behaviour of his own heart to God all along the interval between prayer and prayer. The want of this part of watchfulness is the cause why we are so jejune and barren in the performance of this duty. It is no wonder that he should want matter for his prayer at night, and trifle in it with impertinences, who did not treasure up what passed in the day betwixt God and him. Though the minister be not making his sermon all the week, yet by observing in his other studies what may be useful for him in that work, he is furnished with many hints that help him when he goes about it. Such an advantage the Christian will find for prayer by laying up the remarkable instances of God's providences to him and of his carriage to God again under them; these will furnish him with necessary materials for the performance. The bag is filling while the kine are feeding or chewing the cud, and accordingly yields more plentifully when milked at night. Truly thus it is here. That Christian must needs be most fruitful and plentiful in his devotions, when he comes to pour out his heart to God in prayer, that hath been thus filling it all the day with meditations suitable and helpful to the duty. Would he praise God? He hath the preservations, deliverances, and assistances which God hath given into him at hand, in the commonplace-book of his memory, which another hath lost for want of writing them down in this book of remembrance. Would he humbly confess the sins of the day? He presently recalls, 'In this company I forgot

myself and spake unadvisedly with my lips; in that enjoyment I observed my heart to be inordinate; this duty I omitted; that I was remiss and negligent in doing.' Now what a wonderful help hath such a soul above another that walks at random to get his soul into a melting mournful frame? The eye affects the heart. The presence of the object actuates the affection. The sight of an enemy stirs up anger; the sight of a dear friend excites love, and puts a man into a sudden ravishment—whom, may be, he should not have thought on, if he had not seen him. How can they mourn for the sins of the day at night who remember them no more than Nebuchadnezzar his dream?

(c) By the *frequent exercise of ejaculatory prayer*. He doth not watch to pray that never thinks on God but when he is on his knees; for, by this long discontinuing his acquaintance with God, he indisposeth himself for the more solemn addresses of his soul to him. Long fasting takes away the stomach. The Christian will find that the oftener he is refreshing his spirit with those little sips and short gusts of heaven, the larger draught he will be able to take when he returns to his set meal of morning and evening prayer. For, by the means of these he will be secured from worldly affections, which exceedingly deaden the heart, and also be seasoned and prepared for further communion with God. These short walks often taken keep the soul in breath for a longer journey.

2. The Christian must watch *in prayer*. It is not enough to watch the child that he goes to school, but the master's eye must watch him in school; to be idle at school is as bad as to truant from it. Thou dost well, Christian, to take care of thyself before prayer, and to see that the duty be not omitted; but wilt thou now leave it at the school-door? Truly then all thy former care is to little purpose.

(1.) Thou must *watch thy outward man*, and rouse that up from sleep and sloth. If the body be heavy-eyed in prayer the soul must needs be heavy-heeled; the pen drops out of the writer's hand when he falls asleep. 'Watch and pray,' saith Christ to his disciples; he knew that they could not do that work nodding. And yet, how many do we see at the very time of prayer in our congregations so far from watching, in this sense, that they invite sleep to come upon them by laying themselves in a lazy posture? Cer-

tainly, friends, communion with God is worth keeping our eyes open. Little do these drones think what contempt they cast upon God and his ordinance. I wonder any can sleep at the worship of God and not dream of hell-fire in their sleep. But it is not enough to keep thy awaked, if thou sufferest it to wander. 'Turn away mine eyes,' saith David, 'from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way,' Ps. 119:37.

(2.) Thou must *watch thy soul in prayer*. The soul is the man, and the soul in prayer is the very soul of prayer. Watch what its ends and aims are, that it shoots not beside the mark. Watch what strength and force thy soul puts to the work. Our prayers miscarry by shooting short as well as wide. In a word, thou must keep thy heart with all diligence from one end of the duty to the other, or else it will give thee the slip before thou art aware. How oft, alas! do our souls begin to speak with God in prayer, and on a sudden fall a chatting with the world! One while, our hearts are warm at the work, and we pursue hard after God with full cry of our affections; but instantly we are at a loss and hunt cold again. Holy David was sensible of this, and therefore we have him in the midst of this duty begging help from God to call in his gadding heart: 'Unite my heart to fear thy name,' Ps. 86:11.

3. The Christian is to watch *after prayer*.

(1.) By calling his soul to a *review concerning the duty*, how it was performed by him. God himself, when he had finished the works of creation, looks back upon them, 'And God saw every thing that he had made,' Gen. 1:31; that is, he viewed his work, as an artist would do a piece he had drawn. He hath given us all a faculty to reflect upon our actions, and looks we should use it, yea, complains of those that do not 'consider their ways and doings.' Many duties depend upon this. He that looks not back how he prayed, can he be humbled for the sins that cleaved to it? And will God pardon what he takes no care to know, that he may show his repentance for them? Or will he mend those faults in the next prayer which he found not out in the former? No, but rather increase them. We need not water weeds; let them but stand unplucked up and they will grow alone. This is the sluggard whose soul will soon run into a wilderness, and be overgrown with those sins in

prayer, which at last may choke the very spirit of supplication in him.

(2.) By observing what is the *issue and success of his prayer*. As he is to look back and see how he prayed, so forward to observe what return he finds of his prayer. To pray, and not watch what becomes of our prayer, is a great folly and no little sin; like children that throw stones into a river, which they never look to see more. What is this but to take the name of God in vain, and play with an ordinance that is holy and sacred? Yet thus, alas! do many knock at God's door—as idle children at ours—and then run away to the world, as they to their play, and think no more of their prayers. Or, like Pilate, who asked Christ, 'What is truth?' and, when he had said this, went out to the Jews, forgetting what he asked. Holy David did not think prayer such an idle errand. 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up,' Ps. 5:3. First, he is careful to take his aim right in delivering this arrow of prayer, which he sends with a message to heaven, 'I will direct my prayer unto thee.' Then he is as careful to observe where his arrow lights, and what answer is made to it, 'and I will look up,' which amounts to as much as that expression, 'I will hear what God the Lord will speak,' Ps. 85:8, that is, to me, concerning the prayer which in those words immediately foregoing he had made, 'Show us thy mercy, O lord, and grant us thy salvation.' When the merchant hath sent his ship to sea, he is inquiring at the exchange after her, to hear how she got to her port, whether on her return, and with what lading. When the husbandman hath cast his seed into the ground, then he comes every day almost to see how it comes up. This, Christian, is to watch unto prayer, to wait for answers to prayer. Mordecai, no doubt had put up many prayers for Esther, and therefore he waits at the king's gate, looking what answer God would in his providence give thereunto.

[*The Christian's guard or watch  
about prayer* SET FOR HIM.]

*Third.* The third thing I promised was to *set the Christian's watch for him, by giving some little counsel and help towards his constant performing*

*this duty of watchfulness.* In doing this, we take the following particulars.

1. *Particular. Harbour not any known sin in thy bosom.* Sin hath two contrary effects on the conscience, and both sad enough. Either it fills the conscience with horror, or benumbs and stupifies it; it breaks the soul's rest, or takes away its sense. The latter is the more common. Suffer the devil to anoint thy temples with this opium, and thou art in danger to fall into the sleeping disease of a stupid conscience; little list then thou wilt have to pray. Or if it hath the other effect upon thee, thou wilt be as much afraid, as now thou dost little desire, to pray.

2. *Particular. Beware of any excess in thy affections to the creature.* A drunken man, of all other, is most unfitting to watch. Such a one will be asleep as soon as he is set in his chair. Now all inordinacy of affection is a spiritual drunkenness. Christ joins both together, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares,' Luke 21:34. It is a preservative against drowsiness of spirit, that the day of the Lord might not take them napping. And of the two, the drunkenness of the affection is the worse. He that is bodily drunk over-night, is sober by the morning; but he that is overcharged with the cares or love of the world, rises as drunk as when he lay down; and how can he then watch unto prayer? We have therefore these two often joined together, 'Let us watch and be sober,' 1 Thes. 5:6; 'Be ye therefore sober, and watch,' 1 Peter 4:7. Whatever the affection is, the intemperance of it lays the soul under a distemper, and indisposeth it to prayer. Is it sorrow? Our Saviour finds his disciples 'sleeping for sorrow,' when they should have watched and prayed, Luke 22:45. Is it love? This laid Samson asleep in Delilah's lap. The heart of man hath not room enough for God and the world too. Worldly affections do not befriend spiritual. The heart which spends itself in mourning for worldly crosses, will find the stream runs low when he should weep for his sins. If the cares of this life fill his head and heart he will have little list to wait on God for spiritual purposes. It is no wonder that the master finds his servant asleep in the day, when he should be at work for him, if he sat up revelling all the night.

3. *Particular. Resist this spiritual drowsiness when it first creeps upon thee.* Sleep is easier kept off when approaching, than shaken off when it hath got possession and bound the senses. This sleepy disease of the soul steals insensibly upon us, even as the night steps in by little and little. When, therefore, thou findest it coming, rouse up thyself; as a man who hath business to do would start up from his chair to shake off his drowsiness. Now thou mayst observe these few symptoms of this distemper invading thee.

(1.) An *unwillingness and backwardness to duty.* If thou findest this, it appears thou beginnest to be heavy-eyed. When grace is wakeful, the Christian needs not many words to persuade him into God's presence. 'Thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said, Thy face, Lord will I seek.' therefore, conclude thou mayest that some vapours have fumed up from thy corruptions, to dull and deaden thy heart to the work. He that would run to the door, when awake, at the first knock of his dear friend to let him in, may, when between sleeping and waking, let him stand too long. This was the spouse's case, and it lost her the company of her beloved. It showed plainly she was in a sleepy distemper, in that she was so backward to duty; for that was the door that Christ would have met her at.

(2.) *Formality in prayer* is a certain symptom that a sleepy distemper hangs about thee. Grace awake is full of life and activity; at least it discovers itself by making the soul deeply sensible of its deadness and dulness. *Vigilantis est somnium narrare.* saith Seneca—it shows the man awake that tells his dream, what he did in his sleep; and it proves the soul awake that can feelingly and mournfully confess his deadness.

(3.) *Prevalency of wandering thoughts.* In sleep, fancy and imagination rules and ranges without any control. If thy thoughts range and scatter into impertinences in time of prayer, and meet with no check from thee, it shows thy grace, if thou hast any, is not well awake.

4. *Particular. Express a conscientious diligence at thy particular calling in the intervals of prayer.* They that sit up to watch had some need of work to keep them awake. Idleness is but one remove from sleep. I cannot believe that he who lazeth a day awake in idleness, should find his heart awake to pray at night; for he hath that day lived in the neglect of a duty as necessary

as this, and it is bad going to one duty through the neglect of another. There is a generation of men indeed, that under a pretence of watching and praying always, betake themselves to their cloisters, and renounce all secular employments, as if it were easy to put off the world as to change their clothes, and get on a cowl or a religious habit; but the world hath found those places commonly to have proved, not so much houses to pray in, as dens to draw their prey into. It is more like that those who are pampered with sloth and fulness of bread should be eaten up with luxury and sensuality than with zeal and devotion. The air, when still, thickens and corrupts; the spirits in our body are choked with rest; and the soul needs motion and exercise as much as either. In spiritual offices it cannot hold out without intermittings; therefore, God hath provided our particular callings as a relief to our spiritual devotions. Only, our care must be not to overdo. The same thing may quicken and weaken, wake us and lay us asleep. No greater help to our religious offices than a faithful discharge of our particular calling; no greater duller of the Spirit of prayer than the same when inordinately pursued. The same oil feeds the lamp and drowns it if excessively poured on. Hold the candle one way, and the wax nourishes the flame; turn the other end up, it puts it out.

5. *Particular. Preserve a sense of thy spiritual wants.* As fulness inclines the body to sleep, so doth a conceit of spiritual fulness the soul. When the belly is full then the bones would be at rest—the man hath more mind to sleep than work; whereas he that is pinched with hunger, his empty craving stomach keeps him awake. If once thou beginnest to have a high opinion of thyself, and thy spiritual hunger be a little stayed—from a conceit of thy present store, and sufficiency of thy grace—truly then thou wilt compose thyself to sleep, and sing the rich man's lullaby to thy soul, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease.' The Corinthians are a sad instance for this purpose. 'Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us,' 1 Cor. 4:8. Paul is now nobody with you. The time hath been you could not be without his pains. The hungry child did no more cry for the breast than you for the word preached by him. But now your stomach is stayed, you are full and can live

without him. Whereas, God knows, it was a fulness of wind of pride, not of solid grace. It is the nature of grace to dilate the heart and make room for more, but of pride to cloy and glut the soul. God hath long kept open house in England; the wine-cellar door of his ordinances hath not been shut upon us; we have had free access to drink, and that abundantly, of their sweet wine. But, alas! may it not be for a lamentation to see how many are drunk with spiritual pride, rather than filled with grace, after so long an enjoyment of them!—insomuch that some have attempted to stave the very vessels from which they have drawn this wine! Such are they that decry all ordinances, and would down with ministers and ministry; yea, who can live without public preaching and private praying also. Others, not so mad drunk as the former, are yet fallen asleep under the tap; they have lost their first life in and love to ordinances; they sit with sleepy eyes and dead hearts under them. Well, Christian, if thou wouldst keep thy soul awake for this or any other ordinance, take heed thou losest not the sense of thy wants. Begging is the poor man's trade. When thou beginnest to conceit thyself rich, then thou wilt be in danger to give it over, or be remiss in it.

6. *Particular. Retire often to muse on some soul-awakening meditations.* We seldom sleep when we are thoughtful, especially if the thoughts we muse on be of weight and importance enough to intend and occupy the mind. Indeed, idle trivial thoughts such as have nothing to invite attention, are given as a ready means to bring a man asleep—I mean bodily sleep. That Christian who neglects frequently to meditate on spiritual things, and lets his thoughts walk all day in the company of carnal worldly occasions, I should wonder if he finds his heart awake at night to pray in a spiritual manner. Give me therefore leave to present a few subjects for thy meditations to insist upon, and they will be as the brazen ball which some philosophers used to hold in their hand that they might not sleep too long, or as the alarm which men set overnight to call them up to their business early in the morning.

(1.) *Meditate of Christ's coming to judgment.* Surely thou wilt not easily sleep while this trumpet, that shall call all mankind to judgment, shall sound in thy ear. The reason why men sleep so soundly in security is, because they

either do not believe this, or at least do not think of it seriously so as to expect it. The servant that looks for his master will be loath to be found in bed, when he comes; no, sits up sits up to open the door for him when he knocks. Christ hath told us he 'will come,' but not *when*, that we might never put off our clothes or put out the candle. 'Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come,' Matt. 24:42. There are indeed negative signs concerning his coming to the general judgement of the world, by which we may know he will not yet come; as the fall of Babylon, the calling of the Jews, and other prophecies, that must be fulfilled; before which he will not come. But there are none such, from which we may conclude that his coming to any of us in particular, to take us away by death, and summon us to our particular judgment before his bar, shall not yet be. Thou art young; thou canst not therefore say thou shalt not die as yet. Alas! measure the coffins in the churchyard, and thou wilt find some of thy length. Young and old are within the reach of death's scythe. Old men indeed go to death; their age calls for it. But, young men cannot hinder death's coming unto them. Thou art rich, will this excuse thee? Rich men indeed can get others to serve in their arms here, when their prince calls them forth to war; but 'there is no discharge in this war.' Solomon tells us 'Thou must personally do this. Thou art strong and lusty, thou canst not therefore say that death will be longer at work to fell thee down. Some indeed he cuts down by chips in consumptive diseases—they die by piecemeals; others he tears up in one night, as a tree by a tempest. O think of this, and thy sleep will depart from thee!

(2.) Consider *the devil is always awake*. Is it time for them in the city to sleep, when the enemy without watch, and may be are climbing the walls? Our Saviour takes it for granted, 'If the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up,' Matt. 24:43. Of all the nights in the year he would not then have slept. Would Saul have slept in his trench, if he had thought David had been so near? Or Sisera have lain down to rest, if he had seen the hammer and nail in Jael's hand to drive through his temples? 'Hannibal is at the gates!' was enough to wake the whole city of Rome, and call them to their

arms. And is not *diabolus ad ostium*—the devil is at thy door, enough to keep thee out of thy bed of sloth and negligence? What day in all the year is no term to Satan? What place or company art thou in, that he cannot make a snare to thy soul? What member of thy body, or faculty of thy soul, which is not in danger to be abused by him? Hast thou not an inmate in thy own bosom that watcheth to open the gate to him? and is there not a constant correspondence between them? O how oft doth he beat us—as Bernard saith—with our own staff; and as the thief sometimes serves the traveller, binds us with our own garters! Shall we not always watch to pray, when he watcheth to tempt? Shall not we keep our correspondence with God, and Christ, our allies in heaven, as he doth with our flesh that is his confederate?

*Ut jugulent homines surgunt de nocte latrones;  
Ut t'ipsum serves non expergisceris;—*

—shall thy enemy be awake to seek to cut thy throat, and wilt not thou rise to save it?

(3.) Consider *wicked men are awake, and hard at work for Satan and their lusts*. The philosopher blushed that the smith should be up and have his hammer in his hand before he had his book. O may it not put the Christian to shame! Consider how watchful the men of the world are to follow their worldly business. Do they not rise early, and go to bed late, grudging the very time that is spent to refresh nature in the night with sleep, so bent they are upon their carnal projects! The philosopher observed this, and shamed himself for suffering the smith to be at his anvil in the morning sooner than he was at his book. O Christian! should it not make thee blush much more to see the whole town up and as busy as bees about a garden, one flying this way, another that way—and all to bring a little more of this world's perishing pelf into their hive, out of which death, ere long, will smoke them, and force them to leave what with so much pains they have gathered for others they know not who, possibly their greatest enemies—while thou, Christian, sleepest away thy precious time, though thou art sure to carry thy gettings into the other world with thee,, and there enjoy the fruit of thy short labour here with everlasting glory! Nay, consider how watchful the wicked are to take all opportunities to pursue their works of



darkness. The adulterer watcheth for the twilight to meet his minion; and wilt not thou watch unto prayer, that thou mayest fill thy soul with spiritual loves in communion with thy God? The thief is up at midnight to get his prey; and wilt not thou break thy rest a little for to obtain a richer treasure than is to be found in the coffers of the richest princes that the world boasts of? Shall these be at so much pains to satisfy their lusts, and thou take none to honour and enjoy thy God? O what a shame was it to the heavy-eyed disciples that they could not watch to pray with their Master, when Judas that bold traitor was so wakeful to be up in the dead of the night to betray him into his murderers' hands!

(4.) Consider *how short the time is that thou art desired to watch*. 'Could you not watch with me one hour?' saith Christ,' Matt. 26:40. Ere long, Christian, thou shalt be called off thy guard, and then thou shalt have all rest, though no sleep. It is but for this short life thou art put to stand upon this hard duty; and is that so long? Others do not count it so. O how soon is a day, a year, yea a life, passed at play or sin? The great complaint that such make is, 'Time is short.' They wish they could clip its wings, and take off the weights from this clock that make it post away so fast. Is time so short and sweet to spend in sin, and can it be tedious to thee to bestow it in devotion? Why should an hour in the closet be thought by a saint long, when day and night spent in an ale-house is too short for the sinner? But, above all, consider whether it be not better to watch and pray here on earth for a few days than to wake and roar in hell under endless and easeless torments!

(5.) Consider seriously *how great a loser thou hast been already in thy heavenly trade for want of watching*. It is with the Christian as with some negligent merchant, who takes notice of some one loss of a round sum that befalls him—may be some hundreds at a clap. At this he cries he shall be undone; but regards not the pence and shillings that he idly spends, nor considers his loss which follows upon his daily negligence. Here his estate melts insensibly, and he is not aware of it; whereas, would he count what in this dribbling way is lost by retail, he might find it amounts to more than the other. Thus the Christian sometimes is troubled for one great sin into which he hath fallen—and that not without reason—but withal, he observes not how he

neglects this duty to-day, and negligently performs that at another time; how he now prays coldly for want of due preparation, and what little fruit comes of another for want of watchfulness after it; whereby in time he falls low, though with an easy descent, step by step; whereas, if he could bring the several items of these his particular losses together, he would find them swell into a sad reckoning, except with these his losses he hath also lost—which is the greatest—the tenderness of his conscience. Now, Christian, hast thou not a mind to thrive at last? And shall a careless Christian add to his stock? Did you ever go by the sluggard's field and not find it overgrown with thorns? Wouldst thou but be persuaded to make it thy business daily to watch thy heart—how thou prayest, and how thou walkest after thou hast been at prayer—thou shouldst find a blessed change in thy spiritual affairs. This strictness will at first be uneasy, like a new suit; but every day that will wear off, and a sweet facility follow when thou shalt see thy gains come trowling in by it. He that finds how well he is paid for his diligence by the increase of his estate, will not grudge the sluggard his ease when he shall see him walk by his door in rags. It was the saying once of a rich man, who, by God's blessing on his diligence, had raised a vast estate, that at his first setting up in the world he got a little with much trouble, but afterwards he got his great gains with little trouble. And thou, Christian, wilt find the same in thy spiritual trade. Thy trouble will be most at first, but thy gains most at last; and the trouble less, because the way of godliness, by use and experience, will be naturalized to thee, and consequently become easy and delightful.

(6.) Consider *what others lose by thy not watching*. He that lives in a town wrongs his neighbour as well as himself by not looking to his fence: thus one Christian may injure many by not keeping his own watch.

(a) Thy very *example is a wrong to others*, for this sleepy disease is catching; thy loose conversation may make others so, as one learns to yawn of another. It is no small blessing to to live among active Christians, whose zeal and forwardness in the ways of God is exemplary; this puts mettle in those that follow them; the heavenly holy conversation of a master is a help to the whole family.

*(b) Thou indisposest thyself for doing thy duty to them.* We are commanded to watch over one another in love, as those that are concerned in our brethren's welfare. Now, how unfit is he to watch over others that doth not watch himself? to 'provoke to love and to good works,' who needs himself the spur? Can one asleep wake another that is so?

(7.) Lastly, Consider *Christ's care over thee*. Look upon him in his providence. That eye which neither sleeps by night nor slumbers by day is thy constant keeper. Consider him in his intercession. There he prays for thee, 'watching thereunto with all perseverance.' It is his trade and business in heaven, for he lives to make intercession for his saints. Consider him in his Spirit. What is he but Christ's messenger sent as our guardian to take care of the saints in his absence? In a word, consider him in the gospel ministry, which is set up for this very purpose, to

'watch for your souls.' Yea, every private saint hath a charge to be his brother's keeper. This well considered would make thee,

(a) *Watchful to promote his glory* that so carefully provides for thy safety. What put David into such a rage against Nabal but the disrespect that his servants found at his hands to whom he had been so serviceable? 'In vain have I kept all that this fellow hath.'

(b) It would make thee the *more watchful over thy own soul*, if thou hast so much ingenuity as to fear grieving thy God, who expresseth this tender care over thee. What greater grief can the indulgent parent have than to see his child not mind his own good after all his care and cost laid out upon him? He joys to see the money he gives him improved and increased by his diligence; but it breaks his very heart with sorrow when it is all wasted and squandered away by ill husbandry.










































## DIVISION FIFTH.—THE CONSTANCY PROPER TO PRAYER.

*‘With all perseverance.’*

These words, ‘*with all perseverance*,’ contain the fifth branch in the apostle’s directory for prayer—THE CONSTANCY PROPER TO PRAYER—which I shall despatch briefly in these four heads. FIRST. By giving the importance of this phrase, ‘*all perseverance*.’ SECOND. By giving the reason why we are to pray ‘*with all perseverance*.’ THIRD. I shall cast in some considerations to move us to the duty. FOURTH. Wind up the discourse with a word of counsel and direction for the help of the weak Christian therein.

*[Import of the phrase ‘WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE.’]*

FIRST. Let us explain *the importance of the phrase* 'with all perseverance.' Here is perseverance, yea 'all perseverance,' required in prayer. *First.* Let us inquire what is meant by 'perseverance.' *Second.* What is meant by 'all perseverance.'

*First.* What is meant by ‘perseverance.’ The word             here used comes from       the same with     —a letter only transposed to melt the sound. It signifies strength and victory; hence its compound                   is to prosecute any business with an unwearied constancy till all difficulties be conquered and the thing at last be accomplished. It is used for the diligence and

labour of hunting dogs that follow the chase till at last they get the game pursued; it is applied also to lackeys that with great labour run after their masters and are at their hand in a journey. In Scripture it is frequently applied to the duty of prayer, as Acts 6:4; Col. 4:2; Rom. 12:12, and signifies that invincible patience, courage, and constancy which a Christian is to show in upholding this duty of prayer.

*Question.* But are 'praying always' in the beginning of this verse, and this 'praying with perseverance,' the same? If not, wherein lies the difference?


*Answer.* It cannot be thought the apostle, being giving directions for prayer, would let them interfere one with another, and in so short a space repeat the same direction over again in other words; the rest are all distinct, so therefore

will we take these. Calvin makes this to be the difference:—By ‘praying always,’ saith he, he exhorts us to pray in prosperity as well as adversity; and not then to intermit the practice of this duty because not driven to it by such outward pressing necessities. But, by ‘praying with perseverance,’ *admomet ne defatigemur, instandum esse alacri animo; infracto studio continuandas esse preces, si non statim consequamur quod volumus*—he admonisheth that we be not weary of the work; but continue instant and constant in its performance, though we have not presently what we pray for. By ‘praying always,’ we are exhorted to the daily constant exercise of the duty of prayer, not to neglect the seasons the seasons for prayers as they return upon us. By ‘praying with perseverance,’ we are pressed to bear up against discouragements as to any particular suit or request we make at the throne of grace, and not to give over though we have not a speedy answer to it. So that the former is opposed to a neglect of duty in its stated seasons, and the latter to a fainting in our spirits as to any particular suit we put up. We may keep our constant course of prayer, and yet not persevere in prayer for this or that mercy, which God withholds sometime for the exercise of our grace.

*Second.* I shall show what is meant by ‘all perseverance.’

1. By ‘all perseverance’ is meant *such a perseverance as holds out to the end*—till God doth give the thing we pray for, or takes away the subject of our prayer, as he did in David’s case for his sick child by his death. It is possible a soul may continue long, yet at last faint when it sees the time for answering still protracted. God still stays, and no news of his coming, after many a despatch sent to heaven upon that occasion. O it is hard to hold up our hands, with Moses, ‘to the going down of the sun!’ Christ complains how rare and scarce such a faith is to be found, when he bears long before he throws in the mercy prayed for. ‘Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?’ Luke 18:8. Shall he find so much faith as to keep his people at prayer in expectation of his coming to their relief?

2. By ‘all perseverance’ is meant a *perseverance of the whole man in prayer*. We must not only persevere to hold up the outward performance of the duty of prayer; but persevere

to exert the inward powers of our souls and their graces in the duty. The duty may be kept up, and the heart be down in performing it. The faith, zeal, and other graces of the soul may be gone or act but feebly. Like an army that hath not yet quitted the field, but their powder and are even all spent; there they stand, and set a good face on it, but can do little or nothing to offend the enemy or defend themselves. Thus many in afflictions pray still. They have not yet given over the duty and run out of the field. But alas! their faith fails and their heart quails; there is little life and vigour to be seen in the performance. Here is some kind of perseverance, but not this ‘all perseverance,’ which above all requires the perseverance of grace in its actings at the duty. So we translate the word, Rom. 12:12. What is here ‘with perseverance,’ is there ‘continuing instant in prayer;’ the word is . Some are ‘instant,’ but it lasts not. If they find the mercy comes, they draw hard; but if their chariot of prayer be set, and after a pull or two the mercy comes not, their faith jades, and they give over the work. Others are constant, but not instant; they continue to pray, but pray themselves cold; they grow lifeless and listless in the work, as if they looked for nothing to come of it. We must join both together, or expect benefit from neither.

[WHY we are to pray ‘with all perseverance.’]

SECOND. I proceed to the second thing promised, viz. to show *why we must pray ‘with all perseverance;’* which take in these particulars:—

*First.* It is *strictly commanded*. ‘Pray without ceasing,’ 1 Thes. 5:17; that is, without fainting. So our Saviour, Luke 18:1, ‘And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.’ Mark, not only that they might, but ‘ought.’ It is indeed a high privilege to us, and a low stoop in the high God, to give us leave thus to lie at his door, and to suffer the cry of our prayers to be ever sounding his ears. We, I ma sure, could not like to have beggars knocking day and night at our doors; but so infinitely good is God, that he doth not only allow us this boldness, but also commands it, that the fear of a sin might move us, if the loss of a privilege will not.

*Second.* This perseverance in prayer is *highly recommended*. Indeed perseverance

crowns every grace and commends every duty. It is not our faith and hope, but to 'hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end,' that God looks at, Heb. 3:6. Not the seeming zeal and swiftness of our motion in the ways of God at our first start and setting forth, but the constancy of a well-breathed soul in holding on his course till the race be finished, that Christ commends: 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed,' John 8:31. So in prayer. Not the short spurts of an inconstant zeal, that begins to pray as they say the French do to fight—like thunder and lightning, but if the first charge carries it not, then they quail, and are quite cowed in their spirits. No; it is not this soft metal, whose edge is thus easily turned, that God likes in prayer, but a zeal tempered and hardened so with resolution that makes it cut through all delays and difficulties. This God highly commends. It got Jacob the name of a prince, so nobly he behaved himself in this duty, holding it out till break of day with God, and then would not let him go till he had blessed him.

*Third.* It is *that which God intends by his delays and seeming denials.* Why deals he thus with his people? Surely it is to put their graces to the trial, whether they will quit the siege for a few repulses or fall on with more courage. He holds his peace, to make them cry the louder; steps aside, to make them hunt more eagerly after him. He lays blocks before the wheel of their prayers, to try their mettle how well they will draw, when it seems a dead pull, and the mercy comes not at their prayer. Now two things God aims at by his people's perseverance in prayer.

1. His own glory. 2. Their advantage. These two are never severed.

1. *His own glory.* What fairer occasion can the Christian have in his whole life to honour God, than by holding fast his integrity, and keeping his allegiance to God firm, when he seems to be neglected, yea, forsaken of him? Certainly God would never have put Job to so much trouble, nor have made him pray and stay so long for the gracious issues of his providence, but to glorify himself in the faith and patience of his faithful servant. 'Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord,' saith the apostle James, ch. 5:11. Truly, we could not have heard so much of his patience, if we had not heard so much of his

troubles. Had God put an end sooner to them, he might have found more ease, but not God more honour. This was it that God was pleased with and counted himself highly honoured by—that Satan with all his wits and wiles could not make Job give over praying, much less fall of cursing God; no, not when God broke him with his tempest, and seemed not to regard him or his prayers. It pleaseth us most when our prayers make the shortest voyage—when they are at heaven and back again with and answer quickly; but it glorifies God most when he lays an embargo—as I may so say—upon our prayers, that no answer comes from heaven to us, and yet we will send more after them, as Jacob did Benjamin after his other son, who was then prisoner in Egypt. When the poor soul will not be taken off the duty by any intervening discouragements, but presseth harder upon God from his seeming denials, this is indeed to give glory to God. 'Blessed is he that hath not seen, and yet' thus 'believeth.'

2. God, by his people's persevering long in prayer before he gives in his gracious answer, intends *their advantage.*

(1.) He usually pays them *use for their forbearance.* The longer they pray, the more redundant the mercy is when it comes. Such a mercy, that comes as an answer of persevering prayers, is compared to the husbandman's gains at harvest, which abundantly recompenseth his whole year's patience. 'In due season we shall reap, if we faint not,' Gal. 6:9. The breast is filling for the child while the mother is sleeping. God sometimes seems to sleep and forget his poor children that cry to him, but he is preparing the fuller mercy for them.

(2.) Such mercies are got with longest and greatest difficulties, they come with *sweetest manifestations of divine love*: 'O woman, great is thy faith,' Matt. 15:28. This poor woman had not her request so soon granted as some others, but she lost nothing by it; for, with the recovery of her child—which was all her errand—she carries away with her a high testimony from Christ's own mouth to the truth and eminency of her grace. She who was at first called a dog is at last owned for a dear child.

(3.) Such mercies as are the issue of persevering prayers, they are *received usually with more joy and thankfulness than others.* Partly they are so, because the Christian's desires are

more intense and sharp by long staying and earnest praying for them—and so he tastes more sweetness in the mercy, as he that comes hungry from a long journey at plough relisheth his food better than another that hath not whetted his appetite with any labour or exercise; and also because such mercies give disappointment to the Christian's many fears, which their long stay occasioned. When God is long a coming, we are prone to question whether he will come at last or no: 'Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore?' Ps. 77:7, 8. See how many sad thoughts gathered about this good man's heart; which, though they did not overthrow his chariot of prayer, yet clogged his wheels, and made him drive with a heavy heart. Now, for a mercy to break out of so dark a cloud, it must needs bring such a glory with it as to ravish the soul with joy and enlarge it into thankfulness. Those judgments amaze and dispirit sinners most which come after long peace and prosperity, when they think the danger is over and bitterness of death is even past; as in Haman's case, who was sent to the gallows after he had vaunted how he was invited to the queen's banquet. This strange turn of his affairs made it a double death to him. So, mercies that surprise the saint after he hath prayed long, and can hear no tidings that they are on their way, O how it affects his heart with joy and gratitude! The church had prayed 'without ceasing' for Peter in prison, but still he is there, even to the very time when Herod would have brought him forth—probably to his execution. Now, when he came himself to bring the joyful news their prayers were heard—while they were instant at the work—it is said 'they were astonished,' Acts 12:16.

(4.) They were usually *more holily used and improved*. For God holds his people long at prayer for a mercy many times for this very end—to prepare and season their hearts, that, when they have it, they may know the better how to employ it for his glory and their own good. None are more careful to husband a great estate than those who are at most pains to get it. Hannah prayed long for a son, but none is given. This makes her add a vow to her prayer: 'If thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and wilt give unto thine handmaid a

man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life,' 1 Sam. 1:11. Happy was it for this good woman she had not her desire sooner. If she had received him at first, haply she had never given him back to God again. The Lord sometimes forbears to give a mercy to us, only to get us deeper into bonds to lay it out for him when we have it.

(5.) The last advantage that comes to the Christian by perseverance in prayer is, *when the mercy is at last denied*. And it is this—it will enable and dispose him to bear the denial more meekly and holily than another. He that is short-spirited, and cannot wait on God for a mercy, will not easily submit to him in a denial; whereas, he that keeps up a spirit of prayer for it, when God comes to take away the subject of his prayer, will acquiesce, now he sees God hath fully declared his will in the thing. David and Job are pregnant instances for this. Job lets not a day pass without prayer for his children; and how does the man behave himself when they are slain? Doth he fret and fume? Doth he curse God for making them a sacrifice for whom he had offered so many sacrifices? No; he meekly submits to his holy will; he opens not his mouth against him, but in praises to him. So David, when his child was dead—for whom, while living, he ceased not passionately to pray—to show how well satisfied he was with divine providence, he washeth his blubbered cheeks, puts off his mourning apparel, and goes to the house of God to worship, 11 Sam. 12:20. Prayer is a great heart-easer; it breathes out those distempered passions which, being bound up in others, break out when God at any time crosseth them in their wills.

[SOME CONSIDERATIONS *pressing the duty of persevering prayer.*]

THIRD. Having shown why we are to persevere in prayer, I come now to the third place, to cast in *some considerations to move us to the duty*. Christ bestowed a parable on his disciples for this very end, to show that 'men ought always to pray and not to faint.' Surely, then, it deserves an exhortation. Now to enforce the exhortation, take these five particulars into your consideration.

*First Consideration.* The *prevalency of perseverance in prayer*. This is emphatically expressed

by that question of our Saviour in his parable upon this subject: 'Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?' Luke 18:7. As if he had said, Can you think that God will send away those who are so near and dear to him, his own elect, with a denial and that when he hath made full proof of their faith and patience in waiting long upon him for an answer? 'I tell you,' saith Christ, 'that he will avenge them speedily.' Men seek to please their old customers that are constant to their shop, whoever else they send away; so will God those that are in constant trading with him at the throne of grace. 'They that wait upon the Lord are not ashamed.' David is careful for our encouragement to let us know how well he sped after his long waiting at God's door: 'I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry,' Ps. 40:1; Hebrew 'in waiting I waited;' that is, I stayed waiting long, and at last he came. But David was a favourite; may others look to speed as he did? See ver. 3, 'Many shall see it,...and shall trust in him.' Answer of prayers is a covenant privilege. It is not a monopoly given to one or two, but a charter granted to the whole corporation of saints to the end of the world: 'He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer,' Ps. 102:17. Now mark what follows, 'This shall be written for the generation to come,' ver. 18.

*Second Consideration.* Thy perseverance in prayer will help to evidence thy state to be gracious. The hypocrite is oft uncased here; will he pray always? Job 27:10. Many will come into a workman's shop, and take up his tools to work with them for awhile, and lay them down again by and by, who would never yield to be bound to his trade and serve out an apprenticeship at it. Thus an unsound heart will be meddling with this duty now and then, but grows weary of the work at last, especially if he be made to wait long for an answer. Saul prays to God, and because he hears not from him, goes at last to seek to the devil. Observe what effect God's silence, frowns, and seeming denials produce in thy heart, and thou mayest know the temper of thy spirit thereby. Do they wear off thy edge to prayer, or sharpen it? Do they make thee fall off, and send thee away from God's door—as some sturdy beggars go from ours when denied an alms—with clamours in thy mouth, and

discontent in thy heart, resolved to beg no more there? Or do they make thee fall on with more courage, and enkindle thy affections to God and this duty more ardently? as the suitor, whose love is heightened by repulses, and importunity doubled by being obstructed and opposed. Truly, if thou findest the latter, thou mayest conclude, if this instant constancy in prayer be for spiritual blessings—Christ and his sanctifying graces—that divine virtue, and that good store hath gone from Christ into thy soul. 'O woman, great is thy faith!'

*Third Consideration.* Consider the great folly of fainting in prayer. Thou dost a foolish and irrational act. Haply thou art in a deserted condition, prayest for comfort, but none comes; for victory over such a temptation without or corruption within, but art foiled in both, for all thy praying; therefore thou first faintest in the duty, and then givest it over. What egregious folly is this! Because mercy comes not in all haste to thee, therefore thou wilt run from it—which thou dost in ceasing to pray! When the fisher misseth his draught, he doth not presently give over his trade, but falls a mending his net. O cease not to pray, but mend thy praying! See at what hole the fish went out—the mercy was lost; double thy diligence, and all shall be well at last. If thy pain continues while the plaster is on, dost think it will cease when it is taken off? Whatever the mercy is thou wouldst have, must it not come from God's hands? Now will God give the mercy to thee who rejectest his counsel for the obtaining of it? Is not prayer, and that 'with all perseverance,' the way he directs all his people to take? Suppose a physician, who is sent for to a sick patient, should give the messenger an electuary to carry back with him, and saith, It will be some time before I come myself to the sick man, but charge him to take a good quantity of this as oft as he finds himself ill, every day, till I come, and he shall do well. Now the patient begins to follow his physician's directions, but, staying longer than he likes before he comes, and finding his trouble continue, sets it away, and takes no more of it. The physician at last sets forth, and, as he is on his way to him, hears of it, turns back, and comes not at him; so the poor man dies by his own hasty folly. Truly this is our case. God, for reasons best known to himself, stays some while before he comes to his tempted distressed servants, for their

deliverance, but leaves order when any of them ail anything—so the word ▼☆▼□☆☆♂♂, James 5:13, signifies—that they should pray, apply themselves to the use of this duty; yea, continue the spiritual constant use of it till he comes; and withal assures us he will come soon enough to save us. Now, what folly is it to cast off this means so strictly prescribed? Surely, thought there were nothing else, this is enough to turn God back when on his way of mercy to do us good.

*Fourth Consideration.* Consider it is *as sinful as foolish to give over this duty*. ‘Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God,’ Job 15:4. It is a high crime for one trusted with a castle for his prince to deliver it cowardly into his enemy’s hand, especially if he hath provision wherewithal to defend it. Now hath not God provided sufficiently to enable the Christian to maintain this duty against all the armies of men and devils, afflictions and temptations, that can oppose it? Princes are most careful to enforce and supply frontier castles above others with all necessaries for defence, because most assaulted. Prayer is a duty that is as hard laid at by Satan as any, and hath many other difficulties that render it no easy matter for the Christian to be instant and constant at it. God hath considered this, and accordingly provided succour. He gives his Spirit to help the Christian—because of his many infirmities—what and how to pray; who, if he be used kindly, will not be wanting to lift with him in the work. And, while the Spirit is ready to pray in him, Christ is as ready in heaven to pray for him; who also sends the precious promise of the gospel—as messengers into a besieged town—to assure the soul relief is coming from heaven to him, be the affliction or temptation never so great and formidable that besets it. Now, to faint in the work, and, by giving over the duty, to open the city gates of his soul, for Satan to enter and triumph over God with his insulting blasphemies—O what gracious soul, that hath any spark of loyalty in his breast unquenched to his God, doth not tremble at the thought of such a treasonable action! We cannot cast off prayer, but we cast some dishonourable reflection upon God; for, as one saith well, every real defect in the creature proceeds from an imaginary defect which he falsely supposeth to be in God. Men first conceive unworthily of God, and then carry

themselves unworthily and undutifully to him. Now the causes from which this fainting in prayer proceeds are all evil and bitter, as by and by will appear.

*Fifth Consideration.* As it is foolish and evil, so it is *of dangerous consequence to ourselves, to faint, and cease to pray*.

1. It is the *ready way to bring some stinging affliction upon us*. This is the best that can come of it. Art thou a servant of God, and fleest from his face? Art thou a child, and playest the truant? Look that thy heavenly Father will send thee to school with a rod at thy back.

2. Cease to pray, and thou wilt *begin to sin*. Prayer is not only a means to prevail for mercy, but also to prevent sin. ‘Pray that ye enter not into temptation.’ The thief comes when the candles are out and all the house in their beds. Christ could not keep his disciples awake at their devotions; and how soon were they put to the rout when the tempter came! When the courtier in a discontent withdraws, and gives over his attendance at court, he is more easily wound in to disloyal practices against his prince. Discontent softens the heart to receive sinful impressions from the tempter. ‘Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God,’ Job 15:4. Eliphaz’s doctrine was true, though his application was false. When Saul gave over in a pet to pray to God, then he sought to a witch. Sins of commission are the usual punishments that God inflicts on persons for sins of omission. He that leaves a duty may fear to be left to commit a crime; he that turns his ear from the truth takes the ready course to be given over to believe fables, II Tim. 4:4. He that casteth off prayer, it is a wonder if you find him not ere long cast into some foul sin.

[COUNSEL AND DIRECTION *for the weak Christian in persevering prayer.*]

FOURTH. I shall wind up the discourse with a *word of counsel and direction for the help of the weak Christian therein*. Now this will, I suppose, be best performed by laying before you the several causes of a person’s falling off from this duty, or fainting in it, and so to fit the directions accordingly. All diseases are not cured with the same medicine, neither are catholic remedies so effectual as those which respect the particular humour from which the distemper ariseth. Now

the CAUSES of non-persevering in prayer are diverse.

*First.* Sometimes the cause is *want of a lasting and enduring motive or principle to keep and hold us constantly to the duty.* When the spring is down the watch must needs cease going, for that fails that gave the wheels their motions. That sometimes which sets the creature to prayer, is not pure obedience to the command, but a desire to some particular mercy, which, if obtained, the fish being caught, the net is laid aside; or, if he prays long, and hath it not, he grows weary of the work, and lets it fall. Be sure, Christian, therefore to pray in obedience. Bind the duty upon thy conscience, and thou wilt not easily shake it off. 'God forbid that,' saith Samuel, 'I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you,' 1 Sam. 12:23. He had little encouragement, from them he prayed for, to continue at the work, but his obedience to God, to whom he prayed, held him to it. This is a strong fence to hedge in the heart indeed. We cannot break through this hedge but we shall feel the thorns in our side. A gracious soul dreads nothing more than guilt. Tell him it is a sin to cease praying, and you say enough. What though God answers not my prayer, his silence to my prayer must not make me silent not to pray. Prayer is still a duty. God is not bound to answer presently when we pray, but we are bound to pray though he doth not answer. 'All this is come upon us,' saith the church, 'yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant,' Ps. 44:17. Remember, Christian, thou art a covenant servant, and one thing thou art as such bound to do is, to pray to thy God without ceasing, 1 Thes. 5:17. This will defend thee against any motion that the tempter suggests to the contrary. the beggar knocks awhile at the rich man's door, and, if he be not served, away he goes. But the servant in the house, though he be hungry, doth not run away presently from his master, because he hath not his dinner so soon as he desires.

*Second.* Sometimes this not persevering in prayer comes from *pride.* 'This evil is of the Lord; what should I wait for the Lord any longer?' II Kings 6:33. What a haughty spirit was here! Pride likes not to wait, but to be waited on. He in the gospel was ashamed to beg, much more to stand long at the door upon a begging errand. Now, though this be a disease which a saint is

more free from than other men, yet there are dregs enough still within him to royle and distemper his spirit, if he be not daily evacuating and purging them out. It will not therefore be amiss to leave a few soul-humbling considerations in your hands, which you may be often taking, especially when you feel any grudgings of this sin about you, and your hearts begin to grow discontented that God makes you stay so long for any mercy prayed for.

1. Consider *what it is to pray.* It is to go a begging for an alms, not to demand a debt. Now, doth it become thee in so poor a condition, and about such a work, to be so quick and short with thy God? If you can live without being beholden to God, why then do you at all come to his door? If you cannot, why then do you not wait more patiently for his pleasure? Should he wrong thee if he beat thee from his door? Why then art thou no more thankful for his leave to wait there, though thou beest not presently served?

2. Consider *who he is thou prayest to.* Is he not the great and glorious majesty of heaven and earth? And is not this one piece of the state he looks to be served in by his poor creatures? How long did Mordecai sit at the king's gate before he had that which he waited for? Is it not time enough for the servant to be set at dinner after he hath waited at his master's table? Were it not unsufferable sauciness in the servant to complain his master sat too long and required too much waiting at his hands? This is the language of our hearts, when we think much to stay God's time for a mercy. Is he not a righteous holy God? Surely he doth thee no wrong to make thee pray, and that long, for a mercy which thou deservest not when it comes at last. Is he not wiser than thou, to know how to time his mercies? 'Shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place?' Job 18:4. Wilt thou have God overthrow the course of his providence, which he thinks fit, to gratify thy impatient spirit? Surely this is to charge God foolishly with some error in his government. In a word, is not he a faithful God, though he comes not so soon to thy relief as thou wouldst have him? where did he give thee leave to date his promises and set the day of payment? No; he hath promised to answer his children's prayers, but concealed the time of performance of his



promise, on purpose to keep them in a waiting posture; and therefore he breaks not his promise when he detains a mercy, but thou forgettest thy duty not to wait. God is not unfaithful, but thou art faithless and unbelieving.

3. Have not *as good as thyself* prayed, and that *as long as thou, before they have received an answer*, and yet have not thus behaved themselves? Look into the generation of seekers, and thou wilt find that God hath exercised their patience as well as thine. Hast thou stood at God's door longer than many of thy brethren have done? Remember Job, David, and Heman, how many troubles came over their heads! what sad tidings did they hear! Dismal afflictions did they endure they endure before the day broke and divine providence cleared up! Shall God raise a cause<sup>ccxxvii</sup> for thee to walk by thyself dryshod, while these, and thousands besides, have taken many a weary step through the deep sloughs of affliction, before they could come to fair way? When God led Israel far about, and made it a journey of forty years from Egypt to Canaan, it had been great pride for any among them to have desired God to lead them a shorter way thither than all his brethren. David desired no more at God's hands than to fare as his fellow-saints did: 'Be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name,' Ps. 119:132. Nay, doth not Christ himself and example beyond all example, wait, and that long, even in heaven itself for an answer to his prayers? He hath been already above a thousand years there at prayer for his church, and against his enemies, and hath not as yet received the full of his desires; but still is expecting till the one be saved, and the other be made his footstool. Who art thou that thou shouldst have so high an opinion of thyself, as to look God should make all stay, and trade for time, while thou alone for ready money?

4. Consider *whether thou didst never make God wait on thee before his suit could be heard*, though he begged not for his benefit but thy own. Did God wait in thy carnal state upon thee, that he might at last be gracious to thee, and thinkest thou much to wait at prayer now on him?

*Third.* This not persevering in prayer *proceeds oft from unbelief*. The creature prays, God is silent, and no answer comes. Now, thinks Satan, is my time come to do this person

a mischief; and therefore he labours to persuade the creature that there is no mercy to be expected from God. If, saith the tempter, God had meant to come, he would have been here before now. So many days and months are now gone, and no news of his approach. Thou hast stayed too long to meet with disappointment at last; give over, and take some other course. Thus he dealt with our Saviour. No enemy appeared in the field for forty days, and then he appears. This is his way with the saints also. He lets them alone while he thinks they are softened into a compliance by long standing upon duty, and hopes their ammunition grows low; then he comes to parley with them, and take them off from waiting upon God, by starting many fears and doubts in their thoughts concerning the power, mercy, and truth of God; so that the poor Christian is at last put to a stand, and knows not whether he should pray or not pray. Or if he holds up the duty, yet not his heart in it; he prays faintly, and with a kind of despair, as the poor widow made ready her last handful of meal with no other thoughts than of dying when she had ate it. Thus he prays, but lots upon nothing but death and misery to follow it. O this is sad praying, to expect no good from God in the performance! Unbelief is a soul-enfeebling sin; it is to prayer as the moth to the cloth, which bites the very threads asunder, and crumbles it to nothing; it wastes the soul's strength, that it cannot look up to God with any hope. 'For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened,' Neh. 6:9. Resist therefore Satan, steadfast in the faith. Never let thy heart suffer the power, mercy, or truth of God to be called into question; thou hadst as good question whether he can cease to be God. These attributes of the divine nature are to thy faith like the stone to Moses, which Aaron and Hur put under him to sit upon; they will sustain thy spirit, that thou shalt not faint or grow weary at the work, though God makes thee wait till 'the going down of the sun.' O this waiting posture highly pleaseth God, and never puts the soul to shame. Mary, that stayed by the sepulchre, though she missed her Lord there, got at last a happy sight of him. *Quæramus et nos Christum, saith one upon the place, ex fide, et astitit nobis licet non illicò eum agnoverimus*—let us but seek Christ in faith, and he will at last be with us, though we do not presently see him.

*Fourth.* Some persevere not in prayer, *because they have their eye upon some other than God from whom they expect help.* It is no wonder he gives over praying who thinks he hath another string to his bow. While the carnal heart prays for deliverance, he hath other projects in his head how to wriggle himself out of the briers in which he is caught, and on these he lays more stress and weight than on God to whom he prays; therefore, at last, he leaves praying, to betake himself to them. Whereas another, that looks for all from God, and sees no way to help himself but by calling in God to his aid, will say as Peter to Christ —asking his disciples whether they would leave him as others had done— ‘Lord, to whom shall we go but unto thee? thou hast the words of eternal life.’ I know not another door to knock at—saith the poor soul—but thine; the creature hath it not to give, but thou hast; I will therefore never leave thee. We know not what to do, said good Jehoshaphat, but our eyes are up unto thee.

*Fifth.* It proceeds from *a want of inward complacency which the creature should have in God, and communion with him.* ‘Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?’ Job 27:10. He will not always call upon him, because he never did ordinarily delight in him. We easily let go what we take no great content to enjoy.

The sincere soul is tied to God by the heart-strings, his communion is founded in love; and ‘love is stronger than death,’ ‘many waters cannot quench it.’ A stranger may have an errand that brings him to a man’s house; but that done his acquaintance ceaseth. But a friend, he comes to sit with him, and the delight he takes in his company will not suffer him to discontinue his acquaintance long. Get therefore thy affections but once placed upon God as thy chief good, and the spark or stone will as soon forget the way to their centre, as thou the way to thy God in prayer. The hypocrite useth prayer as we use physic—not because he loves the taste of it; the sincere soul as food—it is sweet to his gust<sup>ccxxviii</sup>. David, from the inward satisfaction he found in the presence of God, cries out, ‘It is good for me to draw near to God;’ Ps. 73:28, as one that, tasting some rich wine or sweet morsel, lays his hand on his stomach—where he finds the cheering of it—and saith to the standers-by, ‘O it is good!’ Never will such a soul part with it. No, he will say, as the fig-tree in Jotham’s parable, Shall I forsake my sweetness, and the good fruit I have found in communion with my God! I will never do it.

## DIVISION SIXTH.—THE COMPREHENSIVENESS OF PRAYER.

*‘And supplication for all saints.’*

These words contain the sixth and last branch in the apostle’s directory for prayer, and that is, *the comprehensiveness of the duty*, or the persons that are to be the subject of our prayers—‘*supplication for all saints.*’ But what! would he have us pray for none but saints? Thus cannot be the apostle’s meaning, it being so contrary to the mind of Christ, from whom he hath his message. Christ both bids us pray for our enemies, and is himself our pattern for it; yea, Paul himself teacheth contrary doctrine to this: ‘I exhort therefore, that, first of all, prayers and supplications be made for all men,’ 1 Tim. 2:1, that is, all sorts of men, faithful and infidels, friends and enemies. So then saints are not here named as the adequate and only subject of our prayers, but as a principal species, a sort of persons whom we are in an especial manner to carry in our prayers to God, whom if we do but remember, we shall not easily forget to pray for others also; because, as Augustine saith, *numerus sanctorum de numero impiorum semper est auctus*—the saints’ number is increased and taken out of the number of the wicked. In praying for Babylon, we pray for Jerusalem. The more that are prayed out of sin, the more are prayed into Christ. We shall wind up our discourse upon this subject upon these THREE PROPOSITIONS or bottoms. FIRST. We must show a public spirit in prayer, by praying for others as well as ourselves. SECOND. Of all whom we remember in our prayers, saints must not be forgot. THIRD. In praying for saints, we must be careful to comprehend and encircle all saints.

## FIRST PROPOSITION.

[A PUBLIC SPIRIT *must be shown in prayer.*]

We must show a public spirit in prayer, *by praying for others as well as ourselves*. This is a duty of common interest, in which others are to share with ourselves. Like the buckets that hang in our houses, which are for the use of the whole town when any house is on fire, the spirit of prayer is a public treasure, though laid up in some few hands. All cannot pray, therefore all should be prayed for. I say it is the saints' duty, not a favour upon courtesy, which may *ad libitum*—at pleasure, be done or left undone. We sin and transgress the law of prayer if we do it not. 'God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you,' 1 Sam. 12:23. Paul writes himself a debtor to his brethren in this respect, 'We are bound to thank God always for you,' II Thes. 1:3. He acknowledges it due debt. In another place he 'thanks God that he hath them in remembrance always.' So sensible he was of the weight of this duty, that he thanks God for giving of him a heart to perform it.

[WHY a public spirit must be shown in prayer.]

*First.* It is one end why the Spirit of prayer is given us. The gifts of the Spirit are to be employed according to the mind and intent of the Donor. If a man bequeaths house and land to another, but charges the estate with such a payment for the use of the poor, he forfeits his legacy that fulfills not the will of the dead. God intends the good of others in all his gifts to particular saints; the way to lose our gift is to hoard it up, and not lay it out for the end it was given. 'The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal,' I Cor. 12:7. How should we profit others by this gift of the Spirit, if not by praying for them? That Spirit which stirs us up to pray for ourselves, will, if we quench it not, send us on the same errand for others; yea, in some cases, for others before ourselves—for their spiritual good, before our own temporal; for the public good of a community, before the private good of our single person; as in Moses' case, who would not be taken off praying for Israel to be made great upon their ruins. Indeed that offer from God, 'Let me alone, and I will

make of thee a great nation,' was only probatory, to try whether Moses would prefer his own stake before the people's, and God was highly pleased with his self-denial.

*Second.* The law of love binds it as a duty upon us. We are commanded to 'love our neighbour as ourself.' That '*as*' imports a parity for kind, though not for proportion; for manner, though not for measure. I must love my neighbour as truly, though not as strongly, as myself. Now, how do we show real love to ourselves, if we pray not for ourselves? Our Saviour expounds our love to our enemy by praying for him: 'Love your enemies,' and 'pray for them which despitefully use you,' Matt. 5:44. We may give an alms to an enemy, and not love him. It is easier to draw out our purse than to draw out our soul to the hungry; as the prophet phraseth it, in prayer we draw out our souls. If a man ever speaks or does anything sincerely, surely it is when he directs his speech to God in prayer, saith Lucas Brugens, upon the place. Therefore, God chooseth this of praying for our enemies as the surest testimony for our loving of them. And truly he that wisheth well only to himself may well be reckoned among the most degenerate of mankind. One well compares such a self-lover to the hedgehog, that laps himself with his own soft down, and turns out bristles to all the world besides.

*Use.* This shows the largeness of God's bountiful heart. He gives his children not only leave to ask for themselves, but for others. This is not the manner of men; we count it too much boldness to beg for themselves and others also. If a poor man, when he hath got his alms, should then beg for all his neighbours, where should he find the man that would bid him welcome? But behold here the immensity of divine goodness, who gives us leave to bring our neighbour's pitcher with our own to his door, yea commands it, and then takes it ill when we steal to prayer upon our own private errand, and leave the thought of others' necessities behind us. Why shouldst thou, Christian, stand in doubt whether God will supply thy own wants, when he commands thee to intercede for others?

[Lamentation for the want of  
a public spirit in prayer.]

A lamentation may be taken up for *the narrowness of our spirits in prayer*. Some, indeed, are so far from praying for others, that they have not learned to show so much mercy to themselves; yea, live in such an estate of alienation from God, wherein they cannot pray for themselves or their dearest relations. O how many prayerless fathers have we that are cruel to their own flesh! husbands to the wives of their own bosom! Ask whether they love them; they will tell you, Yes, that they do as their own souls. And you may believe them, for they serve them no worse than they do their own souls. A time is coming wherein they will know, one hearty prayer found upon the file for their relations would speak more for their love they pretend towards them, than all the bags of money which they fill for them. Others, if they show a little natural affection to their own flesh and domestic relations, yet their love hath much ado to get over their own thresholds, to inquire how it fares with others. O how little do they feel their neighbours' pains! how seldom do they spread them with any real sense upon their hearts before the Lord! Or, if their eye affects their heart with what is presented so near unto them in the afflictions of their next-door neighbour, yet how few discover such a public spirit as to carry upon their hearts the miseries of those that are at further distance, so as to be faithful remembrancers to the Lord for them? Blessed Paul was afflicted with, yea, had 'a great conflict for, those that had never seen his face in the flesh.' Even among those that are Christian, O what a decay is there of this public spirit! There is great complaint in the world among men of their great losses in our late times of confusion; but I think the saints are the greatest losers, who have lost so much of their love and charity. One saith the world was once destroyed with water, *propter ardorem cupidois*—for the heat of lust which had set it on a flame; and shall be once again destroyed with fire, *propter teporem charitatis*—for the coldness of love and charity. Love is to the soul what natural heat is to the body—it gives vigour, and enables for the performance of all offices of life. But alas! how is this kindly heat decayed among Christians in this old age of the world! This was long ago foretold by our Saviour, 'The love of many shall wax cold,' Matt. 24:12, and no wonder, when

self-love, that predatory fire, waxes so hot; foretold also by the apostle, 'In the last days men shall be lovers of themselves,' II Tim. 3:2. And what a black regiment follows this captain sin, is there to be seen! If once a man make self the top of his aim, farewell loving of or praying for others. Charity cannot dwell in so narrow a house as the self-lover's heart is; yea, it is diametrically opposed to it: 'Love seeks not her own,' I Cor. 13:5.

But to turn lamentation into exhortation: labour for a public spirit in prayer. Is there none, O man, that needs the mercy of God besides thyself? Wouldst thou have none saved in another world, nor provided for in this with thee? Now, in remembering others, God will give thee leave thy love should begin at home, though he would not have it end there. Look into thy family; canst thou forget them a day, if thou rememberest thyself? Shall a believer turn worse than an infidel? He provides for his house; and thou hast light that tells thee all thy providing for them is nothing, except God say amen. When thou hast paid thy duty to them, still widen thy charity and take up thy neighbours into thy thoughts. O consider what is doing in the streets and neighbourhood! How many mayest thou there soon find pouring out their precious souls as a drink-offering to Satan, the god of this world, in their horrid abominations? O pray that God would stay their bloody hand before they have irrecoverably made away themselves! Then take a further walk in thy meditations to view the public state and posture of the nation. See what mercies are writ with the golden pen of Providence upon its forehead, and pay thy humble thanks; what prognostics of judgments coming thou canst observe in the face of the times, and get into the gap before the wrath begins. Did Abraham so plead for a Sodom, though himself was far enough from the danger of the storm, and not thou for thy own nation, who art like to be taken in it if it fall in thy days, or thy posterity to rue it, if the cloud impending be not scattered by the prayers of the faithful? Nay, let not the sea that divides thee and the other parts of the earth make thee think thou art not concerned in their happiness or misery. Let thy prayers walk over the vast ocean, and bring matter for thy devotions, like the merchant's ship her freight from afar. Visit the churches of Christ abroad; yea, the poor

Indians and other ruins of mankind that lie where Adam's sin threw them with us, without any attempt made as yet upon them by the gospel for their recovery, and carry their deplored condition before the Lord. Our Drake is famous for compassing the earth with his ship in a few years; thou mayest by thy prayers every day, and make a more gainful voyage of it too than he did.

*[Considerations to induce to  
a public spirit in prayer.]*

Take two or three *quickenings* considerations to set thee the more feelingly to this work.

1. *Consideration.* Thou canst not pray in faith for thyself, if only for thyself. The Lord Jesus taught his disciples this piece of charity in the form of prayer he gave them: 'When ye pray, say, Our Father.' *Pater est verbum fidei; noster est verbum charitatis*—'father' is a word of faith and confidence; 'our father' imports love and charity, two necessary graces in prayer. We live by faith, and faith works by love. No prayer can be without faith, nor faith without charity. Christ sends him in the gospel from the altar, to reconcile himself to his brother before he offered his gift. And why, but that he might be as ready and willing to pray for his brother as himself? If we have not charity to pray for our brother, we cannot expect welcome when we pray for ourselves.

2. *Consideration.* You do not else make good the character and report which God gives of his children. He speaks of them to be a blessing to the persons and places about them: Israel 'a blessing in the midst of the land of Assyria,' Isa. 19:24. They are compared to a fountain, which is a common benefit to serve a whole town; to stop or trouble which is a wrong to all that draw their water thence, Prov. 25:26. Now, one way wherein the godly are eminently serviceable to others, is by the interest they have in God and the prevalency of their prayers with him. 'By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted,' Prov. 11:11; that is, by their fervent prayers, which draw down a blessing from heaven upon it. God blesseth *imperatorie*—by command: 'he commanded the blessing, even life for evermore,' Ps. 133:3. The saints bless when they pray: 'On this wise ye shall bless the children of

Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee,' Num. 6:23, 24.

3. *Consideration.* God gives a *signal testimony of his favour to his saints' prayers for others.*

(1.) He doth *great things at their request for others.* How oft did Moses reverse divine plagues that were executed on Egypt? even as oft as Pharaoh had a heart to beg his prayers. How low did Abraham beat the market for Sodom's preservation? he brought it down to 'ten righteous men.' Could that wicked place have but afforded that number, it had not been turned to ashes.

(2.) When their prayers obtain not a mercy for the people, then nothing else can help them. Therefore God, to express his peremptory resolution and irreversible decree to punish Israel, tells them, 'Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people,' Jer. 15:1, thereby intimating their case desperate. If the prayers of such holy men could not prevent the fall of that cloud of his wrath impending, much less could they with their own power or policy shift it off. Indeed when God is fully set upon a vindictive way, he takes them off from praying: 'Pray not thou for this people,...for I will not hear thee,' Jer. 7:16. And even in this he shows at what a rate he values his people's prayers, which makes him loath they should bestow their pains in vain. 'Pray not thou for this people'—as if he had said, Let them pray if they will, I can without any regret reject their motion; but I am unwilling thou shouldst pray in an unaccepted time for that which I have no mind to give.

(3.) When the saints' prayers bring not back with them the mercy for others that is their express errand, yet God is careful that his people should not have the least suspicion that the denial proceeds from any disrespect he hath to their persons or prayers, and therefore he sometimes *gives the thing they desire, only he changes the subject.* Thus, when God denied Abraham for Ishmael he gave him abundantly in Isaac. Sometimes, again, what he denies them for others he grants to themselves. Thus David's prayers for his enemies 'returned into his own bosom.' Now in praying for others:

(a) Get thy heart *deeply affected with their state and condition for whom thou prayest.* God loves mercy better than sacrifice. To draw out

our souls in giving and alms is greater charity than to draw out our purse. So in prayer, be sure thy soul be poured out, or else thou art a deceiver; thou wrongest both God and him also thou prayest for. Before Christ prayed for Lazarus he troubled himself. 'Behold how he loved him!' said those about him who were witness to the groans he fetched and tears he shed. Then thou wilt pray fervently for others when thy heart is warmed into sympathy for them. A lawyer may show more rhetoric in pleading a man's cause, but a brother or dear friend that carries the sense of his condition upon their hearts must needs discover more affection.

(b) *Prefer spiritual blessings in thy prayers for others before temporal.* Is it a sick friend on whose errand thou goest? If health be all thou beggest for him, thou art not faithful to thy friend. He may have that and be the worse for it. Ask of Christ grace and glory for him, and then thou dost something to purpose. Surely this our Saviour meant in his method of causing the palsied man to be cured of his disease: 'Be of good cheer,' saith Christ, 'thy sins are forgiven,' Matt. 9:2. He first brings him the news of a pardon, as a mercy {of} infinitely more worth than life or limbs, thereby tacitly reproving his friends, who took more care to have his body healed than his soul saved. Is it the nation thou art praying for? Aim at more than deliverance from outward judgments and plagues. The carnal Jews could say, 'Give us water that we may drink,' Ex. 17:2; but thought not of their sin, to beg repentance for and pardon of it. That was the cry of the creature—a beast can low and bellow in a drought; but this is the voice of a saint.

(c) *Be not discouraged in your prayers for others though an answer doth not presently overtake them.* Thou prayest for a rebellious child, or carnal friend, who yet continue to be so; take heed thou dost not presently think them past grace, and give over the work. Samuel saw the people he prayed for mend but slowly, yet hear what he saith: 'God forbid that I should cease praying for you,' 1 Sam. 12:23. I have heard of some that have been laid forth, yea buried, before they were dead, by their overhasty friends. Be not thou thus cruel to the souls of thy relations or neighbours. Lay them not out of thy prayers, bury them not in thy thoughts for

reprobates, because thou canst not perceive any sign of spiritual life in them, though thou hast many a time stretched thy hands in prayer over them; their souls thou seest are yet in their bodies, and so long it is not too late for God to breathe the life of grace into their souls. Again, is it for the public thou prayest? Draw not in thy stock of prayer, though thou hast not so quick a return in thy trade with heaven for it as thou desirest. The father's labour is not lost if his son receives the benefit of it. He may be dies before the ship comes home he sent forth, but his child lives to have the gains of that adventure paid into his purse. Thus one generation sows prayers for the church, and another reaps the mercy prayed for.

## SECOND PROPOSITION.

[SAINTS *must be specially remembered in prayer.*]

In praying for others, of *all we remember, saints must not be forgot.* The apostle hints this, by making them the instance for all, as the *species famosa*—or chief rank of men, for whom we are to pray; and it suits well with Paul's doctrine elsewhere. We are here bid 'As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith,' Gal. 6:10. Now this of prayer I take to be one of the most eminent ways of doing them good. What greater kindness can a man do for his sick friend than to go to the physician for him. By other acts of charity we give a little out of our own purse; but, by praying for the poor saints, we open God's treasury for them. If one should meet a beggar, and out of his purse throw him a few pence; but another tells him, I have no money of my own to give, yet I will go to court, and open your necessitous condition to the king my master; it were easy to tell which of these does the poor man the greatest kindness. A poor saint may thus do more for another, though, as Peter told the cripple, he hath neither silver nor gold to give, than he who hath the largest purse of his own. That of Araunah is observable, where we have his bountiful offer to king David: 'Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt-sacrifice,' 11 Sam. 24:22. This was much, and showed his heart to be noble

and large, as it follows, 'All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king,' ver. 23. Yet one thing he did amounted to more than all this, which was his hearty prayer to God for David's acceptance: 'And Araunah said to the king, The Lord thy God accept thee.' He might have done all the other for fear; a subject sometimes gives his prince, because he knows he may take though he gives it not. But by his praying for him he discovered his hearty affection to him. There are several weighty reasons for this duty. *First.* >From God. *Second.* From Satan. *Third.* From the saints prayed for. And, *Fourth.* From the saints praying.

[WHY *believers are to be specially remembered in prayer.*]

*First.* There is a reason taken *from God*.

1. They are the *special object of his love*; his heart is set upon them, his thoughts and providence are at work continually for them. Others indeed do partake of divine bounty, but they may thank the saints' company and neighbourhood for it. When the gardener waters his beds of flowers, some runs down into the alleys, but had he no flowers he would save that pains. When once God hath got his whole family of saints home to himself in heaven, it will quickly be seen what God will do with the rest of the world. God dispenseth the same providence to them both, but not with the same affection, not to the same end. 'He is the Saviour of all men, but especially of those that believe,' 1 Tim. 4:10. He saves the saints with saving purposes; the wicked he saves temporally, to destroy them eternally. He saves them from a present sickness or danger that they may ripen for hell; as we save our young wood for greater growth, and then cut it down for the fire. Now what shall be done for those whom God declares so much love? We cannot do less than pray for them. By this we comply with God, and show our content in his choice.

2. God hath made them the *proper heirs of all his promises*. Now promises are the ground of prayer. We are to pray for others, though wicked, not knowing but God may have a secret purpose of doing them good. But when there is grace, *hic se asperit decretum*—here God breaks open his decree. The fountain of his electing grace, which ran hitherto underground, now


bursts forth; so that now you may with fuller confidence pray for such a one. When Paul begs prayers, to encourage his friends at the work for him, he assures them of his sincerity: 'Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly' Heb. 13:18. As if he had said, You pray for one that God will not chide you for mentioning. It is an encouragement for a merchant to adventure when he puts his stock into a good bottom.

3. They are a generation *that alone honour God in the world*. Indeed God honours himself upon others in their present lusts and future damnation. He makes their wrath praise him here, and his wrath poured on them shall praise him hereafter; but no thanks to them for all this, for they do their utmost to lay the honour of God in the dirt. But the saints are a people who are not merely passive but active in the praising of God; it is their mother-language to bless the name of God. Whatever is their work, this is their end and aim—'whether they eat or drink,' to 'do all to the glory of God.' Now, upon this account, we are to pray for saints above others. The first thing our Saviour teacheth us to pray for is, that the name of God may be hallowed, in order to which he directs us in the very next words to pray for his church and saints, as those who alone can hallow it—'thy kingdom come.'

*Second.* There is a reason *from Satan*. His great spite is against the saints. God owns them; therefore he hates them, and spits fire and brimstone at them. Where God is of one side you may be sure to find the devil on the other; indeed they are the only company that stand in his way. As for the wicked, he takes himself to be advanced when they are exalted in the world; the father is honoured when the child is preferred. But the saints' rising portends his fall; this makes him bend all his force, by temptation or persecution, to procure their ruin. these are the stars he would stamp under his feet. The first murder in the world was of a saint; and Cain will kill Abel to the end of the world. In all broils and confusions of nations these are the threatened party, therefore they need our prayers most.

*Third.* There is a reason taken *from the saints prayed for*.

1. They exceedingly *desire prayers*. The wicked, I confess, may do this also, but it is by fits—in a pang of fear or fright. Thus Pharaoh

sends in all haste for Moses when the plagues of God are in his house and fields. The carnal Jews pray Samuel to pray for them that they die not; but it was when terrified with dreadful thunder and rain that fell, I Sam. 7<sup>ccxxix</sup>. Yea, Simon Magus himself, smitten with horror at Peter's words, begs his payers, 'that none of those things which he had spoken might come upon him.' But at another time these wretches cared neither for the saints nor for their prayers. Pharaoh, who desired Moses at one time to pray for him, at another time chases him out of his presence with a charge never to come at him more. But now, the saints are very covetous, yea ambitious, of the auxiliary prayers of their brethren, and those not the meanest among them neither. Indeed, as any is more eminent in grace, so more greedy of his brethren's help. The richer the tradesman is, the more he sets at work for him. Paul himself is not ashamed to beg this boon of the meanest saint. 'Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,' Rom. 15:30. Did you ever hear a beggar at your door, or prisoner at the gate, beg more passionately?—for the Lord Jesus' sake, for the Spirit's sake. If ever you felt any warmth in your hearts from the blood of Christ, or love of the Spirit comforting you, strive , wrestle with me till we together have the victory, prevailed with God for this mercy.

2. As the saints are covetous of prayers, so they *lot upon it that you do pray for them*; yea, take up comfort beforehand from the expectation of what they shall receive by them. 'I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayers,' Php. 1:19. 'I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you,' Phm. 22. Where,

(1.) Observe Paul's *modesty*. He sinks and drowns his own prayers, and expresseth his faith on theirs.

(2.) His *confidence*. He doubts not but they will pray, neither does he question the happy return of them into his bosom. As if he had said, If ye be faithful ye will pray for me. So that we break our trust, and disappoint our brethren, if we forget them.

3. Saints are the *honest debtors we can deal with*; they will pay you in their own coin. He that shows any kindness to a saint is sure to have

God for his paymaster; for it is their way to turn over their debts to God, and engage him to discharge their score to man. Onesiphorus had been a kind friend to Paul, and what does Paul for him? To prayer he goes, and desires God to pay his debts. 'The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain,' II Tim. 1:16.

*Fourth.* There is a reason taken *from the saints praying*. There is no duty God commands but he pays the Christian well for the performance, and leaves him a loser that neglects it. There is enough in this duty we are speaking to that may make it lovely and desirable in our eye. The best of saints have accounted it a great privilege to be admitted into this noble order. Paul thanks God that 'without ceasing he had Timothy in remembrance in his prayers night and day.' But wherein lies this mercy to have a heart to pray for our brethren?

1. It is a *singular mercy to be instrumental to the grace or comfort of any saint*, much more to be instrumental for the glorifying of God. This a gracious heart prizeth highly, though it costs him dear to promote it. Now in praying, though but for one single saint, thou dost both. 'Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf,' II Cor. 1:11. Paul, begging prayers, enforceth his request with a double argument.

(1.) From the *prevalency of joint prayers*. When twenty pull at a rope, the strength and force of every one is influential to the drawing of it; so in prayer, where many concur, all help. God looks at every one's faith and fervency exerted in the duty, and directs the answer to all.

(2.) From the *harmony of joint praises*. The fuller the concert in praises, the sweeter the music in God's ear. Joint prayers produce social praises. He that concurs to a prayer, and not in returning praise, is like one that helps his friend into debt, but takes no care to bring him out.

2. By praying for others we *increase our own joy*. When Paul saw the prayers which he had sown for the Thessalonian saints, I Thes. 1, come up in their faith and zeal, he is transported with joy, as an incomparable mercy bestowed upon himself: 'What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God?' I Thes. 3:9. He had watered them with his prayers; God gives



increment to their grace. From this his joy flourisheth, and his heart is so ravished, that he knows not what thanks to God are enough for the mercy he receives through his hands. Truly, the reason why we gain no more from the graces of our brethren, is because we venture no more prayers upon them.

3. This would be an *undoubted evidence to prove ourselves saints—could we but heartily pray for them that are such*. Love to the brethren is oft given as a character of a true saint. Now, no act whereby we express our love to saints stands more clear from scruples of insincerity than this of praying for them. Will you say you love the saints because you frequent their company, show kindness to their persons, stand up in their defence against those that reproach them, or because you suffer with them? All this is excellent, if sincere; yet how easy is it for vainglory, or some other carnal end, to mingle with these! But if thou canst find thy heart in secret—where none of these temptations have such an advantage to corrupt thee—let out to God for them with a deep sense and feeling of their sins, wants, and sorrows, this will speak more for the sincerity of thy love, than all the former without this.

[*Use or Application.*]

*Use First.* Must we pray *above all for saints*?

Woe then to those who, instead of praying for them, had rather with those, Isa. 59:15, make 'a prey' of them; that, instead of praying for them, can curse them, and drink to their confusion. Haply it is not under the plain name of saints, but as wrapped up in the bearskin of fanatic, puritan, or some other name of scorn, invented to cover their malice, so they can devour and tear them in pieces. The saints are a sort of people that none love but those that are themselves such. It is a good gloss of Jerome, *estote sancti, ut oratis pro sanctis*—be saints, and then you will pray for saints. The righteous is an abomination to the wicked: it is a sect everywhere spoken against. The feud began at first between Abel and Cain, and so spread over the whole world; one generation takes up the cudgel against them, as another lays it down. Hamilcar bequeathed his hatred against the Romans to his son Hannibal when he died. So is the feud transmitted by the wicked from one

generation to another against the saints. Nothing can quench their wrath or take up the quarrel;—no moral perfections, which, were they in others, would be thought lovely. Let the saint be never so wise, meek, affable, and bountiful, yet this, that he is a Christian, is a 'but' that will blot all in the wicked world's thoughts. *Bonus vir Cajus Sejus, sed malus tantum quod Christianus*, was the language in Tertullian's age—Cajus Sejus had been a good man if he had not had that without which he could not be good. No near relation can wear off their spite. Michal cannot bite in her scornful spirit, but jeers her husband to his face for his zeal before the Lord.

In a word, no benefit which accrues to the wicked by the saints' neighbourhood—and that is not a little—can make them lay down their hatred. They are the only bail which God takes to keep a nation, when under his arrest, out of prison. They are the cause of blessings to the families, towns, and kingdoms they live in; yet the butt at which their envenomed arrows are levelled against. The whole city is against Lot; not a man among them to take his part, so true and constant are the wicked to their own side. Tertullian tells us of some heathen husbands that liked their wives, though loose and wanton, and lived with them, when such, before they were converted to Christianity, but when once they had embraced the faith, and thereby were made chaste, they put them away; fathers that could bear undutiful rebellious carriages in their children, when once converted and these amended, they turned them out of doors. *Ut quisque hoc nomine emendatur, offendit*—as any were reformed in their lives by turning Christian, so he became an offender. It were will if this were only the heathens' sin; but by woeful experience we find that the true Christian hath not more cruel enemies in the whole world than some be that are of his own name. The sharpest persecutions of the church have been by those that were in the church. O what a dreadful will such have to make in the great day, who profess the name of Christ, yet hate his nature in the saints!—who call Christ Lord, yet persecute his best servants and destroy his loyalest subjects! These are the men that above all other shall feel the utmost of the Lord's fiery wrath in the day when he shall plead his people's cause and avenge himself on their adversaries.

*Use Second.* Be exhorted to his duty of praying for saints; you cannot do that which God will take more kindly at your hands. He himself puts this petition into our mouths: 'Ask me of things to come concerning my sons,' Isa. 45:11. Courtiers frame their petitions according to their prince's liking. They are careful not to ask that which he is unwilling to give; but when they perceive he favours a person or business, then they are ambitious to present the petition. Joab knew what he did in sending the woman of Tekoah to David, with a petition wrapped up in a handsome parable for Absalom the king's son. He knew the king's heart went strongly after him, and so the motion could not but be acceptable. And is not the Lord's heart gone after his saints? Thy prayer for them, therefore, must needs come in a good time, when it shall find the heart of God set upon the very thing thou askest. This was it that God was so pleased with in Daniel, ch. 9:22, 23. Now, in your prayers for the saints, among other things that you pray for them, forget not these:

1. *Pray for their lives.* They are such a blessing when they live, that they seldom fall but the earth shakes under them. It is commonly a prognostic of an approaching evil when God takes them away by death. Jeroboam had but one son in whom some good was found; he must die, and then the ruin of his father's family follows, 1 Kings 14:7. When Augustine died, then Hippo falls into the enemy's hands. If the wise man be gone that preserved the city, no wonder if its end hastens. God makes way to let his judgments in upon the world by taking the saints out of the world. When God chambers his children in the grave, a storm is at hand, Isa. 26. It is, you see, of concernment to do our utmost to keep them among us, especially when their number is so few and thin already, that we may say, as once the prophet concerning Israel, 'I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage,' Micah 7:1. Did we indeed see them come up as thick in our young ones as they fall in the old, we might say a blessing is in them. These would be as hope-seeds at least for the next generation. But when a wide breach is made and few to step into it, this is ominous. At Moses' death, Joshua stood up in his place, and it went well with Israel's affairs. But when Joshua died, and a generation rose up that had not seen the

wonders God had done for his people, and so rebelled, then they to wrack apace, Judges 2:9, 10.

2. *Pray for their liberty and tranquility.* 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee,' Ps. 122:6. Jerusalem was the place for their public worship, 'whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord,' ver. 4; so that, by praying for Jerusalem's peace, is meant such serene times wherein the people of God might enjoy his pure worship without disturbance. The church hath always had her vicissitudes; sometimes fair and sometimes foul weather, but her winter commonly longer than her summer; yea, at the same time that the sun of peace brings day to one part of it, another is wrapped up in a night of persecution. Universal peace over all the churches is a great rarity; and where it is in any part of it enjoyed, some unkind cloud or other soon interposeth. The church's peace therefore is set out by a half-hour's silence, Rev. 8:1. When God gave the poor Jews 'a reviving,' after a tedious captivity, by moving Cyrus to grant them liberty to go and rebuild the house of God, how soon did a storm rise and beat them from their work! One prince furthers them, another obstructs the work. The gospel church Acts 9, had a sweet breathing time of peace; but how long did it last? this short calm went before a sudden hurricane of persecution that falls upon them, Acts 12. Thus have the politic rulers of the world used the saints, as their carnal interest seemed to require; one while to countenance, another while to suppress, them. No sort of people in the world can expect less favour from the world than the church; their only safety therefore lies to engage God to espouse their cause.

3. *Pray for their love and unity among themselves.* The persecutor's sword—blessed be God!—is not at the church's throat among us. But are not Christians at daggers' drawing amongst themselves? The question in our days hath oft been asked, Why the word preached—being as frequent, clear, and powerful as any former age ever enjoyed in this nation—hath been no more effectual to convert the wicked or to edify the saints? I will not say this is the sole reason, but I dare deliver it as none of the least causes—and that is the woeful divisions and

rents amongst those that have made greatest profession of the truth.

(1.) *For the saints.* It is no wonder they should thrive no more under the word, for the body of Christ is edified in love, Eph. 4. So long as there is a fever upon the body it cannot nourish. The apostles themselves, when wrangling, got little good by Christ's sermon, or the sacrament itself administered by Christ unto them. One would have thought that such was a meal in the strength whereof, as so many Elijahs, they might have gone a long journey. But, alas! we see how weak they rise from it. One denies his master, and the rest in a fright forsake him; so unfit were they in such a temper to make a spiritual advantage of the best of means.

(2.) *Again, for the wicked.* It is no wonder that the word prevails no more on them. The divisions and scandals that have arisen among those that call themselves saints have filled their hearts with prejudice against the holy truths and ways of God. Christ prays for his people's unity: 'That the world may believe,' saith he, 'that thou hast sent me,' John 17:21. What is oftener in the mouths of many profane wretches than this—We will believe them when they are all of one mind, and come over to them when they can agree among themselves? Who loves to put his head into a house on fire? This should, methinks, stir up all that wish well to the gospel to pray, and that instantly, for the reunion of their divided hearts. Hot disputes will not do it; prayer, or nothing can. Pliny saith of the pearls called *uniones*, that their nature, though they be engendered in the sea, partakes of the heavens more than the earth. 'The God of peace' can only see us at peace. If ever we be wise to agree, we must borrow our wisdom from above; this alone is 'pure and peaceable.'

### THIRD PROPOSITION.

*[In praying for saints, we must comprehend 'ALL.']*

In praying for saints, we must be careful to *comprehend and encircle all saints*. I do not mean, as the Papists, for quick and dead. Prayer is a means to wait upon them in their way; at death, then they are at their journey's end. Prayers are bootless for the dead sinner, and needless for

the deceased saint. The wicked in that state are beneath, the saint above, our prayers. We cannot help the wicked. The tree is fallen, and so it must lie. We read of a change the body shall have after death. Vile bodies may, but filthy souls cannot, after death be made glorious. If they go off the body filthy, so they shall meet it at the resurrection. The time to pray for them is now while they live among you, or never; for death and hell come together to the sinner. No sooner Dives' wretched soul is forced out of his body, but you hear it shriek in hell, 'The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment,' Luke 16:22, 23. But Abraham tells him 'there is a gulf fixed,' that forbids all intercourse betwixt heaven and him. No what is that but an irrevocable decree with which the wicked are sealed under everlasting wrath? If God receive no prayers from them, then not from others for them. And as the wicked are beyond our help, so the saints above all need of our help; for they are in their port and haven. Prayer implies want, but saints departed are perfect, called therefore 'the spirits of just men made perfect.' We need not beg a pardon for them, for the Lord acquits them—they are 'just;' not for a supply of any good they want, they are 'made perfect;' not to remove any pain they feel, for 'the Spirit saith, Blessed are they that die in the Lord, they rest from their labours.' But they who invented this device intended, it is like, gain to their own purse, rather than benefit to others' souls. It is a pick-purse doctrine, contrived to bring grist to the pope's mill. But, to leave this, they are the living saints, *your companions here in tribulation*, that are the subject of your prayers, and of these we are to encircle the whole community within our remembrance. The Papists speak much of a treasury the church hath. This indeed is the true treasury of the church—the common stock of prayers with which they all trade to heaven for one another. Paul tells us what a large heart he had, even for those whose 'face he never saw in the flesh,' Col. 1:2. Take a few REASONS for the point.

*[WHY in praying on behalf of saints we are to comprehend 'ALL.']*

REASON FIRST. We are to *love all saints, therefore to pray for all*. Love in a saint is the

picture of God's love to us; and God's love looks not asquint to one saint more than another. That image is not of God's drawing which is not like himself. Nature may err in its productions, but not God in the grace he begets in his saint's bosom. The new creature never wants its true nature. If God loves all his children, then wilt thou all thy brethren, or not one of them. When Paul commends Christians for this grace of love, he doth it from this note of universality, Eph. 1:15; 'After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints;' so Col. 1:4; Phm. 5. Now, if we love all, we cannot but pray for all. To say we love one, and not pray for him, is a solecism. Can a courtier love his friend and not speak to his prince for him, when he may do him a favour by it? Love prompts a man to do that wherein he may express the greatest kindness to his friend. Mary pours the most precious ointment she hath upon Christ. Prayer, if of the right composition, is the most precious ointment thou canst bestow on the saints. Save it not for some few of them that are of thy private society or particular acquaintance; but let the sweet odour of it fill the whole house of the church; pray for all.

REASON SECOND. We are to pray for all saints, *because Christ prays for all*. He carries all their names in his breastplate. 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.' He leaves not one of the number out of his remembrance. The elder brother was priest to the whole family; so is Christ, our elder brother, to the whole household of believers. Now Christ's intercession is a pattern for our prayers. We cannot indeed pray for all as he doth. He prays for them not only in the lump, but for every individual saint by name: 'I have prayed,' Peter, 'for thee,' Luke 22:32; yea, not only for every person by name, but for their particular wants and occasions. 'I have prayed that thy faith fail not.' Christ takes notice of that very grace which was in most imminent danger, and secures it by his intercession. O what unspeakable comfort is this to a saint, that he in particular should be spoken of in heaven, and every want or temptation he laboureth with be taken notice of, and provided for, by Christ's mediation! Thus indeed we cannot pray for all, because we know but few of their persons, and little of the state and condition of those we know. Neither is there

need we should. Our general suffrage and vote is as kindly taken as if we could descend to particular instances. God knows the mind of the Spirit, in our prayers on earth, to be for the same things which Christ insisteth on in his intercession in heaven.

REASON THIRD. We must pray for all saints, *or else we can pray for none*.

1. We cannot pray *really for any, if not for all*. He that prays for one saint and desires not good to another, prays not for that one as a saint, but under some other consideration, as wife, friend, child, or the like—a saint clothed with such and such circumstances; for *à quatenus ad omne valet consequentia*—he that loves a man, because a man, loves all, because the same human nature is found in all; and all saints have the same nature.

2. We cannot pray *acceptably for one, except for all*; and so we wrong those for whom we do pray, by leaving them out for whom we also should. Joseph would not hear the patriarchs for Simeon's release till they brought Benjamin over to him also. If thou wouldst be welcome to God in praying for any, carry all thy brethren to him in thy devotions; leave none behind. 'Are here all thy children?' said Samuel to Jesse. He would not sit down till the stripling David was fetched to complete the company. May be thou art earnest in prayer for thy hear neighbour Christians, but dost thou not forget others that are further off? Thou rememberest the church of God at home, but dost thou lay the miseries of the churches abroad to heart? What if God should ask thee now, Are here all thy brethren? Are there none but these that live under thy eye to be remembered? Have not I children, and you brethren, elsewhere in the world to be thought upon? The Jews in Babylon were not to forget Jerusalem because of the great distance. 'Remember the Lord afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind,' Jer. 51:50.

[*Use or Application.*]

*Use First.* O what a rich merchant is the saint, *who hath a stock going in so many hands*! In heaven Christ is hard at prayer for him, on earth his brethren. What can this man want? Christ hath such an interest in his Father's heart, that he can deny him nothing; the saints such interest in Christ, that he will not deny them. So

the Christian's trade goes smoothly on in both worlds. Think of this, Christian, for thy comfort—wherever a child of God is living upon earth, there hast thou a factor to traffic with heaven for thy good. Let this help thy faith in putting up thy own private prayers, knowing that thou prayest in a communion and fellowship with others. Even when thou art alone in thy closet, expect an answer to more than thy own prayer. It is an uncharitableness not to pray for others, and pride not to expect a benefit from the prayers of others.

*Use Second.* It teacheth us *how inquisitive we should be of the affairs of our brethren and state of the church*, that so we may pray with a more bowelly sense of their wants for them. Nehemiah, when he heard of some that were come out of Judea, inquires how it fared with his brethren there? and from the sad report he heard of their afflictions and reproaches is put into a bitter passion, which he emptied, with prayers and tears for them, into the bosom of God, Neh. 1:4. How could he have done this so feelingly, had he not first been acquainted with their distressed condition? We are many of us asking oft, 'What news?' and reading books of intelligence, foreign and national; but is it as Athenians, or as Christians? to fill our heads, or to affect our hearts? to furnish us with matter of chat and talk by the fireside with our neighbours, or of prayer to our God?

*Use Third.* Labour to *get a wide heart in prayer for all the saints*. God, it is said, gave Solomon a large heart of knowledge and wisdom, as the sand of the sea, 1 Kings 4:29. Behold a mercy greater than that to Solomon is here. A large heart is better than a large head—to do good, than to know it. Nothing is more unworthy than a selfish spirit; no selfishness worse than that which is vented in prayer. A heathen could blame that Athenian who in a drought prayed for his own city, saying, 'O Jupiter, rain upon the fields of the Athenians,' but forgot that his neighbours wanted as well as himself. Many heathens were great admirers of this virtue of charity. Take one instance for all. It was a law among the Romans that none should come near the emperor's tent in the night upon pain of death. Now, there was one night a certain soldier apprehended, standing near the emperor's tent with a petition to deliver unto him, who was therefore presently to be executed; but

the emperor, hearing the noise from within his pavilion, called out, saying, 'If it be for himself, let him die; if for another, spare his life.' Being examined, it was found his petition was for two of his fellow-soldiers that were taken asleep on the watch. So both he escaped death and they punishment. Was this office of charity so pleasing to an earthly prince as to dispense with a law for its sake? O how acceptable then to our merciful God is it to intercede for our fellow-saints! But the more to provoke you to the exercise of this duty in its full breadth and latitude—viz. for all saints—consider,

1. This praying for all saints *will prove thy love to saints sincere*. A man, in praying for himself or his relations, stands not at that advantage to see the actings of pure grace, as when he prays for such as have not these carnal dependencies on him. When thou prayest for thyself in want or sickness, how knowest thou that it is any more than the natural cry of the creature? Is it for thy family thou prayest? Still thy flesh hath an interest in the work, and may help to quicken thee—if it be not the chief spring to set thee agoing. But when thy heart beats strongly with a sense of any other's misery, that hath nothing to move thee, but his Christianity to be his remembrancer, and thou canst in secret plead with God for him as feelingly as if thou didst go on thy own errand, truly thou breathest a gracious spirit.

2. As it will speak for the truth of thy grace, *so for the height and vigour of it*. It is corruption that contracts our hearts. They were none of the best Christians of whom Paul gives this character, 'They sought their own,' Php. 2:21. As the heart advanceth in grace, so it widens and grows more public-spirited. The higher a man ascends a hill the larger his prospect. One that stands upon the ground cannot look over the next hedge; his eye is confined within the compass of his own wall. Thus the carnal spirit thinks of none but his own estate or stake, feels not the water till it comes into his own cabin; whereas grace cleaves the soul, and the more grace a man hath, the more it will enable to look from himself over into the condition of his brethren. Such a one partakes of the nature of the heavenly bodies, which shed their influences down upon the whole world. Especially this would speak grace high in its actings, if these circumstances concur with it:

(1.) When a person is himself *swimming in abundance of all enjoyments, and can then lay aside his own joy to weep and mourn for and with any afflicted saints, though at never so great a distance from them*. Thus did Nehemiah for his brethren at Jerusalem, when himself was in a warm nest and had all the enjoyments that so great a prince's court could afford. It is not usual for any but those of great grace to feel the cords of the church's afflictions through a bed of down on which themselves lie. It must be a David that can prefer Jerusalem above his chief joy.

(2.) On the other hand, *when in the depth of our own personal troubles and miseries, we can yet reserve a large room in our prayers for any other saints*, this speaks a great measure of grace. It showed the Romans' strength and courage to be great, that they could spare several legions to send into Spain for the help of their friends there, while Hannibal was near their own walls with a puissant army. To be able to lend auxiliary prayers to other afflicted saints, or abroad to the church of God, when thou thyself art engaged deeply with private sorrows, does signify a very gracious spirit.

(3.) When, *in our own distresses, we can entertain the tidings of any other saint's mercies with joy and thankfulness*. This requires great grace indeed, to act two so contrary parts well at the same time. The prosperity of others too oft breeds envy and discontent in them that want it. If therefore thou canst praise God for others' mercies, while the tears stand in thy eyes for thy own miseries, it is a rare temper; flesh and blood never learned thee it thou mayest be sure.

To shut up this with a caution—though we are to pray for all saints, yet *some call for a more special remembrance at our hands*.

(a) Those that are *near to us by other relations*. First, by bond of nature as well as of grace: 'A brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?' Phm. 16. It is true the bond of the Spirit is more sacred than that of the flesh—*sanctior est copula cordis quam corporis*; yet, when that of the flesh is twisted with the other, it adds, as force to the affection, so argument to the duty; therefore saith Paul, 'much more unto thee.' Charity may begin, though it must not end, at home. Again, by domestic relation, society and communion, whether civil or religious—these give an enforcement to the

duty; master for servant, and servants for masters; minister for people, and people for minister. He that starves his family is not like to feast his neighbours. He that is a churl to his neighbours, is not like to be overkind to strangers. So he that prays not for those who by these relations stand so near to him, is very unlike to abound in this duty for others.

(b) Those that are *in distress*. Whoever you forget, remember these. If one be sick in our family, we will send him his portion before we carve for any that are at the table. This is a fit season for love. A friend for adversity is as proper as fire is for a winter's day. Job's friends chose the right time to visit him in, but took not the right course of improving their visit. Had they spent the time in prayer for him which they did in hot disputes with him, they had profited and pleased God more. Again, this is the season that the tempter is busy. This lion walks abroad in the night of affliction, hoping then to make the Christian his prey. And if he wakes to make a prey of him, shall not we watch to pray for him? Again, this is the season of God's most speedy answering prayers. 'In the day when I cried thou answeredst me,' Ps. 138:3; that is, in the day of affliction. Indeed now is the time when the Spirit of Christ will be stirring us up to pray. And when should we send our letters but when the post calls? He that stirs thee up to pray for them, will be as careful to deliver up thy prayers and see an answer returned.

(c) Such of the saints as are *of a public place and use*. You pray for many here while you pray for one.

(d) Such as have *expressly desired and engaged you to remember them at the throne of grace*. Among debts, specialties are paid in the first place. Thou art a debtor to all thy brethren, and owest them a remembrance in thy prayers; but more especially them to whom thou hast particularly promised it. This is, as it were, a bond under thy hand, given for further security of paying this debt to thy friend. Whoever thou forgettest, remember him. Did the butler's conscience accuse him for not remembering his promise to Joseph, who had engaged him—when he was restored to court—to intercede with Pharaoh for him? 'I do,' saith he, 'remember my faults this day,' Gen. 41:9. Much more hast thou cause to confess thy faults, who forgettest to make mention of them to the Lord

that have solemnly desired it at thy hands. To have promised the payment of a sum of money, and to have failed, were not greater dishonesty. Thou mayest prejudice his soul more by disappointing him of thy prayer, than his estate could suffer for want of thy money. How knowest thou but the mercy he wants is stopped while [until] thy prayers come to heaven for it? That other saints obtain by their prayers for us what sometimes we do not by our own is clear from Job 42:8.





## DIRECTION TWELFTH.

### THE DUTY OF EVERY CHRISTIAN IN COMPLETE ARMOUR TO AID BY PRAYER THE PUBLIC MINISTERS OF CHRIST.

*‘And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly,  
to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds’*  
(Eph. 6:19, 20).

The apostle having laid out this duty of prayer in its full compass, taking all saints within its circumference, he comes now to apply the general rule, and claims a share in it himself—*‘and for me.’* When he bids them pray ‘for all saints,’ he surely cannot be shut out of their prayers who is not the least in the number. In the words there are four branches. FIRST. Here is an *exhortation*, or Paul’s request for himself, and in him for all ministers of the gospel—*‘and for me.’* SECOND. The *matter* of his request—*‘that utterance may be given unto me.’* Not that he would confine and determine them in their prayers to this request alone; but he propounds it as a principal head to be insisted on by them on his behalf. THIRD. The *end why* he desires this—*‘that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.’* FOURTH. A *double argument* to back and enforce this request—*‘for which I am an ambassador in bonds’*—FIRST. Taken from his office. SECOND. From his present afflicted state.

#### BRANCH FIRST.

[THE REQUEST OF PAUL *as a minister of Christ,  
for the prayers of believers.*]

*‘And for me.’*

Here is an *exhortation*, or Paul’s request for himself, and in him for all ministers of the gospel—*‘and for me.’* FIRST. We may note here that people are to be taught the duty they owe to their minister as well as to others. SECOND. It is not only our duty to pray for others, but also to desire the prayers of others for ourselves. THIRD. We may note that the ministers of the gospel are, in an especial manner, to be remembered in the saints’ prayers.

FIRST. We may note here *that people are to be taught the duty they owe to their minister as well as to others*; though indeed no duty is harder for the minister to press or for the people to hear—for him to preach with humility and wisdom, or for them to receive without prejudice.

*[It is our duty as well TO DESIRE THE PRAYERS  
OF OTHERS, as to pray for them.]*

SECOND. It is not only our duty to pray for others, but also *to desire the prayers of others for ourselves*. If a Paul turns beggar, and desires the remembrance of others for him, who then needs it not? This hath been the constant practice of the saints. Sometimes they call in the help of their brethren upon special occasions to pray with them. Thus Daniel, ch. 2:18, when required to interpret the king's dream, makes use of 'Hananiah, Mishael,' and 'Azariah, his companions.' 'Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to these that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret.' Daniel would not give an answer to the king till he had got an answer from God. To prayer therefore he goes. No doubt he forgot not his errand in his closet when at his solitary devotions; but withal he calls in help to join in social prayer with him. He sends for them to his house; where, it is probable, they prayed together, for the mutual quickening of their affections and strengthening of their petition by this their united force. Wherefore, he acknowledgeth the mercy as an answer to their concurrent prayers: 'I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee,' ver. 23. This justifies the saints' practice when, in any great strait of temptation or affliction, they get some other of the faithful to give a lift with them at this duty. Sometimes we have them desiring their brethren's prayers for them when they cannot conveniently have it with them. Thus Esther sets the Jews in Shushan to prayer for her, Est. 4:16; so our apostle in many of his epistles desires the saints to carry his name with them to the throne of grace, Rom. 15:30; II Cor. 1:10, 11; Col. 4:3; Php. 1:19. And not without great reason, for,

*First.* God hath made it a *debt which one saint owes to another* to carry their names to a throne of grace. Now, not to desire this debt to be paid, which God hath charged our brethren with, is to undervalue the mercy and goodness of our God. Should a legacy be left us by a friend, were it not a despising of his kindness not to call upon the heir who is to pay it? Surely God accounts he doth us a kindness herein, and therefore may take it ill not to ask for it. It is not

our usage to lose a debt for want of a demand, and this is none of the least we have owing to us.

*Second.* Many are the *gracious promises that are made to such prayers of the faithful one for another*. 'If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them,' I John 5:16. But you will say, How can the prayer of one obtain the forgiveness for another? I answer, None is forgiven for the faith of another; this must be personal; but the believing fervent prayer of one is an excellent means to obtain the grace of repentance and faith for another, whereby he may come to be forgiven. So, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed,' James 5:16. Now, in not desiring our brethren's help in this kind, we make no use of these promises—the proper end of which is to encourage us to call in the auxiliary aid of others—as if such passages of Scripture might have been well spared for any need we have of them. Should you see a piece of ground never sown nor fed, you might well say the ground is barren or the owner a bad husband; either the promise is empty and useless, or we that do not improve it are worse husbands for our souls. But we cannot say so of the promise, if we consider the great fruit and advantage which the saints in all ages have reaped from it. Did not Daniel get the knowledge of a great secret as a return of his companions' prayers with him? Did not Job's friends escape a great judgment that hung over their heads at his intercession? What a miraculous deliverance had Peter at the prayers of a few saints gathered together on his behalf! Bring not therefore an evil report upon this promise, seeing such sweet clusters as these are to be shown that have been gathered from it.

*Third.* If we desire not others to carry our name to a throne of grace, *we are guilty of quenching the Spirit of prayer; which may be done in ourselves and others also*.

1. By this we may *quench it in ourselves*. Partly, because we neglect a duty. We are bid to 'confess our sins one to another,' and for what end but to have the benefit of mutual prayers? The same Spirit which stirs thee up to pray for thyself will excite thee in many cases to set others at prayer for thee; which, if thou dost not, thou overlayest his motions, and so committest

a sin. Again, thou quenchest the Spirit of prayer in thyself by depriving thyself of that assistance which thou mightest receive in thy own prayers through theirs; for the Spirit conveys his quickening grace to us in the use of instruments and means. He that doth not hear the word preached quenches his Spirit, because God useth this as bellows to blow up and enkindle the saint's grace. So, he that desires not the prayers of others quencheth the Spirit of prayer in himself, because the exercise of their grace in prayer for thee may fetch down more grace to be poured in unto thee.

2. Thou mayest be accessory *to the quenching of the Spirit in others*, because thou hinderest the acting of those graces in them which would have been drawn forth in prayer for thee hadst thou acquainted them with thy condition. Fire is quenched by subtracting fuel as well as by throwing on water. By opening thy wants or desires to thy brethren thou feedest Spirit of prayer in them, as they have new matter administered to work upon; by acquainting them with the merciful providences of God to thee, thou prickest a song of praise for them. How many groans and sighs should God in prayer have had from thy neighbour-saints hadst thou not bit in thy temptations and afflictions from their knowledge! What peals of joy and thankfulness would they have rung hadst thou not concealed thy mercies from them!

*Fourth.* We are to desire others to pray for us, *to express the humble sense we have of our own weakness, and the need we have of others' help.* Humble souls are fearful of their own strength. They that have little, desire partners with them in their trade; but when they conceit their own private stock to be sufficient, then they can trade by themselves. 'Now are ye full, now are ye rich; ye have reigned as kings without us,' saith Paul of the self-conceited Corinthians. The time was you thought you had need of Paul's preaching to you and praying for you, but now ye reign without us! O how many are there, when time was, could beg prayers of every Christian they met! Nothing but wants and complaints could be heard from them, which made them beg help from all they knew to pray their corruptions down and their graces up. But now they have left the beggar's trade, and reign in an imaginary kingdom of their self-conceited sufficiency. Certainly, as it shows want of charity not to pray

for others, so no want of pride not to desire prayers *from* others.

*Fifth.* We are to desire others to pray for us, *that we may prevent Satan's designs against us.* He knows very well what an advantage he hath upon the Christian when severed from his company; wherefore he labours what he can to hinder the conjunction of his solitary prayers with the auxiliary aid his brethren might lend him. Samson's strength lay not in a single hair but his whole lock; the saint's safety lies in communion, not in solitude and single devotion. How many, alas! concealing their temptations from others, have found their sorrows grow upon them after all their own private endeavours and wrestlings in secret against them? like one who, when his house is on fire, tries to quench it himself, but is not able, and so hazards the loss of all he hath for want of timely calling his neighbours to his help.

*Sixth.* The love we owe to our brethren requires that we should desire others to pray for us. The saints here live where none else love them but themselves, therefore they need not make much of one another. Now this of desiring their prayers carries a threefold expression of love to them.

1. By this we *acknowledge the grace of God in our brethren*, or else it is supposed we would not employ them in such a work. He that desires a friend to present a petition to the king on his behalf, shows he believes him to be in favour, and one that hath some interest in the prince. Now, what more honourable testimony can we give to another than to own him as a child of God, one whose prayers are welcome to heaven? We are bid to 'prefer every one his brother in honour.' Now no one way can we do this more than by making use of their help at the throne of grace to be our remembrancers to the Lord.

2. By this we do our utmost to *interest our brethren in the mercy we desire them to pray for.* Were a merchant to send some commodity to Turkey or Spain which he knows will make a gainful return, it would be a great favour to take others into partnership with him in the adventure. And what voyage is gainful like this of prayer? and whoever shares in the duty is partner in the mercy.

3. By this we confirm them in *a confidence of our readiness to pray for them.* What consists

good neighbourhood in but a readiness to reciprocate kindnesses one to another?—when that is at the service of one neighbour which is in the house of another? Now, who will be bold or free with his neighbour to take a kindness from him that is not willing to receive the like? Be ye strange to your friend, and you teach him to be so to yourself. Nothing endears Christians more in love than an open heart one to another. A friend should have no cabinet in his bosom to which he allows not his friend a key.

*Objection (1.)* But do we not, by desiring our fellow-saints' prayers, *intrench upon Christ's mediatory office*?

*Answer.* No; surely *Christ would not command that which would be a wrong to himself*. There is great difference betwixt our desiring Christ to pray for us and our fellow-brethren. We desire Christ to present our persons and prayers, expecting acceptation of both through his blood and intercession. But no such matter from the prayers of our brethren; we only desire them as friends to bear us company to the throne of grace, there to present our prayers in a communion together, expecting the welcome of both their and our prayers, not from them, but from Christ—relying on Christ to procure the welcome both to our prayers and theirs at our heavenly Father's hand.

*Objection (2.)* But why, then, *may we not desire the prayers of the deceased saints* for the same purpose we desire the prayers of those that yet live with us?

*Answer (1.)* We have *no precept or example for this in the word*; and unbidden there in duties of worship, is forbidden. We must not be 'wise above what is written.' Not to use the means which God hath appointed is a great sin, which was Ahaz's case; but to invent ways or means more than God hath appointed is far worse. It is bad enough for a subject not to keep the king's laws, but far worse for him to presume to mint a law of his own head. The first is undutiful, but the latter is a traitor.

*Answer (2.)* We have *no way of expressing our thoughts and desires to the saints departed*. Why should we pray to them that cannot hear what we say? or where is the messenger to send our minds by? or which the word in Scripture that saith they hear in heaven what we pray on earth?

*Answer (3.)* It is the prerogative of Christ to

be the *only agent in heaven for his saints on earth*. 'To which of the angels or saints did God say, 'Sit thou at my right hand?' In the outward temple we find the whole congregation praying, but into the holy of holiest entered none but the high priest with his perfume. Every saint is a priest to offer up prayers for himself and others on earth; but Christ only as our High-priest intercedes in heaven for us. The glorious angels and saints there no doubt wish well to the church below; but it is Christ's office to receive the incense of his militant saints' prayers, which they send up from this outward temple here below to heaven, and to offer it with all their desires to God; so that, to employ any in heaven besides Christ to pray for us, is to put Christ out of office.

*[Use or Application.]*

*Use First.* It *reproves those into whose hearts it never yet came to beg prayers for their own souls*. Surely they are great strangers to themselves, and ignorant what a privilege they lose! As Christ said to the woman of Samaria, If thou hadst known the gift of God, and who it is that asks, thou wouldst have asked, and he would have given. Did poor souls know who the saints are—what favourites with God, and how prevalent their prayers are with him—they would not willingly be left out of their remembrance. I never knew any but, as soon as God began to work upon them—though it were no more than to awaken their consciences—thought this worth the desiring. It is natural for man in straits to crave help. A servant or a child, when master or father are displeased and blows are threatened, if they know any that have interest in their favour, and are more likely to prevail with them than others, then they entreat such to become suitors for them. When hunger and want pinch the poor, then, if they have any neighbour to be their friend, to speak to the parish for them, he shall soon hear of them. Now, were the sense of their wants or troubles of a higher nature, would they not be as earnest to desire prayers for their souls as now they are to beg bread for their bodies? Well, you that fear God, and live among such, do your duty, though they have not hearts to desire it at your hands, pray over their stupid souls before the Lord. When a friend is sick, and his senses are gone, you do not stay

to send for the physician till he comes to himself and is able to desire you to do it for him. You had need make the more haste to God for such as these, lest they go away in this apoplexy of conscience, and so be past praying for.

*Use Second.* It reproves those who desire prayers of God's people, but hypocritically; and they are such as set others on work, but pray not for themselves—a certain sign of a naughty heart. Thus pharaoh often called for Moses to pray for him and his land; but we read not that ever he made any address himself to God, but thought it enough to send another on his errand; whereas a gracious soul will be sure to meet him he employs at the work. 'I beseech you,' saith Paul, 'to strive together with me' in your prayers to God for me. He did not slip the collar off his own neck to put it on another's, but drew together with them in it; else they that pray for thee may pray the mercy away from thee.

*Use Third.* It reproves such as desire prayers of others, but it is only in some great pinch. If their chariot is set fast in some deep slough of affliction, then they send in all haste for some to draw them out with their prayer, who, at another time, change their thoughts of the saints' prayers, yea, and of God himself. The frogs once gone, and Moses hears no more of Pharaoh till another plague rubs up his memory. Moses hears not Pharaoh cry till Pharaoh hears the frogs croak. Thus, as they say of coral, it is soft in the water where it grows, and hard when taken out; many, their consciences are soft and tender whilst sleeping in affliction, but hard and stout when that is removed. Pharaoh that so oft called Moses up to prayer, at last could not endure the sight of him, but forewarned him for ever coming in his sight. O take heed of this! When once the wretch came to that pass, and so strangely changed his note as to drive Moses from him, that had so often bailed and rescued him out of the hands of divine vengeance, then he had not long to live, for he removed the very dam, and lift up the sluice to let in ruin upon himself.

*Use Fourth.* It reproves such as desire others to pray for them, but vaingloriously—to gain a reputation for religion. Beware of this; yet charge not all for the hypocrisy of some, neither deprive thyself of the benefit of others' prayers out of an imaginary fear lest thou shouldst play the hypocrite therein. Watch thy heart, but waive not

the duty. Because some have strangled themselves with their own garters, wilt thou therefore be afraid to wear thine? Or because some canting beggars go about the country to show their sores, which they desire not to have cured, wilt not thou therefore, when wounded, go to the chirurgeon?

[MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL have a special claim on the prayers of believers.]

THIRD. From this request of the apostle we may note that the ministers of the gospel are, in an especial manner, to be remembered in the saints' prayers; and that,

*First.* In regard of God, whose message they bring. They come about his work and deliver his errand. Not to pray for them will be interpreted you wish not well to the business they have in hand for him. They do not only come from God, but with Christ. 'We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain,' II Cor. 6:1. Christ and the minister go into the pulpit together. A greater than man is there; master and servant are both at work.


Again, the blessing of the minister's labour is from God; not the hand that sets the plant or sows the seed, but God's blessing, gives the increase, I Cor. 3:6. When Melancthon was first converted, the light of the gospel shone so clear and strong a beam on his own eyes, that he thought he should convert all he preached unto. He deemed it was impossible his hearers should withstand that truth which he saw with so much evidence; but he afterwards found the contrary, which made him say, 'I see now that the old Adam is too hard for the young Melancthon.' God carries the key by his girdle that alone can open hearts, and prayer is the key to open his. When Christ intended to send forth his disciples to preach the gospel, he sets them solemnly to prayer, Matt. 9:38. Many are the promises which he hath given to the ministers of the gospel for their protection—that he will keep these stars in his right hand, or else they had been on the ground and stamped under foot long ere this—for their assistance and success in the work: 'I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,' Ex. 4:12. 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...I am with you alway, unto the end of the world,' Matt. 28:19, 20. Wherefore are these

promises, but to be shot back again in prayers to God that gave them?

*Second. In regard of the ministers themselves.*

There is not a greater object of pity and prayer in the whole world than the faithful ministers of Christ; if you consider,

1. The *importance of their work*. It is temple work, and that is weighty; which made Paul, that had the broadest shoulders of all his brethren, cry out, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' 'I am doing a great work,' said Nehemiah, Neh. 6:3. But what was that to his? No work more hazardous to carry in than this. It is sad enough to drop to hell from under the pulpit—to hear the gospel, and yet to perish; but O how dismal to fall out of it thither for unfaithfulness to the work! The consideration of this made Paul so bestir him; 'knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men.'

2. It is a *laborious work*. 'Know them which labour among you...and admonish you,' 1 Thes. 5:12; those who labour in the word and doctrine, —which labour to weariness. He that preaches as he should, shall find it a work, and not play. Not a work of an hour while speaking in the pulpit, but a load that lies heavy on his shoulders all the week long; a labour that spends the vitals, and consumes the oil which should feed the lamp of nature; such a labour, in a word, as makes old age and youth oft meet together. The Jews took Christ to be about fifty years old when he was little above thirty, John 8:57. I find some give this reason of it, because Christ had so macerated his body with labour in preaching, fasting, and watching, that it aged his very countenance and made him look older than he was. Other callings are, many of them, but as exercise to nature; they blow off the ashes from its coal, and help to discharge nature of those superfluities which oppress it. Who eats his bread more heartily, and sleeps more sweetly, than the ploughman? But the minister's work debilitates nature. It is hard for him to eat and work too. Like the candle, he wastes while he shines. Whatever work is thought harder than other, we have it borrowed to set forth the minister's labour. They are called soldiers, watchmen, husbandmen, yea, their work is set out by the pangs of a woman in travail. Some of them indeed have easier labours than other—those who find more success of their ministry than their brethren; but

who can tell the throes that *their* souls feel who all the time of their ministry go in travail and bring forth dead children at last?

3. It is *opposed work by hell and earth*.

(1.) It is opposed *by hell*. The devil never liked temple work; he that was at Joshua's right hand to resist him, is at the minister's elbow to disturb him, and that both in study and pulpit also. 'I would have come,' saith Paul, 'but Satan hindered.' Who can tell all the devices that Satan hath to take the minister off or hinder him in his work? One while he discourageth him, that he is ready with Jonah to run away with his charge; another while he is blowing of him up with pride. Even Paul himself hath a thorn given him in his flesh to keep pride out of his heart. Sometimes he roils him with passion, and leavens his zeal into sourness and unmercifulness. This the disciples were tainted with, when they called for fire to come down from heaven upon those that stood in their way. Sometimes he chills their zeal, and intimidates their spirits into cowardice and self-pity. Thus Peter favoured himself when he denied his Master; and when at another time he dissembled with the Jews, to curry their favour.

(2.) It is opposed *by the wicked world*. 'To be a minister,' said Luther, 'is nothing else but to derive the world's wrath and fury upon himself.' How are they loaden with reproaches! This dirt lies so thick nowhere as on the minister's coat. What odious names did the best of men, the apostles themselves, go under? And it were well they would only smite them with the tongue; but you shall find in all ages persecutors have thirsted most after their blood. The persecution in the Acts begins with the cutting off of James' head. Seven thousand could lie better his in Jezebel's time than one prophet. These are the burdensome stones which every one is lifting at, though none can do it without bruising his own fingers. In every national storm almost, they are taken up to be thrown overboard for those that raised it. How many are there of an opinion that nothing keeps them from seeing happy days but the standing of them and their office? O miserable happiness, which cannot be bought and purchased but with the ruin of those that bring the tidings of peace and salvation to them all! Such a happiness this would be as the sheep had in the fable, when persuaded to have the dogs that kept the wolves off killed; or as the

passengers at sea would have when their pilot is thrown overboard. In a word, such a happiness as the Jews had when Christ was taken out of the way by their murderous hands. They slew him to preserve themselves from the Romans destroying their city, but brought them with irreparable ruin by this very means upon their own head.

4. That which adds weight to all the former is, *that the men who are to bear this heavy burden, and to conflict with all these difficulties and dangers, are those who have no stronger shoulders than others*; for they are men subject to the like infirmities with their brethren. Now, will not all this melt you into compassion towards them, and your compassion send you to prayer for them? Shall they stand in the face of death and danger, where Satan's bullets, and man's also, fly so thick, and you not be at the pains to raise a breast-work before them for their defence by your prayers?

*Third. In regard of yourselves.* Love to yourselves will plead to pray for them.

1. Consider their ministry is *an office set up on purpose for your sakes*. It was never intended for the exalting of a few men above their brethren, but for the service of your faith. The gifts that Christ hath given to men, Eph. 4—that is, their office and abilities to discharge it—are both for the edifying of the body of Christ, and will you not pray for those that from one end of the year to the other are at work for you? If you had but a child or servant sent abroad about your worldly business, would you not send a prayer after him? Thus did good Jacob, when his children went on his errand to Egypt: 'God Almighty give you mercy before this man.' Will you not do thus much for your poor minister, and pray God Almighty go with him, when in his study to prepare, and when in the pulpit to deliver what he hath prepared for our souls?

2. The ministers' miscarriage is *dangerous to the people*; therefore pray for them, lest you be led into temptation by their falls. The sins of teachers are the teachers of sin. If the nurse be sick, the child is in danger to suck the disease from her that lies at her breast. If the minister be tainted with an error, it is strange if many of his people should not catch the infection; when, if he be loose and scandalous in his life, he is like a common well or fountain, corrupted and muddled, at which all the town draw their water.

The devil aimed at more than Peter when he desired leave to try a fall with him. 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat,' Luke 22:31. He knew his fall was like to strike up the heels of many others. The minister's practice makes a greater sound than his doctrine. They who forget his sermon, will remember his example to quote it for their apology and defence when time serves. Peter withdraws, and 'other Jews dissembled with him,' Gal. 2:12, 13. Truly, friends, your ministers are but men, and of no stronger than yourselves—men subject to the like passions. He among them that presumes he shall not slide into an error, or fall into a sin, is bolder than any promise in the word gives him leave. They need your prayers as much as any, and those most that fear their danger least.

3. By praying for the minister you take *the most hopeful way to profit by his ministry*. Such a soul as this may come in expectation to have a portion laid on his trencher; his meal is spoke for; and such guests as send to heaven before they come to an ordinance are most likely to have the best entertainment. He that hears a sermon, and hath not prayed for the minister, and the success of his labours, sits down to his meat before he hath craved a blessing; he plays the thief to his own soul, while he robs the minister of the assistance his prayers might have brought him in from heaven. Pinch the nurse, and you starve the child. The less the minister is prayed for, the less, it is to be feared, will the people profit by him.

4. By praying for the minister you do not only render the word he preacheth more effectual to yourselves, but *you also interest yourselves in the good his ministry does to others*. As there is a way of partaking in others' sins, so in others' holy services. He that strengthens the hands of a sinner any way in his wicked practices, makes his sin his own, and shall partake with him in the wages due to the work when the day of reckoning comes. So he that strengthens the minister's hand in his holy work, whether by prayer, countenance, or relief of his necessities, becomes a partaker with him in his service, and shall not be left out in the reward, Matt. 10:40. We read there of 'a prophet's reward' given to private Christians; they who communicate with the minister in his labour, by any subserviency to it, shall share in the reward.

When God comes to reward his prophets for their faithful service, then Obadiah that hid them from the fury of their persecutors—then Onesiphorus that refreshed their bowels—yea, then all those faithful ones that put up their fervent prayers for the free course of the gospel in their ministry—shall be called in to share with them in the reward. He that hath but a fifteenth part in a ship is an owner as well as he that hath more; and, when the voyage is over, he hath his share of the return that is made proportionable to his part. O what an encouragement is this to have a stock going in this bottom!—yea, to venture than ever at the throne of grace for the now despised ministers of Christ, seeing heaven's promise is our insuring office to secure all we send to sea upon this account.

## BRANCH SECOND.

[THE MATTER OF PAUL'S REQUEST, *as a minister of Christ, for the prayers of believers.*]

The second branch in the general division of the words follows, and contains the *matter of the apostle's request* to the church of Ephesus, or what he desires them to mention to God in his behalf—*'that utterance may be given unto me.'* Where observe, FIRST. The *spirituality* of his desire. He sets them not a praying for carnal things, the world's honour or riches; no, we hear him not so much as mention his necessities and outward wants, which he, being now a prisoner, it is like, was no great stranger to; but they are spiritual wants he most groans under. He desires the charity of their prayers more than of their purse.

SECOND. Observe the *public concernment* of that he begs prayers for—*'that utterance may be given me.'* This is not a personal privilege, that would redound only on his own private advantage, but which renders him useful to others—that which may fit him for his public employment in the church; from which we may gather this note.

[*What the minister of Christ chiefly desires believers' prayers for.*]

NOTE. A faithful minister's heart runs *more on his work than on himself*. That which he chiefly desires is how he may best discharge his ministerial trust. No doubt Paul spake out of the

abundance of his heart. That comes out first of which his heart was most full, and for which his thoughts were most solicitous; as if he had said, If you will take me into your prayers, let this be your request, *'That utterance may be given me.'* Wherever, almost, you find him begging prayers, he forgets not this: *'Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course,'* II Thes. 3:1; *'Praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ,'* Col. 4:3. Admirable are the expressions whereby this holy man declares how deeply his heart was engaged in the work of the Lord. He tells them that his very soul and spirit was set upon it: *'Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son,'* Rom. 1:9. Never did any more long for preferment in the church, than he to preach the gospel to the church. *'I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift,'* ver. 11. He professeth himself a debtor to all sorts of men; he hath a heart and tongue to preach to all that have an ear to hear: *'I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise,'* ver. 14. Yea, he was *'ready to preach the gospel'* ver. 15, where he should stand in the mouth of death and danger. This so took up his thoughts, that for it he threw all his worldly concerns at his heels. As for the world's riches, he professeth he <sup>ccxxx</sup>propped not for it: *'I seek not yours, but you,'* II Cor. 12:14. He had a nobler merchandise in his eye. He had rather preach them into Christ, than their money into his purse. And for their respect and love, though it was due debt to him, yet he lays it aside, and on he will go with his work, though they give him no thanks for his pains: *'I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.'* His duty he will do to them, and leaves them to look to theirs to him. The nurse draws forth her breast to the child, though froward, because she looks for her reward, not from the child, but its parent. God will reward the faithful minister, though his people will not thank him for his labour.

In a word, his very life was not valued by him when it stood in competition with his work: *'But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus,'* Acts 20:24. And not without great reason is it that ministers



should prefer their duty above all temporal respects. They are servants to God; and a servant must look to his work, whatever becomes of himself. Abraham's servant would not eat till he had done his message; and when it sped, neither would he stay then to lose time, but posts back again with all expedition to his master, Gen. 24:33. He said well who was employed to relieve the city of Rome with corn, who, when the master of the ship would have had him stay for fair weather, answered, 'It is necessary that we sail, not that we live.' It is necessary the minister should fulfil his ministry, not that he should be rich, not that he should be in reputation. The incomparable value of souls is such as should make hazard our whole temporal stake to promote their eternal salvation. He that wins souls is wise, though he lose his own life in the work. But we come to a more particular inquiry into these words, what the apostle means by 'utterance,' which he desires may be given him. A parallel place to this we have, Col. 4:3, 4. Three things we may conceive the apostle drives at in this his request.

*[Threefold import of Paul's request, when he desires that UTTERANCE be prayed for.]*

*First.* By 'utterance' may be meant *liberty to preach the gospel*;—that his mouth might not be stopped by the persecutor, who had him already his prisoner. Now he desires they would pray for him, that he might not be quite taken off his work: where,

1. Observe what a *grievous affliction it is to a faithful minister to be denied liberty to preach the gospel*. So long as Paul might preach, though in a chain, he is not much troubled; the word is free, though he be bound. But, to have his mouth stopped, to see poor souls ready to perish for want of that bread which he hath to give out, and yet may not be allowed this liberty, goes to his heart. 'O pray,' saith he, 'that utterance may be given.' If he may not preach, neither should he live; for upon this account alone he desired life—the furtherance of their faith, Php. 1:25. O how far are they from Paul's mind, to whom it is more tedious to preach than grievous to be kept from the work! How seldom should we see some in the pulpit, were it not a necessary expedient to bring in their revenue at the year's end!

2. The *liberty of the gospel, and of the ministers to deliver it, are in an especial manner to be prayed for*.

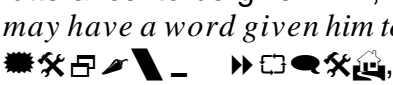
(1.) Because this is *strongly opposed and malign'd by Satan and his instruments*. Wherever God opens a door for his gospel there Satan raiseth his batteries. 'For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries,' 1 Cor. 16:9. No sooner doth God open his shop-windows, but the devil is at work to shut them again, or hinder the free-trade of his gospel. Other men's servants can work peaceably in their master's shop, but as for God's servants, every one hath a stone to throw in at them as they pass by. When Paul began to preach at Thessalonica, the city was presently in an uproar and cry, 'These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also,' Acts 17:6. Indeed they said true; let the gospel have but liberty and it will 'turn the world upside down.' It will make a change, but a happy one. This the devil knows, and therefore dreads its approach.

(2.) Because it is the *choicest mercy that God can bless a nation with*. Happy are the people that are in such a case. It is the gospel of the kingdom; it lifts a people up to heaven. We could better spare the sun out of its orb than the preaching of the gospel out of the church. Souls might find the way to heaven, though the sun should not lend them its light; but without the light of truth they cannot take one right step towards it. Work, saith Christ, 'while ye have the light,' John 12:36. Salvation-work cannot be done by the candle-light of a natural understanding, but by the daylight of gospel revelation; this sun must rise before man can go forth to this labour.

(3.) It is God's power to *preserve the liberty of his gospel and messengers*, in spite of the devil and his instruments. Therefore, indeed, Paul sends them not to court to beg his liberty, but to heaven. God had Nero closer prisoner than he had Paul. 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it,' Rev. 3:8. At Ephesus were many adversaries we heard, yet the door was kept open. Christ carries the keys of the church-door at his girdle: 'He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth,' Rev. 3:7, 'the key of the house of David,' so Isa. 22:22. The church is Christ's house, and the master sure will keep the key of his own door.

(4.) Prayer hath a mighty *power with God to preserve or restore liberty to his gospel and messengers*. It hath fetched home his servants from banishment, it hath brought them out of their dungeon. The prison could not hold Peter when the church was at prayer for him. It hath had a mighty influence into the church's affairs when at the lowest ebb. It was a sad world to the church in Nero's time, when Paul set the saints a praying for kings and those that were in authority; which prayers, though they were not answered in Nero, yet I doubt not but afterwards they were in Constantine and other Christian princes, under whose royal wing the church of Christ was cherished and protected.

(5.) Pray for their liberty, because, *when the gospel goes away, it goes not alone, but carries away your other mercies along with it*. The hangings that are taken down when the prince removes his court. Where the minister hath not liberty to preach the truth, the people will not long have liberty to profess it. When it went ill with James the apostle, it went not well with the church at Jerusalem, Acts 12:1, 2, nor can that place look long to enjoy its outward peace. When God removes his gospel, it is to make way for worse company to come, even all his sore plagues and judgements, Jer. 6:8.

*Second.* When the apostle desires 'utterance' to be given him, he may mean *that he may have a word given him to preach*—, according to that which Christ promiseth, 'It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak,' Matt. 10:19. From which we may note:

1. That ministers have *no ability of their own for their work*. O how long may they sit tumbling their books over, and beating their brains, till God comes to their help; and then, as Jacob's venison, it is brought to their hand! If God drop not down his assistance, we write with a pen that hath no ink. If any in the world need walk pendantly upon God more than others, the minister is he.

2. Observe that those who are most eminent for gifts and grace have *meanest thoughts of themselves, and are acquainted most with their own insufficiency*. Paul himself is not ashamed to let Christians know that if God brings it not into him he cannot deal out to them; he cannot speak a word to them till he receives it from God: 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to

think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament,' II Cor. 3:5, 6. He is the able minister whom God enables.

3. Observe, *the meanest Christian may, by his faithful prayers, help to make the minister's sermon for him*. 'Pray,' saith the apostle, 'that utterance may be given unto me;' that I may have from God what I should deliver to others. O what a useful instrument is a praying Christian! he may not only help his own minister, but others even all the world over. Paul was now at Rome, and sends for prayers as far as to the saints at Ephesus.

*Third.* By 'utterance' he may mean a *faculty of speech—a readiness and facility to deliver to others what he hath been enabled to conceive in his own mind of the will of God*. Many eminent servants of God have been very sensible of, and much discouraged for, their impedit speech and hesitant delivery. Now this may proceed from a natural cause, or supernatural.

1. From a *natural cause*. As,

(1.) From a *defect in the instruments of speech*; which some think was the cause of Moses' complaint, 'I am not eloquent,...but I am slow of speech,' Ex. 4:10. And this discouraged him from being sent on God's errand. But God can compensate the hesitancy of the tongue with the divine power of the matter delivered. This Moses, who was so 'slow of speech,' yet was 'mighty in words,' Acts 7:22, able to make Pharaoh's stout heart to tremble, though he might stammer in the delivery of it. God promised indeed to be 'with his mouth;' yet, it is probable, he did not cure his natural infirmity, for we find him complaining afterwards of it. Such natural imperfections, therefore, should neither discourage the minister nor prejudice the people; but rather make him more careful that the matter be weighty he delivers, and them that their attention be more close and united.

(2.) From a *weak memory*. He that reads in a bad print, where many letters are defaced, cannot read fast and smooth, but will oft be stopped to study what is next. Memory is an inward table or book, out of which the minister reads his sermon unseen. If the notions or meditations we have to deliver be not fairly imprinted on our memory, no wonder that the tongue is oft at a stand, except we should speak to no purpose. If the hopper be stopped, the mill

cannot grind; or if the pipe that feeds the cistern be obstructed, it will be seen at the cock. When God hath assisted in the study, we need him to strengthen our memory in the pulpit.

(3.) From *fear*. If the heart faint, it is no wonder the tongue falters. This, it is like, was at the bottom of Jeremiah's excuse: 'Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child,' Jer. 1:6. That is, I want the courage and spirit of a man to wrestle with these oppositions that will certainly meet me in the work. That this was his infirmity appears by the method God takes for the cure: 'Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee,...be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee,' ver. 7, 8.

2. From *a supernatural cause*; where none of these defects are, but the minister stands best furnished and in greatest readiness for his work. Yet, let but God turn the cock, and there is a stop put to the whole work. Not only 'the preparations of the heart,' but 'the answer of the tongue,' both are 'of the Lord,' Prov. 16:1. God keeps the key of the mouth as well as of the heart; not a word can get out, but sticks in the teeth while [*i.e.* until] God opens the doors of the lips to give it a free egress. He opened the mouth of the ass, and stopped the mouth of that wicked prophet its master. Hear him confessing as much to Balak: 'Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak,' Num. 22:38. Never man desired more to be speaking than he; that which should have got him his hire, the wages of unrighteousness, for he loved it dearly. But God had tongue-tied him. Nay, even holy men, when they would speak the truth, and that for God, cannot deliver themselves of what they have conceived in their inward meditations. Hence David's prayer: 'Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.' Ezekiel he would 'make his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth;' he should not reprove them though he would, Eze. 3:26.

[*Use or Application.*]

*Use First. To ministers. Do ministers depend thus on God for utterance?* This speaks to you, my brethren in the Lord's work. Do nothing for which God may stop your mouths when you come into the pulpit.

1. Take heed of *any sin smothering in your bosoms*. Canst thou believe God will assist thee in his work who canst lend thy hand to the devil's? Mayest thou not rather fear he should hang a padlock on thy lips, and strike thee dumb, when thou goest about thy work? You remember the story of Origen, how after his great fall he was silenced in the very pulpit; for, at the reading of that, 'What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?' Ps. 50:16, the conscience of his sin would not suffer him to speak. O it is sad when the preacher meets his own sin in his subject, and pronounceth sentence against himself while he reads his text! If thou wouldst have God assist thee, be zealous and repent. When the trumpet is washed, then the Holy Spirit, thou mayest hope, will again breathe through it.

2. Beware thou comest not *in the confidence of thy own preparation*. God hath declared himself against this kind of pride: 'By strength shall no man prevail,' 1 Sam. 2:9. A little bread with God's blessing may make a meal for multitude, and great provision may soon shrink to nothing if God help not in the breaking of it. It is not thy sermon in thy head, or notes in thy book, will enable thee to preach except God open thy mouth. Acknowledge therefore God in all thy ways, and 'lean not to thy own understanding.' The swelling of the heart as well as of the wall goes before a fall. Did the Ephraimites take it so ill that Gideon would steal a victory without calling them to his help? How much more may it provoke God, when thou goest to the pulpit, and passest by his door in the way without calling for his assistance?

*Use Second. To the people.* Take heed you do not *stop your ministers' mouths*. This you may do,

1. *By admiring their gifts and applauding their persons*; especially when this is accompanied with unthankfulness to God that gives them; when you applaud the man, but do not bless God for him. Princes have an evil eye upon those subjects that are over-popular. God will not let his creatures stand in his light, nor have his honour suffer by the reputation of his instrument. The mother likes not to see the child taken with the nurse more than with herself. O how foolish are we, who cannot love, but we must dote; not honour, what we adore also! He

that would keep his posey fresh and sweet, must smell and lay it down again—not hold it too long in his hand, or breathe too much upon it; this is the way soon to welter it. To overdo is the ready way to undo. Many fair mercies are thus overlaid and pressed to death by the excess of a fond affection; or when it is accompanied with detracting of others—the abilities of one are cried up to cry down the another. ‘I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos.’ Thus the disciples of either advanced their preacher to hold up a faction.

2. You may provoke God to withdraw his assistance *by expecting the benefit from man and not from God*; as if it were nothing but to take up your cloak and Bible, and you are sure to get good by such a one’s ministry. This is like them in James, that say, ‘We will go into such a city, and get gain;’ as if it were no more to hear with profit than to go to the tap and draw wine or beer in your own cellar! It is just thou shouldst find the vessel frozen—the minister, I mean, straitened, and his abilities bound up—because thou comest to him as unto a God who is but a poor instrument. O say not to him, Give me grace, give me comfort, as Rachel asked children of her husband; but go to thy God for these in thy attendance on man.

3. You may provoke God to withdraw his assistance *by rebelling against the light of truth that shines forth upon you in his ministry*. God sometimes stops the minister’s mouth because the people shut their hearts. Why should the cock run to have the water spilt upon the ground? Christ himself did ‘not many mighty works’—‘he could not,’ saith Mark—in his own country, ‘because of their unbelief.’ *Dei justitia non permittebat, ut sanctum canibus daretur*, saith Brugensis upon the place—it is just God should take away the ministry, or stop the minister’s mouth, when they despise his counsel, and the word becomes a reproach to them. I am sure it is a sad dump to the minister’s spirit, that preacheth long to a gainsaying people, and no good omen to them. The mother’s milk goes away sometimes before the child’s death. God binds up the spirit of his messengers in judgment: ‘I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house,’ Eze. 3:26.

## BRANCH THIRD.

[THE END in Paul’s request as a minister of Christ for the prayers of believers.]

*‘That I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.’*

The third branch in the division of the words presents us with the end why he desires their prayers for utterance to be granted him, expressed in these words—‘*that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel;*’ where there are these three observables. FIRST. The sublime *nature* of the gospel—it is ‘*a mystery.*’ SECOND. Wherein lies the *work* of a gospel minister—‘*to make known the mystery of the gospel.*’ THIRD. The *manner* how he is to perform this work —‘*that I may open my mouth boldly.*’

[What is meant by a ‘mystery,’ and in what respects the gospel is one.]

FIRST OBSERVABLE. The sublime *nature* of the gospel—it is ‘*a mystery.*’ The Greek word  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$  some derive from  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$ , to teach any secret belonging to religion; others of  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$  or  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$ , to shut the mouth, because those that were initiated or admitted to be present at the religious rites and mysteries of the heathens—who were called  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$  — might not reveal them to those that were  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\chi\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha$ , or not initiated. Therefore they had an image before the temple, holding his finger upon his mouth, to put them in mind as they went in and out of keeping secret what was done within. Indeed the mysteries in their idolatrous worship were so impure and filthy that nothing but secrecy could keep them from being abhorred and detested by the more sober part of mankind; and it is not unworthy of our noting what I find observed to my hand by a learned pen—that the Spirit of God should make choice of that word in the New Testament so often to express the holy doctrine of truth and salvation contained in it, which was so vilely abused by those heathenish idolaters; surely it shows them to be over-scrupulous that judge it unlawful any way to make use of those names or things which have been abused by heathens or idolaters. (R. Sanderson on I Tim. 3:16.) But, to return to the

word 'mystery;' it hath obtained in our usual speech to be applied to any secret, natural, civil, or religious, which lies out of the road of vulgar understandings. In Scripture it is generally used for religious secrets; and it is taken both in an evil sense and in a good.

[What is meant by a 'MYSTERY.']


*First.* The word mystery is used in an *evil sense*. 'The mystery of iniquity doth already work,' II Thes. 2:7; whereby is meant the secret rising antichristian dominion, whereof some foundations were laid even in the apostle's days. Error is but a day younger than truth. When the gospel began first to be preached by Christ and his apostles, error presently put forth her hand to take it by the heel and supplant it. The whole system of antichristianism is a mystery of policy and impiety. Mystery is written upon the whore of Babylon's forehead, Rev. 17:2. And Causabon tells us the same word was written upon the pope's mitre; if so, it is well he would own his name. 'My soul, enter not thou into their secrets.'

*Second.* In a *good sense*. Sometimes for some particular branch of evangelical truth. Thus the rejection of the Jews and calling of the Gentiles is called a 'mystery,' Rom. 11:25; the wonderful change of those that shall be upon the earth at the end of the world, I Cor. 15:51; the incarnation, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, I Tim. 3:16; with others. Sometimes it is used for the whole body of the gospel; as to the doctrine of it, called a 'mystery of faith,' I Tim. 3:9; as to the purity of its precepts and rules for a holy life, a 'mystery of godliness;' as to the author, subject, and end of it, called 'the mystery of Christ,' Eph. 3:4—it was revealed by him, treats of him, and leads souls to him; and lastly, in regard of the blessed reward it promiseth to all that sincerely embrace it, called 'the mystery of the kingdom of God,' Mark 4:11. This gospel is the glorious mystery we are now to speak of; and we will show in what respect it is a mystery, or why so called by the Spirit of God.

[WHY OR IN WHAT RESPECTS  
the gospel is a mystery.]

*First.* Because it is *known only by divine revelation*. Such a secret it is that the wit of man could never have found out. There are many secrets in nature, which, with much plodding and

study, have at last been discovered, as the medicinal virtue of plants and the like; but the gospel is a secret, and contains in it such mysteries as were *omni ingenio altiora*—beyond the reach of all genius, as Calvin saith. What man or angel could have thought of such a way for reconciling God and man as in the gospel is laid out? How impossible was it for them to have conjectured what purposes of love were locked up in the heart of God towards fallen man, till himself did open the cabinet of his own counsel? Or had God given them some hint of a purpose he had for man's recovery, could they ever have so much as thought of such a way as the gospel brings to light? Surely as none but God could lay the plot, so none but himself could make it known. The gospel therefore is called 'a revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,' Rom. 16:25.

*Second.* Because the gospel when revealed, *its truths exceed the grasp of human understanding*. They are the eye of our reason as the sun is to the eye of our body, such a *nimum excellens*—exceeding excellency, as dazzles and overpowers the most piercing apprehension. They disdain to be discussed and tried by human reason. That there are three subsistences in the Godhead, and but one divine essence, we believe, because there revealed. But he that shall fly too near this light, as thinking to comprehend this mysterious truth in his narrow reason, will soon find himself lost in his bold enterprise. God and man, united in Christ's person, is undeniably demonstrable from the gospel. But, alas! the cordage of our understanding is too short to fathom this great deep. 'Without controversy,' saith the apostle, 'great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh,' I Tim. 3:16. It is a truth without controversy, —it is confessed of all, yet such a mystery as is not fordable by our short-legged understanding. That there is no name but the name of Jesus by which we can be saved is the grand notion of the gospel; but how many mysteries are wrapped up in this one truth? Who that should have seen the babe Jesus when he lay in the manger, and afterward meanly bred under a carpenter, and at last executed for a malefactor, could have imagined, as one saith, that upon such weak hinges should move such a glorious design for man's

salvation? But who dares think it unreasonable to believe that upon God's report to be true, which we cannot make out by our own understanding? Some things we apprehend by reason that cannot be known by sense—as that the sun is bigger than the earth; some things by sense, which cannot be found out by reason. That the lodestone attracts iron, and not gold, our eye beholds; but why it should, there our reason is dunced and posed. Now if in nature we question not the truth of these, though sense be at a loss in one and reason in the other, shall we in religion doubt of that to be true which drops from God's own mouth and pen, because it exceeds our weak understanding? Wouldst thou see a reason, saith Augustine, for all that God saith? look into thy own understanding, and thou wilt find a reason why thou seest not a reason.

*Third.* It is a mystery *in regard of the paucity of those to whom it is revealed.* Secrets are whispered into the ears of a few, and not exposed to all. 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God,' Mark 4:11. Who were those 'you,' but a few disciples who believed on his name? The greater part of the world were ever strangers to this mystery. Before Christ's time it was impaled within a little spot of ground of the Jewish nation. Since it came abroad into the Gentile world, and hath been travelling above these sixteen hundred years hither and thither, how few at this day are acquainted with it! Indeed, where its glorious light shines long, many get a literal notional knowledge of it—it were strange that men should walk long in the sun and not have their faces a little tanned with it; but the spiritual and saving knowledge of this mystery is revealed but to few, for the number of saints is not great compared with the reprobate world.

*Fourth.* It is a mystery *in regard of the sort of men to whom it is chiefly imparted*—such as are, in reason, most unlikely to dive into any great mysteries; those who are despised by the wise world, and the great states of it, as poor and base. 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty,' 1 Cor. 1:26, 27. If we have a secret to reveal, we do not choose weak and

shallow heads to impart it unto; but here is a mystery which babes understand and wise men are ignorant of: 'I thank thee, O Father,...because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' The people who were so scorned by the proud Pharisees, as those who knew not the law, John 7:49, to them was the gospel revealed, while these doctors of the chair were left in ignorance. It is revealed to the poor many times, and hid from kings and princes. Christ passeth often by palaces to visit the poor cottage. Herod could get nothing from Christ—who out of curiosity so long desired to see him, Luke 23:8; whereas the poor woman of Samaria with a pitcher in her hand, Christ vouchsafeth her a sermon, and opens to her the saving truths of the gospel. Pilate missed of Christ on the bench, while the poor thief finds him, and heaven with him, on the cross. Devout women are passed by and left to perish with their blind zeal, while harlots and publicans are converted by him.

*Fifth.* It is a mystery *in regard of the kind of knowledge the saints themselves have of it.*

1. Their knowledge is but *in part and imperfect.* The most of what they know is the least of what they do not know. The gospel is as a rich piece of arras rolled up; this God hath been unfolding ever since the first promise was made to Adam, opening it still every age wider than other; but the world shall sooner be at an end than this mystery will be fully known. Indeed, as a river—which may be breaks forth at first from the small orifice of a little spring—does widens its channel and grows broader as it approacheth nearer the sea; so the knowledge of this mystery doth spread every age more than other, and still will, as the world draws nearer and nearer to the sea of eternity, into which it must at last fall. The gospel appeared but a little spring in Adam's time, whose whole Bible was bound up in a single promise; this increased to a rivulet enlarged itself into a river in the days of the prophets; but when Christ came in the flesh then knowledge flowed in amain. The least in the gospel state is said to be greater than the greatest before Christ. So that, in comparison of the darker times of the law, the knowledge Christians now have is great, but compared with the knowledge they shall have in heaven, it is little, and but peep of day.

2. It is *mysterious and dark*. Gospel truths are not known in their native glory and beauty, but in shadows. We are said indeed 'with open face' to 'behold the glory of God,' but still it is 'as in a glass.' Now, you know the glass presents us with the image, not with the face itself. We do not see them as indeed they are, but as our weak eyes can bear the knowledge of them. Indeed this glass of the gospel is clearer than that of the law was; we see truths through a thinner veil; baptism is clearer than circumcision, the Lord's supper than the passover; in a word, the New Testament than the Old; yet there is nothing of heaven revealed in the gospel but it is translated into our earthly language, because we are unable while here below to understand its original. Who knows, or can conceive, what the joys of heaven are, so as to speak of them in their own idiom and propriety? But, a feast we know, what a kingdom is we understand; with riches and treasures we are well acquainted. Now, heaven is set out by these things, which in this world bear the greatest price in men's thoughts. In heaven is a feast, yet without meat; riches, without money; a kingdom, without robes, sceptre, and crown, because infinitely above these. Hence it is said, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be,' 1 John 3:2. Our apprehensions of these things are manly compared with those under the law, but childish compared with the knowledge which glorified saints have. Therefore, as Paul saith 'he putteth childish things away,' when he grew up into further knowledge of the gospel; so he tells us of an imperfect knowledge, which yet he had, 'that must be done away, when that which is perfect is come,' 1 Cor. 13:10, 11.

*Sixth.* The gospel is a mystery *in regard of the contrary operation it hath upon the hearts of men.* The eyes of some it opens, others it blinds; and who so blind as those whose eyes are put out with light? Some when they hear the gospel are 'pricked in their hearts;' they can hardly stay till the preacher hath done his sermon, but cry out, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Others are hardened by it, and their consciences seared into a greater stupidity. At Paul's sermon, Acts 17:32, 'some mocked;' others were affected so with his discourse that they desired to 'hear it again.' What a mysterious doctrine is this, that sets one a laughing, another a weeping!—that is the savour of life to some, and of death to

others!

*Seventh.* The gospel is a mystery *in regard of those rare and strange effects it hath upon the godly;* and that both in respect of their judgments and practice. As the gospel is '*a mystery of faith,*' so it enables them to *believe* strange mysteries—to believe that which they understand not, and hope for that which they do not see. It enables them to believe three to be one, and one to be three; a trinity of Persons in the Deity, and a unity of essence; a Father not older than his Son, a Son not inferior to his Father; a Holy Spirit proceeding from both, yet equal to both. It teaches them to believe that Christ was born in time, and that he was from everlasting; that he was comprehended within the virgin's womb, and yet the heaven of heavens not able to contain him; to be the son of Mary, and yet *her* maker that was his mother; to be born without sin, and yet justly to have died for sin. They believe that God was just in punishing Christ though innocent, and in justifying penitent believers who are sinners; they believe themselves to be great sinners, and yet that God sees them in Christ 'without spot or wrinkle.'

Again, as the gospel is a '*mystery of godliness,*' it enables Christians to *do* as strange things as they believe—to live by another's Spirit, to act from another's strength, to live to another's will, and aim at another's glory. They live by the Spirit of Christ, act with his strength, are determined by his will, and aim at his glory. It makes them so meek and gentle that a child may lead them to anything that is good, yet so stout that fire and faggot shall not fright them into a sin. They can love their enemies, and yet, for Christ's sake, can hate father and mother. It makes them diligent in their worldly calling, yet enables them to contemn the riches they have got by God's blessing on their labour; they are taught by it that all things are theirs, yet they dare not take a penny, a pin, from the wicked of the world by force and rapine. It makes them so humble as to 'prefer every one in honour' above themselves, yet so to value their own condition that the poorest among them would not change his estate with the greatest monarch of the world. It makes them thank God for health, and for sickness also; to rejoice when exalted, and as much when made low; they can pray for life, and at the same time desire to die. Is not that doctrine a mystery which fills the Christian's life

with so many riddles!

## USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Why the gospel and its professors are so slighted, misunderstood, and persecuted.]*

*Use First.* This gives us a reason *why the gospel, with the great offers it makes, is so slighted and rejected by the wicked world.* The cause is, the blessings of the gospel are a mystery, and offered in such a way that carnal hearts skill<sup>ccxxx</sup> not of them, and therefore care not for them. The things it propounds are such as they like well enough, might they have them in a way suited to their carnal apprehensions. The gospel offers riches and honours; who are not taken with these? The gospel opens a mine of unsearchable riches, but in a mystery; it shows them a way how to be 'rich in faith,' 'rich to God,' rich for another world, while poor in this. Our Saviour went about to learn the young man in the gospel the way to be rich—not by purchasing more land, but by selling what he had; but he would not follow his counsel. The gospel offers pleasures and delights—and these the sensual world like well enough—but, alas! they please not their carnal coarse palate, because they are pleasures in a mystery, pleasures in mourning for sin, and mortifying of sin, not pleasures in satisfying them; pleasures in communion with Christ at an ordinance, not with a knot of good fellows over a pot at an ale-house; pleasures to the eye and palate of faith, not of sense; to feed their souls, not pamper and fat their bellies. In a word, the gospel makes discovery of high and choice notions. Surely now those who are the more sober part of the world, bookish men, and in love with good literature, whose souls crave intellectual food, and prize a lecture more than a feast, these will be highly pleased with the truths the gospel brings to light, being such rare mysteries that they can find in no other book. Yet, alas! we see that the gospel doth as little please this sort and rank of men as any other. Had it been filled with flowers of rhetoric, chemical experiments, philosophical notions, or maxims of policy, O how greedily would they have embraced it! But it is wisdom in a mystery. 'We speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom

of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought,' 1 Cor. 2:6. Bradwardine, a great scholar, before he was meekened by the grace of the gospel, slighted Paul's epistles, as afterward he confessed, because he did not express *ingenium metaphysicum*—a metaphysical head in his discourses.

Again, we here have the reason why the gospel and its professors are not only slighted, but hated and persecuted. For the gospel, it is a mystery, which the world knows not; and therefore opposed by it. Ignorance is the mother of persecution: 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!' The greatest enemies the gospel ever had were not the sensual and open profane—though these bad enough—but the superstitious and ignorantly devout, these have been they who have shown most fierceness and fury against the gospel. Paul tells of the 'devout' persons that cruelly persecuted him, Acts 13:50. None more hot against the truth than Paul himself, who was a strict Pharisee, but bloody enemy against the truth. What reason then have we to pray for the increase of gospel light! The more the gospel is known, the more kindly will it be entertained.

Again, the professors of the gospel, why are they so hated and maligned, but because they partake of the mysterious nature of the gospel, and therefore their worth is not known? They are high-born, but in a mystery; you cannot see their birth by their outward breeding—the arms they bear, revenues they have to live on, by which the world judges the greatness of persons and families. No, their outside is mean, while their inside is glorious; and the world values them by what they know and see of their external port, and not by their inward graces. They pass, as a prince in disguise of some poor man's clothes, through the world, and their entertainment is accordingly. Had Christ put on his robes of glory and majesty when he came into the world, surely he had not gone out of it with so shameful and cruel a death; the world would have trembled at his footstool, which we see some of them did when but a beam of his deity looked forth upon them. Did saints walk on earth in those robes which they shall wear in heaven, then they would be feared and admired by those who now scorn and despise them. But, as God should not have had his design in Christ's first coming had he so appeared, so



neither would he in his saints, did the world know them, as one day they shall; therefore he is pleased to let them lie hid under the mean coverings of poverty and other infirmities, that so he may exercise their suffering graces, and also accomplish his wrath upon the wicked for theirs against them.

The gospel as a mystery shows us the reason why carnal men do so bungle when they meddle with matters of religion. Let them speak of gospel truths —what ignorance do they show! Even as a countryman chops logic, and speaks of the liberal arts, so they of heavenly matters. Do we not see that those who in worldly affairs will give you a wise and solid answer, in the truths of the gospel they speak like children and babes? Yea, even those that have some brain-knowledge of the Scriptures, how dry and unsavoury is their discourse of spiritual things! They are like a parable in a fool's mouth. So, when they engage in any duty of religion. Put them to pray, hear the word, or meditate upon what they have heard; you had as good give a workman's tools to him that was never of the trade. They know not how to handle them; they go ungainsomely about the work, and cut all into chips. Every trade hath its mystery, and religion above all callings, when none but those that are instructed in know how to manage.

*[Several duties which the mysterious nature of the gospel imposes on believers.]*

*Use Second.* Several duties *pressed upon the saints*, who are instructed in the mystery of the gospel, by way of exhortation.

1. *Duty.* *Be thankful that ever God revealed it to thee.* O what a mercy this is, that thou hast 'life and immortality brought to light,' that thy ears hear this joyful sound! Never came such joyful news to town as the gospel brings. What a poor nation was this of ours before the gospel day broke among us! Bless God thy lot is cast where this sun is up. The gospel indeed was early preached in the world. Adam had it soon after his fall; but a short gospel, a mystery, indeed, to him, wrapped all up in one promise, and that a dark one. But now that one wedge of gold is beaten out into the whole Bible—a gospel written at length, and not in figures. You hear the gospel not preached in law terms, as the Jews did under Moses' pedagogy; but

gospel in gospel language. The veil is taken off which hid the beauty of gospel truths from their face. You hear it after it hath been rescued out of Antichrist's hands, by whom for many ages it was kept prisoner. You live not in those dark times when gospel truths were embased with the mean alloy of schoolmen's subtleties and superstitious vanities —when more stones were given to break the teeth, than bread to feed the souls, of people. The conduit of the gospel now runs with wine, not twice or thrice a year, on some gaudy festival day, but constantly. Every Sabbath-day you have your fill of its sweetest truths. Were it not sad, if they should be found to have been more thankful for the little drawing of gospel light which then but peeped forth, than you for its meridian light, who live to see the Sun of righteousness with his healing wings spread forth upon you? But especially bless God for any inward light and life thou hast received from this gospel. God hath done more for thee in this, than for thousands thou livest among, and those no means ones either. To this day God hath not given thy carnal neighbours eyes to see, nor hearts to perceive, that mystery which is unfolded unto thee. Are you thankful to him that hath taught your worldly trade, by which you pick a small livelihood for your body? O what praise then dost thou owe to thy God, who, by instructing thee in this mystery, hath learned thee as art for saving thy soul! Trumpeters delight to sound where they have the best echo; God delights to give his mercy to those that will most resound his praise.

2. *Duty.* The gospel is a mystery, therefore *rest not in thy present attainments*; either in thy knowledge, as it is a mystery of faith, or thy practice, as it is a mystery of godliness.

(1.) *Rest not in thy present knowledge.* It is like thou knowest much to what once thou didst; but thou knowest little to what thou mayest. Some books are learned at once reading, but the gospel is a mystery that will take up more than thy lifetime to understand it. Mysteries are here sown thick; thou diggest where the springs rise faster upon thee the further thou goest. God tells not all his secrets at once—'here a little, and there a little;' 'many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,' Dan. 12:4. The merchant's ship takes not all in her lading at one port, but sails from one to another for it; neither doth the Christian enrich himself with this

heavenly treasure all at one time or in one ordinance. The true lover of learning gives not over his chase and pursuit for a little smattering knowledge he gets, but rather, having got the scent how sweet learning is, puts on with fuller cry for what he wants. The true doctor studies harder than the freshman, because, as he knows more of learning, so by that knowledge he understands his own deficiency better; for the higher he ascends the hill of learning, the more his prospect enlargeth, while the other, standing at the bottom, thinks he knows all in his little.

(2.) *Rest not in thy present practice*, as it is a mystery of godliness. Let not a little grace serve thy turn, when thou mayest have more; which that you may do,

(a) Compare not thyself with those that have less than thyself, but look on those that have far exceeded thee. To look on our inferiors occasions pride, 'I am not this publican,' saith the Pharisee; but look on other more eminent than ourselves will both preserve humility, and be a spur to diligence. Miltiades' victories would not suffer Themistocles, then a young man, to sleep. The progress that some have made in grace—didst thou but keep them in thine eye—would not suffer thee to be quiet, who art now lagging so far behind, till thou hast overtaken them. May be thou hast got some victory over thy passion, and art not such a bedlam in thy fury as others; but didst thou never hear how meek a man Moses was, that could bear the murmurings of the multitude, yea envy of his brother and sister, and yet his heart not take fire? Thou hast some good affections towards God, but how far short of holy David's zeal, whose heart did run out to God as soon as his eyes were open in the morning? 'When I awake I am still with thee.' Thrice a day, yea seven times a day, he would praise his God. Thou hast some patience, but hast thou learned to write after Job's copy? Thou art not without faith, but art thou like Abraham—strong in faith to follow God when thou knowest not whither he will lead thee?

(b) The grace thou hast will soon be less, if thou addest not more to it. Thou art upon a swift stream; let thy oar miss its stroke, and thou fallest backward. There is not such a thing in religion as a saving trade of godliness. Some men in their worldly trade can say at the year's end they have neither got nor lost; but *thou* canst

not say thus at the day's end. Thou art at night better or worse than thou wert in the morning.

(c) It is the design of the gospel to give grace in great measures. Christ gives life, 'and that more abundantly,' John 10:10. Now shall the fountain be so large, and the pitcher we carry to it so little? Wherefore doth God open his hand to such a breadth in the promise, but to widen our desires and encourage our endeavours?

(d) The more grace thou hast got, the easier it will be to add to it. A little learning with more difficulty by a young scholar, than a great deal more afterwards.

3. *Duty. Bear with one another's imperfections.* You see the gospel is a mystery, do not wonder therefore that any are not presently masters of their art. Christ bears with the saints' imperfections; well may the saints one with another. How raw were the disciples in their knowledge—how long did they stand at one lesson before they could learn it! 'Do you now believe?' says Christ, John 16:31. He had borne with them long, and inculcated the same thing often, before it entered their minds; yet, alas! we can hardly have a good opinion of, or hold communion with, those that are not every way of our judgment, and cannot see things so clear as ourselves. Surely we mistake the nature of the gospel, as if there were none but plain points in it. Blessed be God, as to the principles necessary to salvation, though their nature be high and mysterious, yet they are clearly and plainly asserted in the word. 'Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness,' 1 Tim. 3:16. Godliness is a mystery, but it is 'without controversy.' As to the main fundamental points and practices of it there is no dispute among the faithful; but there are some points more remote from the vital parts of religion that have knots not easily untied, which makes some difference of judgment. But it is not every excess or defect makes a monster—as six or four fingers on the hand—but an excess or defect in some principal part; neither doth every mistake make a monster in religion. Remember that the gospel is a mystery, and you will bear with one another's ignorance the better. And, when love hath once laid the dust which passion and prejudice hath blown into our eyes, we shall then stand at greater advantage for finding out truth.

Again, bear with weaknesses in the practical part of religion. Godliness, as well as

the doctrine of our faith, is a mystery. All the servants in a shop cannot work alike. Some bungle at more than other—as their parts and experience are less. All saints are not of a height. Christ hath some children in his family that are led with strings, as well as others that go strongly without such help. Some act more upon pure gospel principle—love, and a spirit of adoption; others have not yet worn off their legal fears and terrors. Some are got higher up the hill of faith, and have clearer apprehensions of their spiritual state; others are nearer the bottom, who, as the sun newly risen above the horizon, are wrapped up with many clouds of perplexing fears and doubts. In a word, some are got further out of their passions, have greater mastery over their corruptions, than other of their brethren. Pity thy weak brother, and take him by the hand for his help; but despise him not, God can make even him stand, and suffer thee to fall. Christ doth not quench the smoking flax, why should we? The weak Christian is welcome to his heavenly Father, as well as the strong; why should he not be so to his brethren? But, alas! the proverb here is too true, ‘Better speak to the master than the man; the father, than the child.’ Those that can be so bold with God, dare not be free with their fellow-servants and brethren.

4. *Duty.* Is the gospel a mystery? Then Christian, *long for heaven*; there, and only there, shall this mystery be fully known. The great things which were spoken concerning the gospel church made many saints and prophets before Christ’s time desire to see those happy times wherein such revelations should be made; how much more should we long for heaven, where this great mystery shall be fully opened, and every box of this cabinet unlocked, in which lie so many precious jewels to this day unseen by any saint on earth! Then it will be said, ‘The mystery of God is finished,’ Rev. 10:7. Here we learn our knowledge of it by little and little, like one that reads a book as it comes from the press, sheet by sheet; there we shall see it altogether. Here we get a little light from this sermon, a little more from the next, and thus our stock increases by the addition of a few pence thrown in, some to-day, and more to-morrow; but there we shall have all at once. Here we learn with much pain and difficulty; there without travail and trouble. Glorified saints, though they


cease not from work, yet rest from labour. Here passion blinds our minds, that we mistake error for truth and truth for error; but then these clouds shall be scattered and gone. Here the weakness of natural parts keeps many in the dark, and renders them incapable of apprehending some truths, which other of their brethren are led into; but there the strong shall not prevent the weak, the scholar shall know as much as his master, the people as their minister. Here the squabbles and contentions among the godly do leave the weaker sort at great uncertainty what to think concerning many truths; but there they shall all agree—which comforted that holy man on his death-bed, that he was going thither where Luther and Calvin were reconciled. Here we are disturbed in our inquiries after truth—one while the necessary occasions of this world divert us, another while the weakness and infirmities of our bodies hinder us; but in heaven our bodies will call for none of this tending, we shall need provide neither raiment for the back nor food for the belly.

O happy death, that will ease us of all the aches of our bodies and conflicts in our souls! Thou art the only physician to cure all the saints’ distempers in both. When that blessed hour comes, then lift up your heads with joy, for it will lead you into that blissful place where you shall see Christ, not a great way off, with the eye of faith in the optic glass of an ordinance or promise, but, with a glorified eye, behold his very person, never more to lose the sight of him. Thou shalt not taste his love in a little morsel of sacramental bread and sip of wine, but lay thy mouth to the fountain, and from his bosom drink thy full draught. Thou shalt no more hear what a glorious place heaven is, as thou wert wont to have it set forth by the sorry rhetoric of a mortal man preaching to thee of that with which himself was but little acquainted; but shalt walk thyself in the streets of that glorious city, and bless thyself when thou art there, to think what poor low thoughts thou and thy minister also had thereof, when on earth thou didst meditate, and he did preach, on this subject. One moment’s sight of that glory will inform thee more than all the comments and books written of it were ever able to do. And dost thou not yet cry out, How long will it be, O Lord, most holy and true, before thou bringest me thither? Is not every hour a day,

day a month, month a year, yea age, till that time comes? As Bernard, upon those words, 'A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me,' John 16:16, passionately breaks forth—*pie Domine, modicum illud vocas, in quo te non videam? O modicum, modicum longum*—holy Lord, dost thou call that a little while in which I shall not see thee? O this little is a long little while!

[Exhortation to study the mystery of the gospel.]

*Use Third.* Be you provoked, who are yet *strangers to this mystery, to get the knowledge of it*—yea, endeavour to gain an intimate acquaintance with it. To move you thereunto, I shall make use of the TWO ARGUMENTS: 1. Consider the Author of this mystery. 2. The subject-matter of it.

1. *Argument.* Consider *the Author of the mystery of the gospel*. That book must needs be worth the reading which hath God for the author; that mystery deserves our knowledge which is the product of his infinite wisdom and love. There is a divine glory sitting upon the face of all God's works. It is impossible so excellent an artist should put his hand to an ignoble work. 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all,' Ps. 104:24. But there is not the same glory to be seen in all his works. Our apostle tells us 'there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon; one star differs from another in glory.' Now, among all the works of God that of man's redemption may well pass for the master-piece. The world itself was set up to be a stage for the acting of this piece of providence, wherein —'the manifold wisdom of God,' is so curiously wrought, that angels themselves pry into it, and are wrapped up into an admiration of it, Eph. 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12. God's works deserve our study, and those most wherein he hath drawn the clearest portraiture of himself. The gospel mystery therefore, above all other, should be searched into by us, being the only glass in which the glory of God is with open face to be seen.

2. *Argument.* Consider *the subject-matter of the gospel*—Christ, and the way of salvation through him. What poor and low ends have all worldly mysteries! one to make us rich, another to make us great and honourable in the world,

but none to make us holy here or happy hereafter;—this is learned only from the knowledge of Christ, who is revealed in the gospel, and nowhere else. No doubt Solomon's natural history, in which he treated 'of all trees from the cedar to the hyssop, of all beasts, fowls, and creeping things,' was a rare piece in its kind; yet one leaf of the gospel is infinitely more worth to us than all that large volume would have been;—so much more precious, by how much the knowledge of God in Christ is better than the knowledge of beasts and birds. And we have reason to think it a mercy that the book is lost and laid out of our sight, which we should have been prone to have studied more than the Bible; not that it was better, but more suitable to the mould of our carnal minds. But, to a gracious soul, enlightened with saving knowledge, no book to this of the Bible. Paul was a bred scholar; he wanted not that learning which commends men to the world, yet counts all dung and dog's meat in comparison of 'the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord,' Php. 3:8. Well might he call it dog's meat; for a man may feed all his lifetime on human learning, and die, in Scripture sense, a dog at last. It was the saying of Bonaventure, that he had rather lose all his philosophy than one article of his faith. We read that those, Acts 19, were no sooner converted but they burned their books of curious arts. Neither were they losers by it; for they had got acquaintance with one book that was worth them all.

Of all creatures in this visible world, light is the most glorious; of all light, the light of the sun without compare excels the rest. Were this eye of the world put out, the earth would be a grot, a grave, in which we should be buried alive. What were the Egyptians while under the plague of darkness but like so many dead men? they had friends, but could not see them; estates abroad in the fields, but could not enjoy them. Now what is the sun to the sensible world, that is Christ in the gospel to the intellectual world of souls. Without this 'light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ,' what can the soul do or enjoy aright? Man's soul is of high, yea royal extraction, for God is 'the Father of spirits;' but this child meets his heavenly Father in the dark, and knows him not: 'He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not,' John 1:10. And as it is of high birth, so

intended for a high end, to glorify and enjoy God its Maker. Now, for want of the knowledge of Christ it can do neither, but debaseth itself to the drudgery of sin and sensual embraces of the creature instead of God, for whom it was at first made; like the son of some great prince, who, not knowing his royal descent, casts himself away in marriage on some beggar's daughter. O how should we prize and study this mystery therefore that brings us to the true knowledge of God, and the way how we may recover our interest in him and happiness with him! Man's primitive happiness consisted in God's love to him and his likeness to God. The gospel discovers a way how man may be restored to both. The first it doth, as it is a mystery of faith, by revealing Christ and his atonement for our reconciliation with God; the latter, as it is a mystery of godliness, and the instrument with Christ useth in the hand of his Spirit to create man anew, and as it were the tool to re-engrave the image of God upon him with.

*Question.* But how may we be led into the saving knowledge of this mystery?

(1.) Think not how to obtain it by the strength of thy reason or natural parts. It is not learned as other secrets in nature or human arts, of which those that have the most piercing wit and strongest brain soonest get the mastery. None have been more mistaken, or erred more foully in their apprehensions about gospel truths, than the greatest scholars, sons of reason, and men admired for their parts and learning; the cause whereof may be partly their pride and self-confidence, which God ever was and will be an enemy to; and also because the mysteries of the gospel do not suit and jump with the principles of carnal reason and wisdom. Whence it comes to pass that the wiser part of the world, as they are counted, have commonly rejected the grand principles of evangelical faith as absurd and irrational. Tell a wise Arian that Christ is God and man in one person, and he laughs at it, as they did at Paul when he mentioned the resurrection of the body, Acts 17:32, because the key of his understanding fits not the wards of this lock. When a merit-monger hears of being justified by faith, and not by works, it will not go down with him. It seems as ridiculous to him that a man should be justified by the righteousness which another fulfills, as for a man to live by the meat another eats, and be warm with the clothes

another wears. Tell him, when he hath lived never so holily, he must renounce his own work, and be beholden to another's merit; you shall as soon persuade him to sell his estate, to get his living by begging at another's door. These are 'hard sayings,' at which they take offence, and go away, or labour to pervert the simplicity of gospel revelation to their own sense. Resolve therefore to come, when thou readest the gospel, not to dispute with thy Maker, but to believe what he reveals to be his mind. Call not divine mysteries to give an account to thy shallow understanding. What is this but to try a prince at a subject's bar? When thou hast laid aside the pride of thy reason, then thou art fit to be admitted a scholar in Christ's school, and not till then.

*Objection.* But must we cease to be men when we become Christians?

*Answer.* No; we cease not to be men, but to be proud men, when we lay aside the confidence of our own understanding to acquiesce in the wisdom and truth of God. An implicit faith is absurd and irrational when a man requires it of us, who may deceive or be deceived in what he saith. But when God speaks, it is all the reason in the world we should believe what he saith to be true, though we cannot comprehend what he saith; for we know he who is infinite wisdom cannot himself be deceived, and he who is truth and faithfulness will not deceive us.

(2.) Thou must *become a disciple to Christ*. Men do not teach strangers that pass by their door, or that come into their shops the mystery of their trade and profession; but their servants, and such as are willing to be bound apprentices to them. Neither doth Christ promise to reveal the mysteries of the gospel to any but those that will give up their names to be his servants and disciples: 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables,' Mark 4:11. When once thou hast subscribed to the covenant of the gospel, thy indenture is sealed, Christ is now thy master he takes thee for one of his family and charge, and so will look to thy breeding and education; but for those on whose hearts and affections he hath no hold, they come may be to the ordinance, but, when the sermon is done, return to their old master again. Sin is still their trade,

and Satan their lord; is it like that Christ should teach them his trade? The mystery of iniquity and of godliness are contrary; the one cannot be learned till the other be unlearned.

(3.) If thou wouldst learn this mystery to any purpose, *content not thyself with a brain-notional knowledge of it.* The gospel hath respect both to the head and heart—understanding and will. To the understanding it is a mystery of faith; to the heart and life it is a mystery of godliness. Now these two must not be severed: ‘Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience,’ 1 Tim. 3:9. Here is both the manna, and a golden pot to keep it in—truth laid up in a pure conscience. Knowledge may make thee a scholar, but not a saint; orthodox, but not gracious. What if thou wert able to write a commentary on all the Bible, and from the Scripture couldst confute all the errors and heresies which were at any time broached and vented against the truth; what would this avail thee, when thy own lusts confute, yea confound, thyself? ‘If I understand all mysteries,...and have not charity, I am nothing,’ 1 Cor. 13:2. He that increaseth knowledge, and doth not get grace with his knowledge, increaseth sorrow to himself, yea, eternal sorrow. It would be an ease to gospel sinners in hell if they could rase the remembrance of the gospel out of their memories, and forget that they ever knew such truths. In thy knowledge therefore of gospel mysteries, labour for these two things especially:

(a) To see *thy propriety in them.* Herein lies the pith and marrow of gospel knowledge. When thou findest what Christ hath done and suffered for poor sinners, rest not till thou canst say with Paul ‘who loved me, and gave himself for me,’ Gal. 2:20. When thou readest any precious promise, thou shouldst ask thy own soul, as the eunuch did Philip concerning that place of Isaiah, ‘Is it spoken to me, or of some other?’ Am I the pardoned person? Am I one in Christ Jesus, to whom there is no condemnation? How impatient were those two prisoners till Joseph had opened their dream, that they might know what should befall them! The Scripture will resolve you whether your head shall be lift up to the gibbet in hell, or to the king's court in heaven. Now in reading or hearing it preached, this is it thou shouldst listen after and inquire to know—where it lays thee out thy portion, whether in the promise or in the

threatening. There is a sweet feast the gospel speaks of, but am I one of Christ's guests that shall sit at it? There are mansions prepared in heaven, but can I find one taken up for me there?

(b) Labour to find the power and efficacy of *gospel truths upon thee.* When our first parents had eaten that unhappy fruit which gave them and all mankind in them their bane, it is said then ‘they knew that they were naked;’ doubtless they knew it before their fall, but now they knew it with shame; they knew it, and sought for clothes to cover them, of which they found no want before. I only allude to the place. Many know what sin is, but it is not a soul-feeling knowledge: they know they are naked, but are not ashamed for their nakedness; they see no need of Christ's righteousness to cover it, and of his grace to cure it. Many know Christ died, and for what he died; but Christ's death is a dead truth to them, it doth not procure the death of their lusts that were the death of him. They know he is risen, but they lie still themselves rotting in the grave of their corruptions. They know Christ is ascended to heaven, but this draws not their souls after him. A philosopher, being asked what he had got by philosophy, answered, ‘It hath learned me to contemn what others adore, and to bear what others cannot endure.’ If one should ask, What have you got by knowing the mystery of the gospel? Truly you can give no account worthy of your acquaintance with it, except you can say, I have learned to believe what flesh and blood could never believe have taught me, and to do what I never could, till I had acquaintance with its heavenly truths. This is to know ‘the truth as it is in Jesus,’ Eph. 4:21. Had a sick man drunk some potion—which if it works will save his life, if not, will certainly be his death—O how troubled would he be while [until] he sees some operation it hath upon him! what means would he not use to set it awork! If gospel truths work not effectually on thee for thy renovation and sanctification, thou art a lost man; they will undoubtedly be ‘a savour of death’ to thee. O how can you then rest till you find them transforming your hearts and assimilating your lives to their heavenly nature! Thus Paul endeavoured to know the power of Christ's resurrection quickening him to a holy life here, without which he could not attain to a joyful

resurrection hereafter, Php. 3:10, 11. The gospel is a glass, but not like that in which we see our bodily face. This only shows what our feature is, and leaves it as it was; but that changeth the very complexion of the soul 'from glory to glory,' II Cor. 3:18.

*[The minister's duty to make known the gospel.]*

SECOND OBSERVABLE. Wherein lies the work of a gospel minister—'to make known the mystery of the gospel.' You have had the sublime nature of the gospel set forth: it is a mystery. Here the minister's work is laid out; he is with all possible clearness and perspicuity to open this mystery and expose it to the view of the people. Mark, 'the gospel' is his subject, and 'to make it known' is his duty. So runs the minister's commission for his office, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,' Mark 16:15. We hear people sometimes saying, The preacher is beside his text; but he is never beside his errand so long as it is the gospel he makes known. Whatever is his text, this is to be his design. His commission is to make known the gospel; to deliver that therefore which is not reductive to this is beside his instructions. Nothing but the preaching of the gospel can reach the end for which the gospel ministry was appointed, and that is the salvation of souls, 'After that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,' I Cor. 1:21. The great book of the creation had lain long enough open before the world's eyes, yet could they never come to the saving knowledge of God, by all that divine wisdom which is written with the finger of God in every page thereof. Therefore it pleased God to send his servants, that by preaching the gospel, poor souls might believe on Christ, and believing might be saved. No doctrine but the gospel can save a soul; nor the gospel itself, except it be made known.

*[The gospel alone can save a soul,  
and this only when known.]*

*First.* No doctrine but the gospel *can save a soul.* Galen may learn you to save your health if you will follow his rules. Littleton and other law-books will teach you how to save your estates. Plato and other philosophers will learn you how

to save your credits among men, by an outward just inoffensive life. Their doctrine will be a means to save you from many nasty and gross sins, by which you may be applauded by your neighbours on earth, and perhaps less tormented in hell, where Fabricius finds a cooler place than Cataline. But it is the gospel alone whereby you can be taught how to save your souls from hell and bring them to heaven. But what do I speak of these? It is not God's own law—the moral, I mean—that is now able to save you. God would never have been at such a vast expense—in the bloodshed of his Son—to erect another law, viz. the law of faith, if that would have served for this purpose; Gal. 2:21, 'for if righteousness come'—yea, or could come—'by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.'

*Question.* Why then do ministers preach the law?

*Answer.* They preach it as they should, they preach it *in subserviency to the gospel, not in opposition.* *Qui scit benè distinguere inter legem et evangelium, Deo gratias agat, et sciat se esse theologum*—he that knows how to distinguish well between the law and the gospel, let him bless God, and know that he then deserves the name of a divine. We must preach it as a rule, not as a covenant, of life. Holiness, as to the matter and substance of it, is the same that ever it was. The gospel destroys not the law in this sense, but adds a strong enforcement to all its commands.

Again, we may and must preach the law as the necessary means to drive souls out of themselves to Christ in the gospel. The gospel is the net with which we should catch souls and draw them out of their sinning sinking state. But how shall we ever get them to come into it? Truly never. Except we first beat the river with the law's clubs—threatenings, I mean—sinners lie in their lusts, as fish in the mud, out of which there is no getting them but by laying hard upon their consciences with the threatenings of the law. 'Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound,' Rom. 5:20; that is, in the conscience by conviction, not in life by commission and practice. The law shows both what is sin, and also what sin is. I mean it tells when we commit a sin, and what a hateful and dangerous thing we do in committing of it—how we alarm God, and bring him with all his strength into the field against us. Now this is necessary to

prepare a way for the sinner's entertaining the gospel. The needle must enter before the thread with which the cloth is sewed. The sharp point of the law must prick the conscience before the creature can by the promises of the gospel be drawn to Christ. The field is not fit for the seed to be cast into it till the plough hath broken it up. Nor is the soul prepared to receive the mercy of the gospel till broken with the terrors of the law.

*Second.* The gospel itself saves not, *except it be made known*. 'If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost,' II Cor. 4:3. Where God sends no light, he intends no love. In bodily sickness a physician may make a cure, though his patient knows not what the medicine is that he useth. But the soul must know its remedy before he can have any healing benefit from it. John is sent 'to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,' Luke 1:77. No knowledge, no remission. Christ must be lift up on the pole of the gospel, as well as on the tree of the cross, that by an eye of faith we may look on him, and so be healed, John 3:14<sup>ccxxxii</sup>. 'Look unto me, and be ye saved,' Isa. 45:22. A man that sees may lead another that is bodily blind to the place he would go. But he that would go to heaven must have an eye in his own head to see his way, or else he will never come there. 'The just shall live by his faith,' Hab. 2:4, not by another's. A proxy faith is bootless. Now saving faith is a grace that sees her object; it is 'the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. 11:1; that is, which are not seen by sense. 'I know,' saith Paul, 'whom I have believed,' II Tim. 1:12. Therefore faith is oft set out by knowledge: 'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent,' John 17:3. Now, how can they know Christ and life eternal, till the gospel be made known, which bringeth him and life by him to light? II Tim. 1:10. And by whom shall the gospel be made known if not by the ministers of it? Thus far the apostle drives it: 'How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?' Rom. 10:14. So that this great work lies at the minister's door. He is to 'make known the mystery of the gospel.'

*Objection.* But what need now of preaching? this was the work of those that were

to plant a church. Now the church is planted and the gospel made known, this labour may be spared.

*Answer.* The ministry of the gospel was not intended *only to plant a church, but to carry on its growth also*. What Paul plants, Apollos comes after and waters with his ministry, I Cor. 3:6. When the foundation is laid, must not the house be built? And this Christ gave ministers to his church for, 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,' Eph. 4:12. The scaffold is not taken down till the building be finished, but rather to raised higher and higher as the fabric goes up. Thus Paul went on in his ministry from lower points to higher, from foundation to superstrucory truths, Heb 6:1. A famous church was planted at Thessalonica, but there was something 'lacking in their faith,' which Paul longed to come and carry on to further perfection I Thes. 3:10. Surely they that think there is so little need of preaching, forget that the gospel is a mystery—such a mystery as can never be fully taught by the minister or learned by the people; neither do they consider how many engineers Satan hath at work continually to undermine the gospel, both as it is a mystery of faith and godliness also. Hath not he his seedsmen that are always scattering corrupt doctrine? Surely then the faithful minister had need obviate their designs by making known the truth, that his people may not want an antidote to fortify them against their poison. Are their not corruptions in the bosoms of the best, and daily temptations from Satan and the world to draw these forth, whereby they are always in danger, and oft sadly foiled? In a word, is not grace planted in a cold soil, that needs cherishing from a gospel ministry? Do we not see, that what is got in one Sabbath by the preaching of the word, is, if not lost, yet much impaired, by the next? Truly our hearts are like lean ground, that needs ever and anon a shower or else the corn on it withers and changeth its hue. O what barren heaths would the most flourishing churches soon prove if these clouds did not drop upon them! The Christians to whom Peter wrote were of a high form, no novices, but well grounded and rooted in the faith; yet this did not spare the apostle his further pains: 'I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be



established in the present truth,' II Peter 1:12.

## USE OR APPLICATION.

[*Reproof and encouragement to ministers.*]

*Use First. To the ministers.* To reprove some; for encouragement to others. It reproveth,

1. The *vainglorious preachers*; that, instead of 'making known the mystery of the gospel,' makes it his errand into the pulpit to make himself known; who blows up his sermon, as butchers do their flesh they sell, with a windy pomp of words, and frames their discourse rather to tickle their ears, than to profit their souls; to send them home applauding the preacher for his wit and parts, rather than admiring the excellencies of Christ and riches of his grace. Thus many, alas! who should be factors for Christ, play the merchants for their own credit. They are sent to woo souls for Christ, and they speak one word for him and two for themselves. This is a great wickedness, which blessed Paul solemnly clears himself of, 'Nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, I Thes. 2:5, 6. O how seldom are any converted by such sermons! These *gloriæ animalia*—vainglorious preachers, they may be, like Rachel, fair, but their ministry is like to be barren.

2. *Abstruse preachers*; who do not make the mysteries of the gospel known, but make truths plain in themselves mysterious by their dark perplexed discourses upon them. This was the unhappiness of the schoolmen, that ruffled and ensnarled the plainest truths of the gospel with their harsh terms and nice questions, which else might have been wound off by an ordinary understanding. What is said of some commentators, 'The places on which they treat were plain till they expounded them,' may be said of some preachers, their text was clear till their obscure discourse upon it darkened it. What greater wrong can a preacher do his hearers than this? The preacher is to open scriptures; but these turn the key the wrong way, and lock the up from their knowledge. They are to hold up the gospel glass before their people, whereby they may see to dress their souls, like a bride, against their husband's coming; but by that time that they have breathed on their text, it

is so obscured that they cannot see their face in it. That water is not the deepest that is thickest and muddy; nor the matter always the most profound when the preacher's expression is dark and obscure. We count it a blemish in speech, when a man's pronunciation is not distinct. I know not then how it should come to be thought a perfection to be obscure in the delivery of our conceptions. The deeper and fuller the sculpture in the seal is, the clearer the impression will be on the wax. The more fully any man understands a thing, the more able he will be to deliver it plainly to others. As a clipped stammering speech comes from an impediment in the instruments of speech, so a dark and obscure delivery of our thoughts bewrays a defect in our apprehensions; except it should come from an affectation of soaring high in our expressions above the reach of vulgar understandings—and this is worst of all.


3. The mere *moral preacher*; the stream of whose preaching runs not in an evangelical channel. Moral duties he presseth, and sins against the moral law he exclaims against. Neither dare I blame him for that. The Christian's creed doth not vacate the ten commandments. One of the first sermons our Saviour preached was most of it spent in pressing moral duties Matt. 5. And never more need to drive this nail to the head than in our days, in which Christianity hath been so wounded in its reputation by the moral dishonesty of many of its professors. But I level my reproof against them for this, that they do not preach the law evangelically, and make that the main design of their ministry for which they received their commission, and that is, 'to make known the mystery of the gospel'—'to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ,' Eph. 3:8, 9. Did it make the father undervalue Cicero's works—which otherwise he admired for their eloquence—only because his leaves were not perfumed with the sweet name of Jesus Christ? Surely then it is a foul blot upon their sermons and labours, who reveal little of Christ and the mystery of the gospel through the whole course of their ministry. The woe is pronounced not only against the non-preaching minister, but the not-gospel-preaching minister

also: 'Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel,' 1 Cor. 9:16. An ethic lecture will not make thy people 'wise unto salvation.' It were well if thou couldst preach thy drunken neighbour sober and the riotous temperate. But this is no more than Plato did for his Polemo. This may make them men that were before beasts; but thou must get them to be saints, regenerate ones; preach them out of themselves, as well as out of their flagitious practices; from the confidence of their righteousness, as well as from the love of their sins; or else thou leavest them short of heaven. Well then, smoke, yea fire, them out of their moral wickednesses, by the threatenings of the law; but rest not till thou hast acquainted them with Christ, and the way of salvation by him. In a word, preach moral duties as much as thou wilt, but in an evangelical strain. Convince them they cannot do these without grace from Christ, for want of which the heathens' virtues were but *splendida peccata*—gilded vices. *Per fidem venit ad opera, non per opera venit ad fidem*—we must come to good works by faith, and not to faith by good works. The tree must be good before the fruit it bears can be so. 'Without me ye can do nothing.' And then convince them, when they are most exact in moral duties, that this must not be their righteousness before God; the robe which they must cover their souls with—if they would not be found naked in his sight—must not be the homespun garment of their own inherent righteousness wrought in them, but of Christ's righteousness which he wrought for them.

It affords a word of *sweet encouragement to the faithful ministers of Christ*. Haply you have been long at work for Christ, and see little fruit of your labours; your strength is even spent, and candle almost at the socket of old age; but your people are still carnal and obstinate, no sun will tan them, no arguments move them, filthy they are, and so will continue; to hell they will go, no gate can stop them; thou hast done thy utmost to reclaim them, but all in vain. This is sad indeed—to them, I mean—thus to go to hell by broad daylight, while the gospel shows the whither every step of their sinful course leads them. But thou hast cause of much inward peace and comfort, that thou hast done what God expects at thy hands. Remember thy work is, 'To make known the mystery of the gospel,' and upon their peril be it if they embrace it not. God never laid it upon thee to convert those he

sends thee to. No; to publish the gospel is thy duty, to receive it is theirs. Abraham promiseth to discharge his servant of his oath, if the woman which he was to woo for his son would not follow him; and so will God clear thee of their blood, and lay it at their own door. 'If thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness,...he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul,' Eze. 3:19. God judgeth not of his servants' work by the success of their labour, but by their faithfulness to deliver his message. 'Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord,' Isa. 49:5.

[*The duty of the people to make known the gospel.*]

*Use Second. To the people.* As it is the minister's task to make known the mystery of the gospel in his pulpit, so your duty to do the same in your lives. The Christian's life should put his minister's sermon in print; he should preach that mystery every day to the eyes of his neighbours, which the minister preacheth once or twice a week to their ears. As a true-made dial agrees with the sun in its motion, and as a well-drawn picture resembles the face from which it was taken, so should thy conversation resemble that gospel which thou professest. Let none have cause to say, what once did of some loose Christians, *aut hoc non est evangelium, aut hi non sunt evangelici*—either this is not the gospel, or these are not its subjects. What hast thou to do with any sordid and impure practices, who pretendest to be instructed in this high and holy mystery? Thy Christian name ill agrees with a heathen life. If thou sufferest any that is not of thy profession to outstrip thee, yea but to keep pace with thee, in any action that is virtuous and truly honourable, thou shamest thyself and the gospel also. What a shame were it to find one in some trivial country school that should be able to pose a graduate in the university! Thou art trained up in such high and heavenly learning as no other religion in the world can show, and therefore your lives are to bear proportion to your teaching. It was a sharp reproof to the Corinthian saints, when the apostle said, —'ye walk as men,' 1 Cor. 3:3; that is, men in a natural state. And he that walks thus like men, will not walk much


























unlike the very beasts; for man is become brutish in his understanding, and it is worse to live like a beast than to be a beast.


Surely, Christians, if you have not your name for nought, you partake of a nature higher than human. Your feet should stand where other men's heads are; you should live as far above the carnal world as grace is above nature, as heaven is above earth. Christ would never have stooped beneath angels, but to raise your hearts and lives above men. He would never have humbled himself to take the human nature, but on a design to make us partakers of the divine; nor would he have walked on earth, but to make a way to elevate our hearts to heaven. Say not, therefore, flesh and blood cannot bear such an injury or for bear such a sensual pleasure. Either thou art more than a man, or less than a Christian. Flesh and blood never revealed the gospel to thee, flesh and blood never received Christ; in a word, flesh and blood shall never enter into the kingdom of God. If thou beest a Christian, thou art baptized into the spirit of the gospel; thou hast a heaven-born nature, and that will enable thee to do more than flesh and blood can do. Hast thou no desire to see others converted by the gospel? Wouldst thou steal to heaven alone, and carry none of thy neighbours with thee? Now, how shalt thou win them into a good opinion of the gospel, but by such an amiable life as may commend it unto their consciences? It was a charge long ago laid upon Christianity, that it was better known 'in leaves of books than in the lives of Christians.' From hence it is, that many are hardened in their wickedness and prejudice against the gospel. He is an unwise fisherman that scareth away the fish which he desires to get within his net. O offend not those, by scandals in thy life, whom thou wouldst have converted by the preaching of the gospel. There is now-a-days, saith one, much talk, as if the time for the Jews' conversion were at hand; but, saith he, the loose lives of Christians do so disparage this heavenly mystery, that the time seems further off. Indeed, the purity of Christians' lives is the best attractive to win others to the love of religion. Had Christ's doves more sweet spices of humility, charity, patience, and other heavenly graces, in their wings, as they fly about the world, they would soon bring more company home with them to the church's lockers. This is the gold that should

overlay the temple of Christ's church, and would make others in love with its beauty. This was one happy means for the incredible increase of converts in the primitive times. Then the mystery of the gospel was made known, not only by the apostles' powerful preaching, but by Christians' holy living. See how they walked, Acts 2:46; and what was the blessed fruit of it 'They had favour with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved,' ver. 47. It would tempt any almost but a devil—who loves to live in the fire of contention, and is desperately hardened against all goodness—to have entered their names into such a heavenly society; but when this gold grew dim, then the gospel began to lose its credit in the world, and consequently its takings. Converts came in slower when those that professed the gospel began to cool in their zeal and slacken in the strictness of their lives.

[The minister is to declare the gospel WITH BOLDNESS.]

THIRD OBSERVABLE. The *manner* how the gospel minister is to perform his work—'*that I may open my mouth boldly.*' We must inquire:—*First.* What this boldness is the apostle desires prayers for. *Second.* Wherein the minister is to express the boldness in preaching the gospel. *Third.* What kind of boldness it is that he must show. *Fourth.* Some helps to procure boldness.

*First.* What this boldness is the apostle desires prayers for. The words are                            

boldness, 'Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech,'  'we use great boldness;' so your margin II Cor. 3:12.


*Second.* Wherein the minister is to *show this boldness in preaching the gospel.*

1. In *asserting the truths of the gospel.* He is not to smother truth for the face or fear of any. Ministers are called witnesses. A witness is to speak what he knows, though it be in open court before the greatest of men. Paul had a free tongue to speak the truth, even in prison, though he was in bonds, yet he tells us 'the word of God is not bound,' II Tim. 2:9. Some truths will go down easily; to preach these requires no boldness. The worst in the congregation will give the preacher thanks for his pains upon some subject; but there are displeasing truths, truths that cross the opinion, may be, of some in the assembly; to preach these requires a free and bold spirit. When Christ was to preach before the Pharisees, he was not afraid to preach against their errors. Had some wary preacher been to have stood in his place, he would have pitched upon such a subject as should not have offended their tender ears. There are truths that expose the preacher to scorn and derision, yet not to be concealed. Paul preached the resurrection, though some in the assembly mocked him for his pains. There are truths that sometimes may expose the minister to danger—truths that carry the cross at their back. Such was that truth that Isaiah delivered concerning the rejection of the Jews. 'But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not,' Rom. 10:20. This was like to enrage his countrymen, and bring their fists about his ears. We read of a 'word of patience' which we are to keep, Rev. 3:10. Such a word as the preacher had need have good store of patience that delivers it, and Christians that profess it, because it may bring them into trouble, and draw the persecutor's sword against them. This is not always the same. The word of patience in the apostle's time was truths levelled against Judaism and heathenism; under the Arian emperors, it was the deity of Christ; in Luther's time the doctrine of justification, and others asserted by him against the Romish church.

2. Boldness in *reproving sin, and denouncing judgment against impenitent sinners.* They are

commanded 'to lift up their voice like a trumpet, and tell Jerusalem her sins.' 'Preach the word,' saith Paul; 'be instant in season, and out of season; reprove, rebuke with all long-suffering.' He must reprove, and continue therein while they continue to sin. The dog ceaseth not to bark so long as the thief is in the yard. A minister without this boldness is like a smooth file, a knife without an edge, a sentinel that is afraid to let off his gun when he should alarm the city upon a danger approaching. Nothing more unworthy to see a people bold to sin and the minister afraid to reprove. It is said of Tacitus that he took the same liberty to write the emperor's lives that they took in leading them. So should the minister in reproofing sin, be they who they will. Not the beggar's sin, and spare the gentleman's; not the profane, and skip over the professor's sin. It was all one to Christ; whoever sinned should hear of it. The scribes and Pharisees, them he paid to purpose; neither connives he at his own disciples, but rebukes them sharply. 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' saith he to Peter; 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?' to his own mother for her unseasonable importunity.

*Third.* What *kind of boldness must the minister's be.*

1. A *convincing boldness.* 'How forcible are right words?' saith Job; and how feeble are empty words, though shot with a thundering voice? Great words in reproofing an error or sin, but weak arguments, produce laughter oftener than tears. Festus thought it 'unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him,' Acts 25:27. Much more unreasonable is it in the pulpit to condemn an error and not prove it so; a practice and not convince of the evil of it. The apostle saith of some, 'Their mouths must be stopped,' Titus 1:11. They are convincing arguments that must stop the mouth. Empty reproofs will soon open the mouths of those that are reproofed, wider, than shut them. The Spirit of God reproofs by convincing, 'And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin,' , John 16:8, he will convince; and so should the minister. This is to preach in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit.

2. A *wise boldness.* The minister is to reprove the sins of all, but to personate none. Paul, being to preach before a lascivious and unrighteous prince, touched him to the quick, but

did not name him in his sermon. Felix's conscience would save Paul that labour; he 'trembled,' though Paul did not say he meant him.

3. A *meek boldness*. 'The words of wise men are heard in quiet,' Ecc. 9:17. Let the reproof be as sharp as thou wilt, but thy spirit must be meek. Passion raiseth the blood of him that is reproved, but compassion turns his bowels. The oil in which the nail is dipped makes it drive the easier, which otherwise have riven the board. We must not denounce wrath in wrath, lest sinners think we wish their misery; but rather with such tenderness, that they may see it is no pleasing work to us to rake in their wounds, but do it, that we might not by a cruel silence and foolish pity be accessory to their ruin, which we cordially desire to prevent. Jeremiah sounds the alarm of judgment, and tells them of a dismal calamity approaching; yet at the same time appeals to God, and clears himself of all cruelty towards them: 'I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before thee,' Jer. 17:16. As if he had said, I have delivered my message in denouncing judgment (for I durst do no other), but it was with a merciful heart; I threatened ruin, but wished for peace. Thus Daniel, he dealt plainly and roundly with the king, but ushers in his hard message with an affectionate expression of his love and loyalty to him: 'My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies,' Dan. 4:19.

4. A *humble boldness*; such a boldness as is raised from a confidence in God, not from ourselves, or our own parts and ability, courage or stoutness. Paul is bold, and yet can tremble and be in fear; bold, in confidence of his God: 'We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention,' 1 Thes. 2:2; but full of fear in the sense of his own weakness: 'I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,' 1 Cor. 2:3.

5. A *zealous boldness*. Our reproofs of sin must come from a warm heart. Paul's spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city given to idolatry. Jeremiah tells us 'the word of God was as fire in his bones;' it broke out of his mouth as the flame out of a furnace. The word is a hammer, but it breaks not the flinty heart when lightly laid on. King James said of a minister in

his time, he preached as if death was at his back. Ministers should set forth judgment as if it were at the sinner's back, ready to take hold of him. Cold reproofs or threatenings, they are like the rumblings of thunder afar off, which affright not as a clap over our head doth. I told you the minister's boldness must be meek and merciful, but not to prejudice zeal. The physician may sweeten his pill to make his patient to swallow it better; but not to such a degree as will weaken the force of its operation.

*Fourth.* We promised to propound *some helps to procure this boldness*.

1. A *holy fear of God*. We fear man so much because we fear God so little. One fear cures another as one fire draws out another. When your finger is burned you hold it to the fire; when man's terror scares you, turn your thoughts to meditate on the wrath of God. This is the plaster God lays to Jeremiah's wrists to cure his anguish distemper of man's fear. 'Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them,' Jer. 1:17. If we must be broken in pieces—so is the original—better man do it than God. What man breaks in pieces God can make whole again. 'He that loseth his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it,' Mark 8:35. But if God break us in pieces, it is beyond the skill of man to gather the sherds, and remake what God hath marred.

2. *Castle thyself within the power and promise of God for thy assistance and protection*. He that is a coward in the open field grows valiant and fearless when got within strong walls and bulwarks. Jeremiah was even laying down his arms, and fleeing from the face of those dangers which his ministry to a rebellious and enraged people exposed him. Hear what course he had in his thoughts to take, because the word of the Lord was made a reproach to him, and a derision daily: 'Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name,' Jer. 20:9. Now what kept him from this cowardly flight? 'But the Lord is with me as a mighty terrible one,' ver. 11. Now he takes heart, and goes on with his work undauntedly. Our eye, alas! is on our danger, but not on the invisible walls and bulwarks which God hath promised to set about us. The prophet's servant, that saw the enemy's army approaching, was in a panic fright; but the prophet, that saw the heavenly host for his

lifeguard about him, cared not a rush for them all. If God be not able to protect thee, why dost thou go on his errand at all? If thou believest he is, why art thou afraid to deliver it when he is able to deliver thee?

3. Keep a *clear conscience*. He cannot be a bold reprover that is not a conscientious liver. Such a one must speak softly for fear of waking his own guilty conscience. He is like one that shoots in a rusty foul piece, his reproofs recoil upon himself. Unholiness in the preacher's life either will stop his mouth from reproving, or the people's ears from receiving what he saith. O how harsh a sound does such a cracked bell make in the ears of its auditors! Every one desires, if he must be smitten, that it may be by the hand of 'the righteous,' Ps. 141:5. Good counsel from a wicked man is spoiled by his stinking breath that delivers it. Our Saviour was fain to bid them hear the Pharisees, because their persons were a scandal to their doctrine, Matt. 23:2, 3. Even those that are good are too prone to turn their back off the ordinance for the scandal of him that officiates. This is their weakness and sin; but woe be to them at whose wickedness they stumble upon this temptation. It shows the man hath a very good stomach, that can eat his dinner out of a slovenly cook's hands; and a very sound judgment and quick appetite to the word, that can fall to and make a hearty meal of it without any squeamish scrupulosity or prejudice from the miscarriages of the preacher.

4. Consider that which thou most fearest *is best prevented by thy freedom and holy boldness in thy ministry*. Is it danger to thy life thou fearest? No such way to secure it as by being faithful to him that hath the sole dispose of it. In whose hands thinkest thou are thy times? Surely in God's. Then it is thy best policy to keep him thy friend; for, 'when thy ways please him, he can make thy enemies to be at peace with thee.' Man-pleasing is both endless and needless. If thou wouldst, thou couldst not please all; and if thou couldst, there is no need, so thou pleasest one that can turn all their hearts or bind their hands. They speed best that dare be faithful. Jonah was afraid of his work. O he durst not go to such a great city with so sad a message! To tell them they should be destroyed was to set them awork to destroy him that brought the news. But how near was he losing his life by

running away to save it? Jeremiah seemed the only man like to lose his life by his bold preaching, yet had fairer quarter at last than the smooth preachers of the times. However, it is better to die honourably than live shamefully. Is it thy name thou art tender of? If thou beest free and bold, the word thou deliverest will be a reproach and daily derision to thee, as once to Jeremiah. Thou mayest, indeed, be mocked by some, but thou wilt be revered by more; yea, even they that wag their heads at thee carry that in their conscience which will make them fear thee. They are the flattering preachers—who are 'partial in the law'—that become 'base' among the people, Mal. 2:9.

5. Consider, if thou beest not now bold for Christ in thy ministry, thou *canst not be bold before Christ at his judgment-bar*. He that is afraid to speak for Christ will certainly be ashamed to look on his face then. 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,' &c., II Cor. 5:10. Now what use doth Paul make of this solemn meditation? 'Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men,' ver. 11. It is no wisdom to provoke the judge by flattering the prisoner. A serious thought of that day, as we are going to preach, would make us shut all base fear out of the pulpit. It is a very small thing to be judged by man now for our boldness, but dismal to be condemned by Christ for our cowardice. This is man's judgment-day, as Paul calls it, I Cor. 4:3. Every one dares tax the preacher, and pass his sentence upon him, if he please not his itching ear; but Christ will have his judgment-day also, to judge them that now take upon them to judge others, and his sentence will easily reverse theirs. Yea, even those that now condemn thy freedom thy freedom to reprove would be the first to accuse thee for thy sinful silence. The wicked servant, who likes the remissness of his master's government—whereby he may play his ungodly pranks without control—cries out of him at the gallows, and is oft heard there to lay both his sin, and sad catastrophe of his life to which it brings him, at his master's door; saying, 'If he had reproved me, the magistrate had not condemned me; if he had done his duty, the hangman had not now been to do his office.' Thus may some at the last day accuse their cowardly ministers, and say, 'If they had told them their danger, they had not run into it; if they had been bold to reprove their

sin, they had not been so impudent to live in the practice of it, which now hath brought them to everlasting shame and misery.'

6. Consider *how bold Christ was in his ministry*. His very enemies were forced to give him this testimony, 'We know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly,' Luke 20:21. He spared not the proudest of them, but to their head reproved them, and denounced the judgment of God against them. When in the midst of his enemies, he was not daunted with their high looks or furious threats, but owned that very truth which they made his capital crime, Matt. 27:11; John 18:37. Hence Paul saith of him that 'before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession,' 1 Tim. 6:13; and useth this as the most powerful argument to conjure Timothy to be faithful in his ministry. What greater incentive to valour can the soldier have, than to see his general before him stand with undaunted courage where the bullets fly thickest? Such valiant captains do not use to breed white-livered soldiers. It is impossible we should be dastardly if instructed by him and acted with his spirit. When the high-priest and elders 'saw the boldness of Peter and John'—who were convented before them—they soon knew where they had got this heroic resolved spirit; for it is said, 'they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus,' Acts 4:13.

7. Pray and beg prayers, *for this holy boldness*. Thus did the apostles come by it. Their natural boldness was not the product of any natural greatness of spirit they had above others. You see what stout soldiers they were in themselves by their poor-spirited behaviour at Christ's attachment, when they all ran away in a fright, and left him to shift for himself. No; this boldness was the child of prayer; it was not bred in them, but granted from heaven unto them at their humble suit. See them praying hard for it: 'Now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,' Acts 4:29. Mark, they do not pray against suffering, but for '*boldness*' to preach, whatever it may cost them. They desire not to be excused the battle, but to be armed with courage to stand in it. They had rather be lift above the fear of suffering, than have an immunity from suffering. Let God but give them boldness to do their duty, and stand to their

tackling, and they have enough. Now see how soon God sets his fiat to their prayers: 'And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness,' ver. 31. There is the grace they desired, dropped into their bosom, in a farther measure than ever they had it. If the soldier hath a desire to fight for his prince, no doubt he may have arms for asking. If this be thy sincere request, God will not deny it. See them also sending others to God upon this errand for them, Col. 4:3, and here in the text. Certainly people cannot desire that of God for their minister which both he and they need more. It is a difficult duty to them, but necessary for you. He cannot be a faithful minister that dares not deliver all his message. When Mauritius the emperor had inquired of Phocas' disposition, he said, *si timidus est, homicida est*—if he be timorous, he is a murderer. He that fears his people's faces is the man that is most like to murder their souls; so that you pray for yourselves, while you endeavour to pray down this gift upon your minister.

#### BRANCH FOURTH.

[THE DOUBLE ARGUMENT of *Paul enforcing his request for the prayers of believers*].

*'For which I am an ambassador in bonds.'*

We are at length got to the last general head in the words—the *double argument with which the apostle backs his request*, the more effectually to provoke them to the remembrance of him in their prayers. FIRST. Taken *from his office*—'*for which I am an ambassador.*' SECOND. From his present afflicted state—'*an ambassador in bonds.*'

[An argument for Paul's request,  
TAKEN FROM HIS OFFICE.]

FIRST ARGUMENT. Paul enforces his request for his people's prayers by an argument *taken from his office*. Ambassadors being messengers of state, sent by princes abroad about great affairs of their kingdom, it behoves all good subjects to wish them good speed and success in their embassy. Upon this account, Paul, being sent from the great God in embassy as the apostle of the Gentiles, desires the church's prayers for a happy success to the message he brings.

NOTE. *Ministers of the gospel are God's ambassadors*. The apostle doth not monopolize this title, as if none were so beside himself; for elsewhere he reads others in the commission, 'We are ambassadors for Christ,' II Cor. 5:20—that is, we apostles who are now upon the place, and in the employment of the gospel, and such also as shall be despatched after us to the end of the world upon the same errand. The authority of the apostles' extraordinary commission, and that which ordinary ministers after them have, is the same for substance, only they had their mission immediately from Christ's mouth, and were ecumenical; whereas ordinary ministers receive it from the church by an authority derived from Christ, and are fixed to their particular orbs, and are to lie as ambassadors legier in some one place whither they are sent. In handling this point we shall inquire into these three particulars. *First*. Why ministers are called ambassadors. *Second*. Why God would send ambassadors to his poor creature. *Third*. Why he useth weak men and not glorious angels, to be his ambassadors in this negotiation.

[WHY ministers are called AMBASSADORS.]

*First*. Let us inquire *why ministers are called ambassadors*: and that is, 1. To set out the dignity of their function. 2. To set out the duty of their function.

[THE DIGNITY of the ministry is expressed  
by the title 'ambassadors.']

1. Ministers of the gospel are by God designated ambassadors, *to set out the dignity of their office*. God by this title would procure and honourable esteem of the ministers' calling in

the hearts of all those to whom they are sent. This is more necessary to the good success of their message than is generally thought. I know very well that what ministers speak on this subject, they are thought in it to be rather kind to themselves, than friends to the gospel. Men are prone to interpret it as a fruit of their pride, and an affectation they have of some outward grandeur and worldly pomp which they design to gain by such a magnificent title. The apostle himself was sensible of this, and therefore, when he had called for that respect which was due to the minister's function —'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God'—he gives a caveat, that they would 'judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come,' I Cor. 4:1, 5. Then it shall be known from what spirit it is that we ministers magnify our office, and have been acted by in our function; and also by what spirit they are moved who vilify and despise both it and our persons for our calling's sake. Now the dignity of gospel ambassadors will appear in three things.

(1.) In the *greatness of the Prince from whom they come*. Ambassadors have their respect according to the rank of their master that sends them; the greater the prince, the more honourable is his messenger. Now, the ministers of the gospel come from the great God, who is 'King of kings and Lord of lords'—by whom they reign and of whom they hold all their principalities. This is their Master in whose name they come. Therefore Moses, when he was to deliver his message to Israel, bids them 'ascribe greatness to that God' whose name and will he was to publish, Deut. 32:3. The potentates of the world have found to their cost how deeply God takes himself concerned in the affronts that are done to his servants. What brought Israel's flourishing kingdom to ruin but their mocking his messengers and misusing his prophets? Then 'the wrath of God arose against his people, till there was no remedy,' II Chr. 36:16. We cannot despise the messenger and honour his master that sends him, Luke 10:16. Few are so bold as to say with that proud king, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' Ex. 5:2. But too many dare say, Who is the minister, that I should obey his message? —repent at his summons, tremble at the words he delivers? forgetting, alas! they have God's authority for what they say; and so,



by a slanting blow, they hit God himself in contemning his ambassador.

(2.) In the *greatness of the Person whose place the minister supplies*. Ministers are but deputy ambassadors; Christ himself had the first patent; called therefore 'the Messenger of the covenant,' Mal. 3:1; and 'the Apostle...of our profession,' Heb. 3:1. From him the ministers receive their authority: 'All power is given unto me,...Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,' Matt. 28:18. So, II Cor. 5:20, 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' As if the apostle had said, We do but deliver that message which Christ should and would have done had he not been called to heaven about the affairs of his church; and therefore hath left us as his deputies to carry out that ministry which himself began when he was here below. Now, what an honour is it for a poor creature to stand up in Christ's room and bring that message to poor sinners which was first committed unto him?

(3.) In the *excellency of the message they bring*. There are three kinds of embassies in the world which make way for their honourable entertainment that are the messengers to bring them to any state—embassies for peace, embassies for marriage, and embassies for trade.

(a) *Embassies for peace*. Beautiful are their feet, and honoured are their persons, that bring glad tidings of peace along with them; especially four things concur in their embassy, which will all be found in the minister's negotiation.

[1.] When an ambassador *comes from some puissant prince whose power is formidable and armies irresistible*. An ambassador from such a prince, to a people naked and unarmed, for peace and amity, O how welcome is his approach! Such a king we come from. He offers not peace because he cannot maintain a war or stands in need of our friendship. Sinners need his favour, but he fears not their hostility. Never could they yet shoot any of their arrows so high as heaven, but all have come down upon their own heads. What can he that spits against the wind, but look to have it blown back upon his own face? and he that fights with God, but expect to have his weapons beat back to his own head? Worldly princes treat when they cannot fight. Think not so of the great God. His instruments of death are ready. No place where

he hath not his armed troops able to fetch in his proudest enemies. No creature so little but contains an army in it big enough to tame the proudest king in the world. The worm under Herod's foot, at God's command, shall seize on him and eat out his heart. O with what fear and trembling should the ambassadors of this God be received! When Samuel the prophet came to Bethlehem, 'the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?' I Sam. 16:4.

[2.] When such a puissant prince *sends his ambassadors for peace to a people that have already felt the impressions of his power, and are pining under the bleeding miseries which their war with him has brought upon them*, O how would they run to open their city gates to his ambassador!—as willingly surely as Noah opened the window to receive the dove that brought the olive-branch after that dismal flood. This is the deplored state which the ministry of the gospel finds mankind involved in. What a forlorn condition hath our war with heaven brought us into! Do we not feel the arrows of divine vengeance sticking in our very hearts and consciences? The curse of God cleaving to every faculty of our souls and member of our bodies? Are not all the creatures in arms against us? and doth not hell from beneath open its devouring mouth upon us, ready to swallow us in everlasting destruction? And yet we are so stout that we can find no lodging in our town for his ambassadors, but a prison? no entertainment to the offers of peace they make, but contempt and scorn?

[3.] When the terms of peace he brings *are honourable*. Gold, we say, may be bought too dear, and so may the peace of one state with another; as when Nahash the Ammonite offered peace to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, but upon condition that they should have 'every one his right eye thrust out, to lay it as a reproach on Israel,' and therefore was rejected with just indignation; they resolving rather to die with honour than live with shame. It is the custom among many of this world's princes to make their demands according to the length of their sword. When their power is great it is hard to have peace on easy terms. Now this, one would think, should make the ministers of the gospel and their message infinitely welcome to poor sinners, that, though they come from the great God that may make his own demands—for who

may say to God, 'What doest thou?'—and might not only require the eye out of your head, but force the very heart out of your body; yet offers peace on such gracious terms, that we could not possibly have framed them so to our own advantage, had we been left to draw them, as he of his own free grace is pleased to propound them; there being nothing in the whole instrument of peace provided for himself, besides the securing of his own glory in our salvation. See, a little, what he offers to poor sinners, and what he requires of them again. He offers to seal an act of oblivion, wherein all wrongs done to his crown and dignity in the time of our hostility against him shall be forgiven and forgotten. So runs the promise, 'He will forgive them their iniquities, and remember them no more.' He will not only forgive what is past, but receive our persons into favour for the future. A prince may save a malefactor's life, but forever banish his person from court. But God promiseth access into his presence. 'By whom also we have access by faith into this grace (or favour) wherein we stand,' Rom. 5:2. Yea, he promiseth to restore the sinner to all that by his rebellion was forfeited. Treason taints the blood, degrades from honour, and confiscates the estate; God offers to take off the whole curse which befell the sinner for his rebellion, and restores him to his primitive dignity. He 'gives them power to become his children,' John 1:12, and, as his children, makes them his heirs, and that not to a Cabul here below only, but to heaven itself, an inheritance in light beyond all expression glorious; for godliness hath both the promise of this life and that which is to come.

Now, let us see what he expects at the sinner's hand. Not to purchase this his favour with a ransom out of his own purse! No, he empties his Son's veins to pay that. But he requires us, (a) To lay down the weapons of our rebellion—for he cannot in honour treat with us while we have that sword in our hand with which we have fought against him. (b) To accept our pardon and peace at the hands of free grace; attributing the glory of it to the mere mercy of God as the moving, and Christ's satisfactory obedience as the meritorious cause. (c) That we shall swear fealty and allegiance to him for the future. How reasonable these are, those that now reject them shall confess with infinite shame and horror for their folly, when Christ

shall pack them to hell by his irrevocable sentence.

[4.] When in all this a prince is *real in the offers of peace he makes, and gives full security for the performance of what he promiseth*, this must needs make the ambassador that brings them still the more welcome. Treaties of peace among men are too often used but as a handsome blind for war—they intend least what they pretend most. But when an ambassador comes plenipotentiary, and enabled to give full security and satisfaction against all fears and jealousies that may arise in the breasts of those he treats with, this gives a value to all the rest. Now, the great God hath wonderfully condescended to satisfy the querulous hearts of poor sinners. Guilt hath made man suspicious of God; his own unfaithfulness to God makes him jealous of God's faithfulness unto him. Could Satan make Eve so question the truth of God's promise? He saith but, 'Ye shall not surely die?' and she is presently shaken out of her faith on her Maker to believe her destroyer. O how easy then is it for him to nourish those suspicions which do naturally breed now in our unbelieving hearts! How oft are we putting it to the question, Will God forgive so great, so many sins? May I venture to believe? Now God gives his ambassadors full instructions from his word to satisfy all the doubts and scruples which he injects, or which may arise from our own misgiving hearts. *Tota Scriptura hoc agit*, saith Luther, *ne dubitamus sed certò speremus*—the whole Scripture drives at this, to satisfy our doubts, and assure our hopes in the mercy of God. St. Paul hath a passage something like this, 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope,' Rom. 15:4.

There are many expedients men use to satisfy the minds of those they deal with concerning the truth of their promises and certainty of their performing them. Sometimes they ratify them with their seal set to the writing. Thus God gives the broad seal of the sacraments, and privy seal of his Spirit, to assure the believer he will perform all he hath promised in his word. Sometimes witnesses are called in for further security of the conveyance. Thus in the purchase Jeremiah made of his kinsman's field, he took witnesses to the

bargain, Jer. 32:10. See witnesses both in heaven and earth, ready to vouch the truth of what God promiseth, and all agree in their verdict, I John 5:7, 8. If all these will not do, then an oath is taken, and this useth to be 'an end of controversies.' To this also doth God graciously condescend. Not that God's promise needs the suretiship of his oath to make it surer—for it is as impossible God should lie when he promiseth as when he swears—but to make our faith stronger, which needs such supporters as these to stay and strengthen it; as is hinted in that sweet place, from which one flower the sincere believer may suck honey enough to live comfortably upon in the hardest longest winter of affliction that can befall him: 'Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation,' &c., Heb. 6:17, 18. Now, the greater the security God enables his ambassadors to offer poor sinners for the salvation they preach in his name, the more prodigiously provoking is their unbelief and impenitency who reject it. When Titus Vespasian came into Jerusalem, and saw the unspeakable miseries which the besieged had endured from those three sore plagues, sword, pestilence, and famine, that had so long raged among them, it is said that he broke out into these words, 'I am not guilty of all this blood which hath been shed, nor of the miseries this people have endured; that by their obstinacy have brought it upon their own heads.' O how much more may the ambassadors of Christ wash their hands over the heads of impenitent sinners, to whom they have so oft offered pardon and peace in God's name, but they would not hearken, and say, 'We are free from your blood; it is your own obstinacy and desperate impenitency hath undone your precious souls. Would you have accepted life at the hands of mercy, you should not have been cut off by the sword of his justice.'

(b) *Embassies for marriage.* To offer an alliance by marriage between one state and another, this is one great part of the minister's embassy. They are sent to let the world know what good-will the God of heaven bears to poor sinners; that he can be content to bestow his only Son and heir in marriage upon them, if they also upon treaty can like the match. Nay more,

both Father and Son desire it. It is a match which God himself first thought on for his Son. It sprang from the counsel of his own will; and when this great intendment was transacted betwixt Father and Son—as it was before the foundation of the world—the Son declared his liking of it to his Father, yea, expressed the dear affection he bore to mankind; for then it was that he 'rejoiced in the inhabitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men.' In pursuance of this, 'when the fulness of time was come,' he took his progress from heaven to earth, that by marrying our nature he might also enter a near alliance with the persons of believers. This is the match God's ambassadors come to negotiate with you. The Scriptures are their credential letters, that confirm, under God's own handwriting and seal, the truth of all they offer in his name. There you have the picture of his heavenly Prince they woo your affections for drawn to the life in his glory, love, and loveliness, that, by knowing him, you may the better take liking to his person; there are the rich bracelets of the promises, which his messengers are in his name to deliver to those willing souls that shall entertain the motion, and declare their consent to take him for their Lord and husband; yea, they have authority to pronounce the contract, and to promise in Christ's name marriage, which at the great day he will perform unto them: 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ,' II Cor. 11:2. Stand here and adore, ye children of men, this low stoop of divine majesty! O that ever it should enter into the heart of the great God to match his Son unto his creature, and that not of the noblest house among them! for 'he took not upon him the nature of angels,' but of mankind, not in its primitive state, but when it was lapsed and degraded of its primitive glory. For a high-born prince to take a poor damsel out of the beggar's row, is a thing that yet the world hath not been acquainted with. But to take one from the meanest cottage were not so strange as to take her from the jail or bar, where she is condemned for treason against his royal person. Yet this is the very case—the Lord offers to lift up the head of his rebel creature out of prison, where it lies under a sentence of death for horrid treason against his crown and dignity, to take it into his bed and bosom. Truly I know not at which most

to wonder; whether at the mercy of God in making love to us, or our pride and folly that are so coy hardly persuaded to entertain the motion. Though Abigail confessed herself unworthy to be David's wife, yet she was too wise to stand in her own light, by letting slip such an opportunity for her preferment as was not like again to occur; therefore it is said, 'She made haste to go with David's servants.' But alas! how do we either broadly deny, or foolishly make excuse, and hold God's messengers in suspense from day to day.

(c) *Embassies for commerce and trade.* Suppose a prince had in his kingdom rich commodities, without which his neighbour nation could not subsist, nor could find elsewhere; if this prince should send an ambassador to this people, and offer them a free trade, that they might come as oft as they pleased and take of the good things of his land, O how joyfully would such an embassy be embraced! Man's happiness on earth lies in a free trade and commerce with heaven. This world is a barren beggarly place. Nothing is here to be had that an immortal soul can live upon or find satisfaction from. In heaven alone what it needs is to be found. The food it must live on, the clothes it must wear, are both of the growth of this heavenly country. Man's first sin spoiled all his trade with heaven. No sooner did Adam rebel, but a war was commenced, and all trade with him forbidden. Therefore, in our natural state, we are said to be 'afar off,' and 'without God in the world.' The sad effects of this loss are to be seen in the forlorn condition of man's soul, which was once was so gloriously arrayed with righteousness and holiness, but now shamefully naked—not having a rag to cover its shame withal.

Now, God sends his ambassadors to offer peace, and with it liberty to return to its first communion with him: 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.' He invites all to turn merchants with heaven, 'Come ye to the waters;' by which phrase the gospel is compared to a port-town, or its quay-side, to which the crier calls people to repair, and buy commodities that are there landed. Here it is that God sets forth the riches of his grace to view and sale 'without money and

without price.' That must needs be a gainful trade which brings in rich treasure without much cost exported. Here is all the riches of heaven to be had, and no money required for the purchase. Can you hear of this pearl of price, and not turn merchants for it? Or can your souls be maintained by your peddling worldly trade? O, why do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? It is not necessary you should be rich in the world, but it is necessary you should have Christ and his grace. In all your pains and travail for the things of this world, you are but merchant adventurers—it is a hazard you get them or lose your labour. There is no certain rule and method can be learned for growing rich in the world. There are some poor as well as rich of every trade; but, in this trade for Christ and his grace, there is an office erected to insure all your adventure. His soul shall live that seeks the Lord; he that hungers after righteousness shall be satisfied.

[THE DUTY of the ministry is set out  
by the title 'ambassadors.']

2. Ministers of the gospel are by God designated ambassadors, *to set out the duty of their office*. Where there is *honos* there is *onus*—places of honour are places of trust and service. Many like well enough to hear of the minister's dignity—with Diotrefes, they love pre-eminence—that would willingly be excused the labour that attends it. None have a greater trust deposited in their hands than the minister. It is *tremendum onus*—a weight that made the apostle tremble under it: 'I was among you,' saith Paul, 'with much fear and trembling.' To them is 'committed the word of reconciliation,' II Cor. 5:19. If the treaty of peace between God and sinners doth not speed, the ambassador is sure to be called to an account how he discharged his place. But more of the minister's duty as an ambassador afterwards.

[Why God delivers his gospel by  
AMBASSADORS FROM MANKIND.]

*Second.* The second thing we propounded to give an account of was, *why God would send ambassadors to his poor creature*. I answer,

1. *Negatively.*

(1.) Not because he *needs man's good-will*. Earthly princes' affairs require they should hold

a correspondence with their neighbours, therefore they send ambassadors to preserve peace or preserve amity. But God can defend his crown without the help of allies.

(2.) Not because he was *bound to do it*. There is a law of nations, yea of nature, that obliges princes before they commence a war to offer peace. But the great God cannot be bound, except he binds himself. When Adam sinned, God was free, and might have chosen whether he would make a new league with man, or take vengeance on him for breaking his faith in the first. But,

2. *Affirmatively*. No other account can be given of this but the good-will and free-grace of God. When Christ, who is the prime Ambassador, landed first on earth, see what brought him hither, 'Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,' Luke 1:78. Tender mercy indeed, for the life of man lay under God's foot at his pure mercy. He was no more bound to treat with his creature than a prince with a traitor legally condemned. Wherever God's ambassadors come, they come on mercy's errand: 'The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people,' II Chr. 36:15.


*Question*. But if God will treat with his poor creatures, *why doth he it by ambassadors, and not by himself immediately?*

*Answer*. This is the fruit of divine indulgence. Sin hath made the presence of God dreadful; man cannot now well bear it. What a fright was Adam put into when he heard but the voice of God walking towards him in the garden, and not furiously rushing upon him? The Jews had the trial of this; they soon had enough of God's presence, and therefore came to Moses, saying, 'Speak thou with us,...but let not God speak with us, lest we die,' Ex. 20:19.

[WHY GOD USETH MEN, *and not angels,*  
*as his ambassadors.*]

*Third*. But if God will use ambassadors, *why does he not employ some glorious angels from heaven to bring his message, rather than weak and frail men?*

*Answer* (1). The apostle gives us the reason: 'We have this treasure in earthen

vessels, *that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us,*' II Cor. 4:7; —in vessels of shell. As the precious pearl is found in a shell, so this precious treasure of the gospel shall be found in frail men, that the excellency of the work may be of God. The more contemptible the instrument, the more glorious appears his divine power in using it for so high and noble an end. To see a man wound another with a sword that is sharp and weighty would carry no wonder; but to wound him with a feather in his hand, this would speak it a miracle. To see men fall down and tremble when an angel—a creature of such might and glory—is the speaker, is no great wonder; but to behold a Felix quivering on the bench, while a man, and he a poor prisoner at the bar, preacheth to his judge, this carries a double wonder. First, that so poor a creature as Paul was, and in the condition of a prisoner, durst be so bold; and also, that so great a person as Felix was should be smitten with his words, as if some thunderbolt had struck him. Who will not adore the power of a God in the weakness of the instrument? Had God employed angels in this business, we should have been in danger of ascribing the efficacy of the work to the gifts and parts of the instrument, and of giving credit to the message for the messenger's sake that is so honourable. But now, God sending those that are weak creatures like ourselves, when anything is done by them, we are forced to say, 'It is the Lord's doing,' and not the instruments'. What reason God had this way to provide for the safe-guarding his own glory, we see by our proneness to idolize the gifts of men, where they are more eminent and radiant than in others. What would we have done if angels had been the messengers? Truly, it would have been hard to have kept us from worshipping them, as we see John himself had done, if he had not been kept back by the angel's seasonable caveat, Rev. 19:10.

*Answer* (2). Ministers, being men, have *an advantage many ways above angels for the work*.

(a) As they are *more nearly concerned in the message they bring* than angels could have been; so that they cannot deceive others, without a wrong to their own salvation. What greater argument for one's care than his own interest? Surely that pilot will look how he steers the ship that hath an adventure in the freight.

(b) *Their affections have a naturalness arising from the sense of those very temptations in themselves* which their brethren labour under. This an angel could not have; and by this they are able to speak more feelingly to the condition of other men than an angel could do. So that what man wants of the angels' rhetoric is recompensed with his natural affection and sympathy flowing from experience. He knows what a troubled conscience is in another, by having felt it throb in his own bosom; as God told his people, having been themselves sojourners in Egypt, 'You know the heart of a stranger.' And who will treat poor souls with more mercy than they who know they need it themselves?

(c) *The sufferings which ministers meet with for the gospel's sake* are of great advantage to their brethren. Had angels been the ambassadors they could not have sealed to the truth of the doctrine they preached with their blood. Paul's bonds were famous at court and country also: 'Many of the brethren,...waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear,' Php. 1:14. Angels might have sounded the trumpet of the gospel with a shriller voice; but men alone have pitchers to break—I mean frail bodies—by suffering for the gospel, whereby the glory of its truths, like the lamp in Gideon's soldier's hand, shines forth upon the eyes of their greater enemies, to the confusion of their faces and amazement of their hearts.

#### USE OR APPLICATION.

*[Exhortation to the people to hearken to God's ambassadors.]*

Are ministers ambassadors? This shows the gospel ministry to be *an office peculiar to some, not a work common to all*. An ambassador we know is someone who hath his commission and credential letters from his prince to show for his employment. It is not a man's skill in state affairs that makes him an ambassador, nor ability in the law that makes a man a magistrate, but their call to these places. Neither do gifts make a man a minister, but his mission: 'How can they preach except they be sent?' The rules which the Spirit of God gives about the minister's admission into his function were all to no purpose if it lay open to every man's own

choice to make him a preacher. 'Lay hands suddenly on no man,' 1 Tim. 5:22; that is, admit none to the ministry without good proof and trial. But why should any be set apart for that which every one may do? This leads to an exhortation, 1. To the people. 2. To the minister.

*Exhortation 1. To the people.* Be persuaded in the fear of God to *hearken to the message these ambassadors bring*. What mean you to do in the business they come to treat about? Will you be friends with God or not?—take Christ by faith into your embraces, or resolve to have none of him? We are but ambassadors; back again we must go to our Master that sends us, and give an account what comes of our negotiation. Shall we go and say, Lord, we have been with the men thou sentest us unto; thy message was delivered by us according to our instructions; we told them fire and sword, ruin and damnation, would come upon them, if they did not at thy call repent and turn; we laid both life and death before them, and spared not to reveal 'the whole counsel of God' for their salvation; but they believed never a word we spake; we were to them as those that mocked, or told what we had dreamed in the night, and not the words of truth an faithfulness? O God forbid that this should be the report which at their return they make to God of their negotiation! But the more to affect you with the importance of their message, and your answer to it, consider these things following:

(1.) Consider *the wonderful love of God in sending you these ambassadors*. Is it not a prince that sends to one of his own rank, but a God to his rebel creature; against whom he might have sent, not an ambassador to treat, but an army of judgments to fight and destroy. It is not against rebels that are entrenched in some place of strength, or in the field with a force wherewith you are able to resist his power; but to his prisoners fettered and manacled—to you that have your traitorous head on the block. It is not any need he hath of your life that makes him desire your salvation. A prince sometimes saves his rebellious subjects because he needs their hands to fight for him, and weakens himself by shedding their blood; but God can ruin you, and not wrong himself. If you perish, it is without his damage. The Pharisees are said to reject 'the counsel of God against themselves,' Luke 7:30. It is you that suffer, not God.

(2.) Consider *what an intolerable affront is given to the majesty of heaven by rejecting his offers of grace*. Princes' requests are commands. Who dare deny a king what he asks? and darest thou, a poor thimbleful of dust, stout it out against thy Maker? It is charged upon no less than a king as an act of insufferable pride, that 'he did...evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the Lord,' II Chr. 36:12. But what! must a king come down from his throne, and humble himself before a poor prophet that was his own subject. God will not have him tremble and bow, not to Jeremiah, but to 'Jeremiah...speaking from the mouth of the Lord.' O, consider this, ye that think it childish and poor-spirited to weep at a sermon, to humble yourselves at the reproof of a minister! Your carriage under the word preached declares what your thoughts of God himself are. When Naash slighted David's ambassadors, and abused them, the king took the scorn upon himself. 'I will publish the name of the Lord,' saith Moses, 'ascribe ye greatness unto our God,' Deut. 32:3. How should they ascribe greatness to God while Moses is preaching to them. Surely he means by their humble attendance on, and ready obedience to, the word he delivered in God's name.

(3.) Consider *how much the heart of God is engaged in the message his ambassadors bring*. When a prince sends an ambassador about a negotiation, the success of which he passionately desires, and from which he promiseth himself much honour, to be opposed in this must needs greatly provoke and enrage him. There is nothing that God sets his heart more upon than the exalting of Christ, and his grace through him, in the salvation of poor sinners. This therefore is called 'his counsel,' Heb. 6:17; 'the pleasure of the Lord,' Isa. 53:10. Abraham's servant knew how much his master desired a wife for his son and heir among his kindred, and therefore presseth Laban with this as the weightiest argument of all other, 'If you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and it not, tell me;' as if he had said, By this the truth of your love to my master will be seen. So here. If ye will indeed deal kindly with God, tell his ambassadors so, by your complying with them in that which he so affectionately desires. This the Lord Jesus, when on earth, called 'his

Father's business,' which must be done, whatever comes on it: 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' Luke 2:49. He knew he had never come hither except for the despatch of this, and could not look his Father on the face, when he went back, except this was finished. Therefore, as this sped, and the work of the gospel made progress, or met with any stop, in the hearts of men, he mourned or rejoiced. When it was rejected, we find him 'grieved for the hardness of their hearts,' Mark 3:5. When his disciples make report how victoriously the chariot of the gospel ran, 'in that hour,' it is said, 'he rejoiced in spirit,' Luke 10:21. When he was taking his leave of the world, his thoughts are at work how the gospel should be carried on, and the salvation of souls suffer no prejudice by his departure; he therefore empowers his apostles for the work: 'All power is given me. Go, preach the gospel to all nations.' Yea, now in heaven he is waiting for the success of it, and listening how his servants speed in their errand. Now, what a prodigious sin is it, by thy impenitency to withstand God in his main design! Do you indeed deal kindly with our Master, whose embassy we bring?

(4.) Consider *the weight and importance of the message these ambassadors bring unto you*. It is not a slight, sleeveless errand we come about. 'I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil,' Deut. 30:15. 'He that believeth not,...the wrath of God abideth on him,' John 3:36. We come not to entice you with the favour of an earthly prince, who may promise honours to-day, and lose his own crown to-morrow. We bait not our hook with the world's treasures or pleasures; but bring you news of a heaven that shall as surely be yours as you are now on earth, if you accept of the offer. We scare you not with the displeasure of a mortal man, 'whose breath is in his nostrils;' not with the momentary torment of a rack or gibbet, which continue hardly long enough to be felt; but with the never-dying wrath of the ever-living God. And what we either promise or threaten in God's name, he stands ready and resolved to perform. He 'confirmeth the word of his servants, and performeth the counsel of his messengers;' Isa. 44:26.

(5.) Consider *on what terms the gospel and its messengers stay among you*. There is a time when God calls his ambassadors home, and will treat

no longer with a people; and that must needs be a sad day! For, when they go, then judgments and plagues come. If the treaty ends, it will not be long before the war begins. 'Elisha died,...and the bands of the Moabites invaded the land,' II Kings 13:20. The prophet once gone, then the enemy comes. The angel plucks Lot out of Sodom, and how long had they fair weather after? The Jews put away the gospel from them by their impenitency, which made the apostles 'turn to the Gentiles,' Acts 13:46. But did they not thereby call for their own ruin and destruction, which presently came flying on the Roman eagle's wings to them? They judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, and God thought them unworthy also to have a temporal. If once God calls home his ambassadors, it is no easy matter to bring them back, and get the treaty, now broke up, set on foot again. God can least endure, upon trial made of him, to be slighted in that which he makes account is one of the highest ways he can express his favour to a people. Better no ambassadors had come, than to come and go *re infectâ*—without effecting what they came for. They 'shall know,' saith God, 'there hath been a prophet among them,' Eze. 2:5; that is, they shall know it to their cost. God will be paid for his ministers' pains. Now, ministers die, or are removed from their people, and glad they are to be so rid of them; but they have not done with them till they have reckoned with God for them.

*[Exhortation to ministers in discharge of their duty as ambassadors of the King of kings.]*

*Exhortation 2. To the ministers of the gospel.*

You see, brethren, your calling; *let it be your care to comport with this your honourable employment.* Let us set forth a few directions.

(1.) *Stain not the dignity of your office by any base unworthy practices. Dignitas in indigno*, saith Salvian, is *ornamentum in luto*—O lay not the dignity of your function in the dirt by any sordid unholy actions! Paul magnified his office; do not you do that which should make others vilify and debase it. That which makes others bad will make you worse. 'Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?' John 6:70. You are called angels, but if wicked, you become devils. We have read of 'a prophet's reward,' Matt. 10:41, which amounts to more than a private

disciple's; and do you not think there will be a prophet's punishment in hell, as well as reward in heaven? One saith, 'If any were born without original sin, it should be the minister; if any could live without actual sin it should be the minister; if there were such a thing a venial sin, it should not be in ministers. They are more the servants of God than others; should not they then be more holy than others?' Art thou fit to be an ambassador, who art not a good subject? to be a minister, that art not a good Christian?

(2.) *Keep close to thy instructions.*

Ambassadors are bound up by their commission what they are to say; be sure therefore to take thy errand right, before thou ascendest the pulpit to deliver it. 'I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,' I Cor. 11:23. God bids the prophet, Eze. 3:17, 'Hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.' It must be from him, or it is not right. O take heed thou dost not set the royal stamp upon thy own base metal! Come not to the people with, 'Thus saith the Lord,' when it is the divination of thy own brain. No such loud lie as that which is told in the pulpit. And, as thou must not speak what he never gave thee in commission, so not conceal what thou hast in command to deliver. It is as dangerous to blot out, as put in, anything to our message. Job comforted himself with this, that he had 'not concealed the words of the Holy One,' Job 6:10. And Paul, from this, washeth his hands of the blood of souls, 'I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God,' Acts 20:26, 27. Pray, observe, he doth not say he hath declared *all* the counsel of God. No; who can, but God himself? The same apostle saith, 'We prophesy but in part.' There is a *terra incognita*—unknown land, in the Scriptures, mysteries that yet were never fully discovered. We cannot declare all that know not all. But he saith, 'He shunned not to declare all.' When he met a truth, he did not step back to shun it; as when we see a man in the street with whom we have no mind to speak, we step into some house or shop till he be past. The holy apostle was not afraid to speak what he knew to be the mind of God; as he had it from God, so should they from him. He did not balk in his preaching what was profitable for them to know. Caleb, one of the spies sent to Canaan, could not give them a full account of every particular place in the land, but



he made the best observation he could, and then brings Moses word again—‘As it was,’ saith he, ‘in mine heart,’ Joshua 14:7; while others basely concealed what they knew, because they had no mind to the journey; and this gained him the testimony from God’s own mouth to be a man that ‘followed him fully,’ Num. 14:23. So he that doth his utmost to search the Scriptures, and then brings word to the people as it is in his heart, preaching what he hath learned from it, without garbling his conscience and detaining what he knows for fear or favour, this is the man that fulfills his ministry, and shall have the *euge*—well done! of a faithful servant.

(3.) Think it not enough that thou deliverest thy message from God, but *show a zeal for thy Master, whose cause thou negotiatest*. Should an ambassador, after audience had, and his errand coldly done, then give himself up to the pleasures of the court where he is resident, and not much mind or care what answer he hath, nor how his master’s business speeds, surely he could not say he had done the duty of a faithful ambassador. No; his head and heart must be both at work how he may put life into the business and bring it soonest to the desired issue. Abraham’s servant would neither eat nor drink till he saw which way his motion would work, and how they would deal with his master. Thus should ministers let those they are sent to see they are in earnest—that their hearts are deeply engaged in their embassy. When their people show their respect to their persons, though they are thankfully to resent this civility, yet they are not to let them know this is not it they come for, or can be content with; but that they would deal kindly with their Master, whose message they bring, and send them back to him with the joyful news of their repentance and acceptation of Christ. They should passionately endeavour their salvation; one while trying to dissolve them with the soft entreaties of love; another while beleaguering them with threatenings, that if they will to hell, they may carry this witness with them, that their destruction is of themselves, and comes not on them for want of your care and compassion to their souls. It is not enough you are orthodox preachers, and deliver truth; it is zeal God calls for at your hands. He so strongly himself desires the salvation of poor sinners, that he disdains you, whom he sends to impart it to


them, should coldly deliver it, without showing your good-will to the thing. Christ, when he sends his servants to invite guests to his gospel-supper, bids them ‘compel them to come in,’ Luke 14:23. But how? Surely not as the Spaniards did the Indians, who drove them to be baptized as we drive cattle with staves and stones. We are not to pelt them in with outward violence and cruelty practised upon their bodies, but [by] a spiritual force of argument subduing their hearts in our powerful preaching. *Percutit ut faciat voluntarios, non salvat invitos*—when God smites the consciences of men with the terrors of his threatenings, it is to make them willing, not to save them against their wills (Bern.).

(4.) Let not any person or thing in the world *bribe or scare thee from a faithful discharge of thy trust*. Ambassadors must not be pensioners to a foreign prince. He is unworthy to serve a prince in so honourable an employment that dares not trust his master to defend and reward him. Such a one will not long be faithful to his trust; nor will he in the ministry, that rests not contented with God’s promise for his protection or reward. O how soon will he for fear or favour seek to save his stake or mend it, though it be by falsifying his trust to God himself? Blessed Paul was far from this baseness, and hath set a noble pattern to all that shall be God’s ambassadors to the end of the world: ‘As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness,’ 1 Thes. 2:4, 5.

(5.) Be *kind to and tenderly careful of thy fellow-subjects*. Were it not strange if an ambassador, sent from hence to Turkey or Spain, instead of protecting and encouraging the English merchants there in their trade, should hinder their traffic, and employ all the power of his place to their prejudice and damage? Surely this prince sent him not to be an enemy, but a friend and patron, to his good subjects there. The minister, as God’s ambassador, is to encourage the saints in their heavenly trade, to assist them by his counsel, and protect them from the scorn that their wicked neighbours cast upon them for their goodness. O how sad is it if he shall bend his ministry against them! if he shall weaken their hands and strengthen the hands of the ungodly, in or out of the pulpit, by

his preaching or practice! Better he were, with a millstone tied about his neck, thrown into the sea, than thus to offend these little ones! Moses, he smote the Egyptian, but rescued the Israelite. What account will they make to God of their embassy, who, in the very pulpit, smite the Israelite with their tongues, twitting them for their purity, and stroke the Egyptian—the profane and wicked, I mean, in their congregations—whereby they bless themselves as going to heaven, when, God knows, their feet stand in the ways that will undoubtedly lead them to hell!

[An argument for Paul's request, TAKEN  
FROM HIS PRESENT AFFLICTED STATE.]

SECOND ARGUMENT. The second argument with which he stirs them up to his remembrance in their prayers, is *taken from his present afflicted state*—‘for which I am an ambassador *in bonds*.’ In the Greek —*in a chain*. When we hear of an ambassador and a chain, we might at first expect it to be a chain of gold about his neck, and not a chain of iron about his leg or arm; yet it is the latter here is meant. Paul was now a prisoner at Rome, but *in libera custodia*. as is thought by interpreters from this passage—in a chain, not in chains; it being usual there for a prisoner to be committed to the custody of some soldier, with whom he might walk abroad, having a chain on his right arm, which was tied to his keeper's left arm. Such a prisoner, it is conceived, this holy man was now. Paul the lamb was prisoner to Nero the lion, and therefore both needed and desired the church's prayers for him. Many are the OBSERVABLES which this short passage might afford. I shall lightly touch them, but not enlarge upon them.

[Five observables touched upon,  
from Paul's being in bonds.]

*First Observable.* Observe the usage which this blessed apostle finds from an ungrateful world. A chain is clapped upon him, as if he were some rogue or thief. He preacheth liberty to poor sinners, and is deprived of his own for his pains; he proclaims deliverance to the captives, and is used like a slave for his labour. One would wonder what they could find against so holy and innocent a person to accuse him for, who made it his daily exercise to live without offence to God and man; yet see what an indictment Tertullus

prefers against him, Acts 24, as if there had not been such a pestilent fellow in the whole country as he! And Paul himself tells us he ‘suffered trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds,’ II Tim. 2:9. Many grievous things were laid to his charge. Whence,

NOTE. *That the best of men may and oft do suffer under the notion of vile and wicked persons.* Let the saints' enemies alone to black their persons and cause. Christ himself must be ‘numbered among the transgressors,’ and no less than blasphemy be laid to his charge. Persecutors think it not enough to be cruel, but they would be thought just while they are cruel—‘Ye have condemned and killed the just,’ James 5:6. Here is a bloody murder committed with all the formalities of justice. They condemn first, and then kill; and truly, murder on the bench is worse in God's account than that which is perpetrated by a villain on the highway. Well, there is a time when Paul's cause and the rest of suffering saints' shall have a fairer hearing than here they could meet with, and then it will appear with another complexion than when drawn with their enemies' black-coal. The names of the godly shall have a resurrection as well as their bodies. Now they are buried with their faces downward—their innocence and sincerity charged with many false imputations; but then all shall be set right. And well may the saints stay to be cleared as long as God himself stays to vindicate his own government of the world from the hard speeches of ungodly ones.

*Second Observable.* Observe the true cause of Paul's sufferings. It was his zeal for God and his truth—‘for which I am in bonds:’ that is, for the gospel which I profess and preach. As that martyr who, being asked how he came into prison, showed his Bible, and said, ‘This brought me hither.’ Persecutors may pretend what they will, but it their religion and piety that their spite is at. Paul was an honest man, in the opinion of his countrymen, so long as he was of their opinion, went their way, and did as they did; but when he declared himself to be a Christian, and preached his gospel up, then they cried him down as fast—then his old friends turned new enemies, and all their fists were about his ears. The wicked are but the devil's slaves, and must do as he will have them. Now, it is truth and godliness that pull down his kingdom. When, therefore, these appear in the saints' lives, then

he calls forth the wicked world, as a prince would do his subjects into the field, to fight for him; so that it is impossible to get to heaven without blows. 'He that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution:' {II Tim. 3:12} that is, one way or other; and none more than the preacher. He puts his hand into the wasp's nest, and therefore must expect to be stung; he treads on the serpent's head, and it were strange if he should not turn again to bite him. But let not this trouble you. Fear not what you can suffer, only be careful for what you {do} suffer. Christ's cross is made of sweet wood. There are comforts peculiar to those that suffer for righteousness. When Sabina, a Christian martyr, fell in travail in the prison, and was heard to cry and make a dolor in those her child-bearing throes, some asked her how she could endure the torments which her persecutors prepared for her, if she shrank at those? 'O,' saith she, 'now I suffer for sin, then I shall suffer for Christ.'

*Third Observable.* Observe how close Paul sticks to the truth. He will not part with it, though it brings him to trouble. He had rather the persecutor should imprison him for preaching the gospel, than he imprison it by a cowardly silence. He hath cast up his accounts, and is resolved to stand to his profession whatever it may cost him. The truth is, *that* religion is not worth embracing that cannot bear one's charges in suffering for it; and none but the Christian's is able to do this. Neither is he worth the name of a Christian that dares not take Christ's bill of exchange, to receive in heaven what he is sent out in suffering for his sake on earth. And yet, alas! how hard is it to get faith enough to do this! It is easier to bow at the name, than to stoop to the cross of Jesus. Many like religion for a summer-house, when all is fair and warm abroad in the world; but, when winter comes, doors are shut up, and nobody to be seen in or about it.

*Fourth Observable.* Observe the publication Paul makes of his sufferings to the church. He, being now a prisoner, sends his despatches to this and other churches, to let them know his condition. From whence,

NOTE. That *sufferings for the gospel are no matter of shame*. Paul doth not blush to tell it is for the gospel he is 'in bonds.' The shame belonged to them that clapped on the chain, not to him that wore it. The thief, the murderer, may

justly blush to tell wherefore they suffer, not the Christian for well-doing. 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf,' I Peter 4:16. Christ himself counted it no dishonour to have the print of his wounds seen after his resurrection. Babylas, a Christian martyr, would have his chains buried with him. The apostles 'rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name,' Acts 5:41. And if it be no shame to suffer for the gospel, then surely it is none to profess it, and live up to its holy rules. Shall the wicked 'glory in their shame,' and thou be ashamed of thy glory? Shall they do the devil's work at noonday light, and thou afraid to be seen with the good? Yet Salvian tells us, in his days—so wicked they were, and such a scorn was cast upon holiness—that many carried Christ's colours in their pocket, and concealed their piety, *ne viles haberentur*—lest they should be counted vile and base.

*Fifth Observable.* Observe the end why he makes known his sufferings.

1. That they *may know the true cause wherefore he suffered*. Paul's enemies laid heavy things to his charge, and these might haply fly as far as Ephesus. When the saints' are in a suffering condition, Satan is very industrious to defame them, and misrepresent the cause of their troubles to the world, as if it were for no good. Now, though Paul regarded little what the wicked world said of him, yet he desired to stand right in the thoughts of the churches, and therefore acquaints them with the cause of his imprisonment.

2. To *strengthen their faith and comfort their hearts*. No doubt but Paul's chain entered their souls, and his suffering was their sorrow. This he knew, and therefore sends them word by Tychicus—the bearer of this epistle—how it fared with him in his bonds, that they might not spend too many tears for him who had a heart so merry and cheerful in his sufferings: 'That ye might know our affairs, and that he comfort your hearts,' Eph. 6:22. Thus have we seen sometimes a tender-hearted, father on his sick-bed, not so much troubled with his own pains, or thoughts of his approaching death, as to see his children take them so much to heart; and therefore, forgetting his own miseries, address himself with a smiling countenance to comfort them. O it is an excellent sight to behold the saints that are at

liberty mourning over their afflicted brethren, and those that are the sufferers become comforters to them that are at liberty! Never doth religion appear more glorious than when they commend it who are suffering for it. And no way can they commend it higher than by a holy humble cheerfulness of spirit in their sufferings. The comfortable which the martyrs in queen Mary's days sent out of prison, did wonderfully strengthen their brethren throughout the kingdom, and fit them for the prison. Sufferers preach with great advantage above others. They do not speak by hearsay, but what they experiment {verified} in themselves.

3. To *engage their prayers for him*. Suffering saints have ever been very covetous of prayers. Paul acts all the churches at work for him. 'Pray, pray, pray,' was the usual close to Mr. Bradford's letters out of prison. And great reason for it; for a suffering condition is full of temptations. When man plays the persecutor, the devil forgets not to be a tempter. He that followed Christ into the wilderness will ever find a way to get to his saints in the prison. Sometimes he will try whether he can soften them for impressions of fear, or make them pity themselves; and he shall not want them that will lend their tears to melt their courage and weaken their resolution—may be wife and children, or friends and neighbours, who wish them well, but are abused by Satan to lay a snare *before* them, while they express their affection *to* them. No doubt those good people meant well to Paul, who, with tears and passionate entreaties, endeavoured to keep him from Jerusalem—where it was foretold he should come into trouble—but Satan had a design against Paul therein, who hoped they might not only break his heart, but weaken his courage, with their tears. When he cannot make a coward of the saint, to run from the cross; then he will try to sour and swell his spirit with some secret anger against those that laid it on. O it is

no easy matter to receive evil, and wish none to him from whose hands we have it. To reserve love for him that shows wrath and hatred to us is a glorious but a difficult work. If he cannot leaven him with wrath against his persecutor, then he will try to blow him up with a high conceit of himself, who dares suffer for Christ, while others shrink in their heads, and seek to keep themselves safe within their own shell. O this pride is a salamander, that can live in the fire of suffering! If any one saint needs the humility of many saints, it is he that is called to suffer. To glory in his sufferings for Christ becomes him well, II Cor. 12:9; Gal. 6:14; but to glory in himself for them is hateful and odious. Needs not he a quick eye, and a steady hand, that is to drive his chariot on the brow of so dangerous a precipice?

In a word, a suffering condition is full of temptations, so the saint's strength to carry him safely through them is *not in his own keeping*. God must help, or the stoutest champion's spirit will soon quail. 'In all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need,' Php. 4:12. This was a hard lesson indeed to learn. Who was his master? See, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me,' ver. 13. Now, as the saints' strength to suffer is not in themselves, but Christ, so prayer is the best means to fetch it in for their help; for by it they confess their own weakness, and so God is secured from having a co-rival in the praise. Which Paul is here free to do, and more than so; for, as he confesseth he can do nothing without Christ's strength to enable and embolden him, so he dares not rely on his own solitary single prayers for the obtaining it, but calls in the auxiliary forces of his fellow-saints to besiege heaven for him; that, while he is in the valley suffering for the gospel, they might be lifting up their hands and hearts in the mount of prayer for him.

# The End Of

“The Christian in Complete  
Armour”