

GOD'S ANGER.

O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry with thy people that prayeth?—PSALM LXXX. 4.

It hath been said of war, that it is *malum*, an evil; but it may be a *necessarium*, a necessary evil. It is good sometimes to hunt the wolf, though it is better to fodder the sheep. They speak of a drowning man, *etiam ad novaculam*, that he will rather take hold of a knife than of nothing. A very coward will catch the edge of a naked sword to save his life, though it cut his fingers. Man being cast out of paradise, and that paradise guarded with a sword in the hand of a cherub, durst not attempt a re-entry, because he was guilty. But commonwealths, that have lost any part of their territories or just privileges by foreign invasion and by hostile violence, may justly venture upon the sword, and fairly hope for a recovery, because they are innocent; *et hanc picem amoliri gladio*. *Irene* signifies peace; yet the Turk could sacrifice his beauteous Irene to the god of war. If war in itself were utterly unlawful, God would never have accepted this title, 'the Lord of hosts.' Yet in this style he takes such delight, that he is oftener called the God of hosts, in the former Testament, than by any other title. In those two prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, it is given to him no less than one hundred and thirty times.

All creatures are mustered, and trained, and put into garrison, or brought forth into the field, by his command. Which way can we look beside his armies? If upward into heaven, there is a band of soldiers, even a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, Luke ii. 13. If to the lower heavens, there is a band of soldiers, Gen ii. 1; it was *universa militiæ celi*, to which those idolaters burnt incense. On the earth, not only men are marshalled to his service; so Israel was called the 'host of the living God;' but even the brute creatures are ranged in arrays. So God did levy a band of flies against the Egyptians; and a band of frogs that marched into their bedchambers. He hath troops of locusts, Prov. xxx. 27, and armies of caterpillars. Not only the chariots and horsemen of heaven to defend his prophet; but even the basest, the most indocible, and despicable creatures, wherewith to confound his enemies. If Goliath stalk forth to defile* the God of Israel, he shall be confuted with a pebble. If Herod swells up to a god, God will set his vermin on him, and all the

* Qu. 'defy?'—ED.

king's guard cannot save him from them. You have heard of rats that could not be beaten off till they had destroyed that covetous prelate, and of the fly that killed Pope Adrian. God hath more ways to punish than he hath creatures.

The Lord God of hosts is not properly a title of creation, but of providence. All creatures have their existence from God as their Maker; but so have they also their order from him as their Governor. It refers not so much to their being as to their marshalling; not to their natural but militant estate; not only as creatures do they owe him for their making, but as they are soldiers for their managing. Their order is warlike, and they serve under the colours of the Almighty. So that here, God would be respected, not as a creator, but as a general. His anger, therefore, seems so much the more fearful, as it is presented to us under so great a title, 'the Lord God of hosts is angry.' They talk of Tamerlane, that he could daunt his enemies with the very look of his countenance: Oh! then what terror dwells in the countenance of the offended God! The reprobates shall call to the rocks to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb, Rev. vi. 16. If *ira agni* doth so affright them, how terrible is *ira leonis*, the wrath of the lion? It may justly trouble us all to hear that the Lord, the Lord God of hosts, is angry; in the sense whereof the prophet breaks forth here into this expostulation, 'O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry with thy people that prayeth?' Wherein we have five propositions or inferences naturally arising out of the text.

I. That God may be angry: for that is manifestly implied in the text, 'God is angry.'

II. That his anger may last a great while: 'O Lord, *how long* wilt thou be angry?'

III. That his anger may extend to the whole nation: 'how long wilt thou be angry with thy people?' all the people.

IV. That his anger may fall upon his own people, even his peculiar and chosen flock: 'how long wilt thou be angry with *thy* people?'

V. That his anger may dwell upon them in their devotions, and not be removed by their very prayers: 'how long wilt thou be angry with thy people that prayeth?' Yea, against their prayer?

Now, God is never angry without a cause; he is no froward God, of no tetchy and pettish nature; a cause there must be, or he would never be angry. There can be no cause but sin; we never read that God was angry for anything else. Some he hath corrected without respect unto sin, as Job; but he was never angry with any man but for the sin of that man. It is the sin of the people that hath thus grieved God; and it is the anger of God that hath thus grieved the people. Sin must be supposed to run along with his anger, throughout the text, as the ecliptic line does through the zodiac.

1. If it were not for sin, God would not be *angry*.
2. If it were not for the continuance of sin, he would not be so *long* angry.
3. If it were not for the universality of sin, he would not be angry with the *whole* people.
4. If it were not for the unnatural ingratitude of sin, he would not be angry with *his own* people.
5. If it were not for the base hypocrisy of sin, he would not be angry with *his people that prayeth*.

Thus, then, the argument lies fair and plain before us:—

1. It is sin that makes God *angry*.

2. It is the continuance of sin that makes him *long* angry.

3. It is the generality of sin that makes him angry with the *whole* people.

4. It is the unthankfulness of sin, or the sin of unthankfulness, that makes him angry with his *own* people.

5. Lastly ; It is the hypocrisy of sin, or the sin of hypocrisy, that makes him so long angry with his own people that *prayeth*.

I. We provoke him by our rebellions, and he is *angry*.

II. We continue our provocations against him, and he is *long* angry.

III. We provoke him universally, and so he is angry with us all ; not with some offenders here and there, but with the *whole* people.

IV. We provoke him by our unkindness ; for whom he hath done so much good, and upon whom he has heaped so many blessings ; and so he is angry with his *own* people.

V. Lastly ; We provoke him by our dissimulations ; approaching to him with our lips, and keeping back our hearts ; we pray unto him, and yet live against him ; we call upon his name, and rebel against his will ; and so he is *angry*, and *long* angry, and long angry with the *whole* people, and long angry with his *own* people, and long angry with his own people that *prayeth*.

I. God may be *angry* ; and sin is the cause of his anger ; that is the first proposition. Man may be angry without sin, not without perturbation ; God is angry without either perturbation or sin. His anger is in his nature, not by anthropopathy ; but properly, being his corrective justice, or his vindicative justice. *Iratus videtur, quia tanquam iratus operatur*. Our anger is a most impotent passion ; his a most clear, free, and just operation. By this affection in ourselves, we may guess at the perfection that is in God. The dissolute securitans think that God doth but smile at the absurdities of men ; that *ludit in humanis* ; that their drunkenness and adulteries rather make him merry than angry. Like some carnal father, that laughs at the ridiculous behaviour of his children, to whom their wanton speeches and actions are but a pleasure, and in which he rather encourageth than chides. Indeed, God is said to laugh, Ps. ii. 4. He that sits in heaven, laughs them to scorn ; but woe be to the man at whose fooleries God laughs. It is a dissembling falsehood in man to smile and betray, as Judas began his treachery with a kiss. Such are likened to those bottled windy drinks, that laugh in a man's face, and then cut his throat. But this laughter in God argues not so much what he does, as what they suffer, when, by frustrating their sinful purposes, he exposeth them to contempt and scorn. *Dei ridere, est hominem ludibrio exponere*. If a little ant, creeping out of a molehill, should march forth, and proffer to wrestle with a giant, there were yet some proportion in this challenge ; but there is none of a finite power with an infinite. Audacious sinners, that dare provoke the Lord of hosts ! What are all the armies and forces of tyrants, to oppose the omnipotent God ? He will make a feast of them for the fowls of the air, whom he invites to the flesh of captains, and to the flesh of kings, Rev. xix. 18. Let earth and hell conspire, let there be a confederate band of men and devils ; how easily can he command the one to their dust, and the other to their chains ! What power have they either of motion or of being, but from him against whom they fight ? Our God is a consuming fire, and he will consume them not only in anger, but in laughter. The catastrophe of all rebellion is but the *sarcasmos* or bitter scorn of God.

There is no less difference between God's anger and his favour, than between death and life ; death in the most dismal horror, and life in the most comfortable sweetness of it. ' In his favour there is life,' Ps. xxx. 5 ;

death in his anger ; for when ' thou art angry all our days are gone,' Pa. xc. 9. There is great light given to contraries by their comparison. Look first a little upon the favour of God. ' Oh, how excellent is thy loving-kindness, O Lord,' Ps. xxxvi. 7. ' Thy saints shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou wilt make them to drink of the river of thy pleasures.' What follows upon his favour but satisfaction, and peace, and joy, and eternal life ? When the deluge of water had defaced that great book of nature, Noah had a copy of every kind of creature with him in that famous library, the ark, out of which they were reprinted to the world. So he that hath the favour of God in the Ark of the Covenant, hath the original copy of all blessings ; if they could all have perished, yet so they might be restored. God is the best storehouse, the best treasury. O happy men, that have their estates laid up there ! Though friends, goods, and life forsake us, yet if God's gracious countenance shine upon us, that will be life, and goods, and friends unto us. These benefits and comforts flow from his favour.

But, alas ! how terrible is his anger ! He hath scourged some in very mercy, till they have smarted under his rod. Job complains that ' the terrors of God do fight against him,' Job vi. 4 ; and David says, ' From my youth up, thy terrors have I suffered with a troubled mind,' Ps. lxxxviii. 15, 16. If he will do thus much in love, what shall be the terrors of his wrath ? If he hath drawn blood of his dear ones, what shall be the plague of wilful sinners ? If this be the rod of his children, what are the scorpions provided for his enemies ? What comfort can any find in all the prosperous fortunes upon earth, with whom God is angry in heaven ? If that mighty pagan could apprehend this, he would find small safety in his guard of Janissaries, and less pleasure in his brutish seraglio. It is a vain conceit of that potentate, who, refusing the name of *Pius*, would be called *Felix*—happy, not godly. But there can be no felicity without God's blessing ; and he will not bless, where he is not blessed. But Sylla, surnamed Felix, accounted it not the least part of his fortunes, that Metellus, surnamed Pius, was his friend. Piety is the best friend to Felicity, though Felicity does not always befriend Piety.

That is but a wretched prosperity upon which God looks in anger. If the sun were wanting, it would be night for all the stars ; and if God frown upon a man, for all the glittering honours of this world, he sits in the shadow of death. Let him be never so rich in lands and waters, yet his springs have lost their sweetness, his vines their fruitfulness, his gold hath lost its colour, his precious stones their value and lustre. I mean, the virtue and comfort of all these are gone away with the favour of God. If our house were paved with a floor of gold, and walled with pearls and diamonds, and yet the roof wide open to the violence of heaven, would these shelter us from storms and tempest ? Would we like to be so lodged in winter nights ? Or were our house roofed with cedar, and the walls hung with arras ; yet if the floor be rotten, and under it a bottomless pit, could we sleep in quiet ? There can be no safety when God is angry. His wrath may come thundering from heaven, and suddenly sink rebellious sinners into hell ; and then where is all their honour ? when their mortal part lies in the dishonourable dust, and their immortal part suffers in the inextinguishable fire.

Thus terrible is the anger of God ; now what is he angry withal, but sin ? That is the perpetual make-bate between God and us ; the fuel of the fire of his indignation. ' Your iniquities have separated between you

and your God,' Isa. lix. 2. For this cause he looks upon us as a stranger, yea, as an enemy; 'but they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit; therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them,' Isa. lxiii. 10. But they rebelled: man's occasion of offending God is but a *but*, a nothing, no cause at all; God's occasion of being angry with men is a *therefore*, a cause sufficient, and that cause is sin. Search the holy book all over, and you shall never find God angry but for sin. Nor doth the flame of his wrath break out upon every sin, but only when sin grows impudent and past shame, We were wont to say, that *veritas non querit angulos*; but now *vitium non querit angulos*. It doth that in a bravery, with which the false prophet was threatened, that he should do it in fear, 1 Kings xxii. 25; it runs from chamber to chamber, from house to house, not to hide itself, but to boast itself. We so provoke the Lord, that we do not only anger him, but are angry with him. If the winds do not blow, and the rain fall, as we would have it; if anything falls out cross to our desires; we even vex at God himself, as if he were bound to wait upon our humours. No marvel if God be angry with *us*, when we dare to be angry with *him*, by murmuring at his actions, and calling his providence to question. 'Doeest thou well to be angry?' O man, Jonah iv. 4. No; it is exceeding ill, and dangerous. We may tremble to think that the pot may fall out with the potter, and man be angry with his Maker. It is this meretricious and shameless forehead of sin that angers God. And in this anger we here find him, but let us not so leave him; and yet the next point tells us that his wrath is not suddenly pacified.

II. He may be *long* angry. That's the second proposition. *Usque quo, Domine!* It is not for a fit, like some flash of powder, but may burn long. 'How long, O Lord, wilt thou be angry for ever? and shall thy jealousy burn like fire?' Ps. lxxix. 5. He visits his own Israel with a long dearth; during all those three years of drought and scarcity, God's altar smoked with daily sacrifices, and heaven was solicited with daily prayers, yet still he was *angry*; and why may not David complain, in this psalm, of that famine? We are not at the first sensible of common evils; in war, dearth, or pestilence, we think only of shifting for ourselves, or finding out convenient refuges, like foxes in a storm, that run to the next burrows, and study not how to remove public judgments. But the continuance of an affliction sends us to God, and calls upon us to ask for a reckoning. An evil that is suddenly gone, is as suddenly forgotten; as men struck in their sleep, cannot quickly find themselves; so the blow doth rather astonish than teach us. But when the burden lies long upon us, we will at last complain of the weight, and seek to ease ourselves.

Indeed, there be some sinners more insensible, more insensate than beasts; if we find the hungriest ox feeding in the meadow, and cannot with many pricks of the goad make him remove from his place, we wonder at his stupidity. Yet the insatiate world-affecters, though God not only affright them with menaces, but even afflict them with many scourges, cannot be gotten from their covetous practices. So long as they can by any means grow wealthy, they will not believe that God is angry with them. As if there were none that have more than heart could wish; yet live all this while in the sphere of God's indignation. We can read God's wrath in a storm, not in a calm; yet he may most be angry, when he least expresseth it. 'My jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will no more be angry with thee,' Ezek. xvi. 42. Oh! that is the height of his displeasure. The prophet speaks of a true peace, Jer. xiv. 18. *True* were a needless epithet, if there were not a false peace in our carnal hearts. How fondly doth the

secure sinner flatter himself, in the conceit of his own happiness! All is well at home; he quarrels not with himself, for he denies himself no sensual pleasure. God quarrels not with him, he feels no check of a chiding conscience, he sees no frown of an angry judge; nothing but prosperity shines upon him. He sees no difference in the face of heaven, whatsoever he says or does: the same entertainment is given to his blasphemies, as to his prayers. Sure he thinks himself in God's books above other men. And so he is indeed. In God's book of debts; in God's book of arrearages; in God's book of judgments: so he is far in God's books. He owes such men a payment, and they shall have it. Alas! this is not the sinner's peace, but stupidity; not the Maker's favour, but his fury. All this while he is very *angry*, though he suspends the execution of his wrath. Thus *long sin* lies like a sleeping bandog at the door of their hearts; they look upon the cur as if he would never wake; or if he did, yet as if he were so chained, and clogged, and muzzled that he could never hurt them. But when once God rouseth him, then have at their throats; then they shall feel what it is to have lived so *long* in the anger of God; when the Almighty shall put himself into the fearful forms of vengeance, and the everlasting gulf of fire shall open to receive them into intolerable burnings, the merciless devils seizing on their guilty souls, and afflicting them with heavy torments.

It is some favour when we have the respite to cry, 'How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry with us?' He is not thoroughly angry with us when he suffers us to breathe forth this expostulation. There is some hope of remedy when we once complain of our sickness. It is not change of climate, but change of diet, that recovers us; when we grow to forbear the surfeits of sin, there is a fair possibility of comfort. Yet God may be *long angry*, and long continue sensible testimonies of his anger. 'Forty years long was I grieved with this generation,' Ps. xc. 10. He had smitten Israel with divers punishments, and threatened them with more grievous calamities; that 'every man should eat the flesh of his own arm; Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh; and they both against Judah,' Isa. ix. 20, 21. And yet he had not done with them; his 'anger was not turned away, but his hand was stretched out still.' David's pestilence of three days was a storm soon blown over, though it were bitter for the time; but God's displeasure hath dwelt longer upon us.

But how, then, doth the prophet say 'that he retaineth not anger?' Well enough; for he never retaineth it one moment longer than we retain the cause of it. So soon as we ever cease sinning against him, he ceaseth to be angry with us. After David's humiliation and sacrifice, the angel struck not one blow more with the sword of pestilence. He measures out the length of his anger by the continuance of our rebellions; so that, if we expostulate with him, 'Lord, how long wilt thou be angry with us?' he replies, 'Oh, ye sons of men, how long will ye be rebellious against me?' Let us not look that the Lord should begin first; that his pardon should prevent our repentance. There is great reason that he who hath done the first offence should be first in making the peace. Every day we expect comfort from God, and every day God expects conversion from us. Every week we look for some abatement in the bills, and every week God looks for some abatement of our sins, or amendment of our lives. So long as we continue guilty, it is in vain to cry, 'O, Lord, how long wilt thou be angry?' Our hard hearts are not yet broken with remorse; alas! what can be done to break them? 'The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars,' Ps. xxix. 5; he breaketh the mountains, Ps. xviii. 7; he breaketh the

heavens, Isa. lxiv. 1; he breaketh the stones, 1 Kings xix. 11; and yet his word cannot break our hearts. But if he cannot break us with the rod of affliction, he will break us with a rod of iron, Ps. ii. 9, and 'dash us in pieces like a potter's vessel.'

God is long patient before he is long angry; why should he not be long angry before he be appeased? He is not easily provoked; why should he be so easily pacified? Yet so propense to mercy is our gracious Father, that the fire which was long a kindling is soon quenched. His anger, which is not blown into a flame without many and long continued sins, is yet put out with a few penitent tears. When our houses are burning, it were but foolish to cry out, 'We are undone, the fire rageth,' and we all the while forbear to cast on water. The *usque quo* of God's anger waits for the *quousque* of our repentance. He will not give over striking till we fall a weeping; and we may do *well* to weep before him, seeing we did *ill* to sin against him. His anger doth now long offend us, but our wickedness did far longer offend him. We have provoked him many years, and shall not his wrath burn many days? Still it flameth; let us make haste to bring our buckets of water, filled at the cistern of our eyes, and derived from the fountain of our hearts, to quench it. Let no hands be wanting to this business; for if some bring in the water of tears, while others cast in the fuel of sins, this fire will burn still. But, from the highest to the lowest, let us come in with repentance; and that all of us, even the whole people, for so far God's wrath extendeth.

III. God may be *angry with the whole people*; which is the third proposition. He hath been angry with a whole family, with a whole army, with a whole city, with a whole country, with the whole earth. With a whole family; so he cursed the house of Jeroboam, that 'him that dieth in the city the dogs shall eat, and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat.' With a whole army; so he slew of Sennacherib's host in one night one hundred and eighty-five thousand. With a whole city; so the city of Jericho was cursed with a universal desolation, never to be re-edified without the ruin of the builder. With a whole country; so Saul was charged to destroy Amalek, man and woman, infant and suckling, sheep and oxen, and all that belonged to them. With the whole earth; so when it was become corrupt he drowned it with a flood. Yet observe how God hath qualified his wrath; with his hand of favour snatching out some from his hand of anger. When he cursed the whole family of Jeroboam, he excepted Abijah. When he doomed to death the whole city of Jericho, he excepted the family of Lot. When his anger drowned the whole world in a deluge, yet his mercy excepted Noah and his octonary household. But his anger is very grievous when it extends to the whole people. 'Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts the whole land is darkened,' Isa. ix. 19.

What makes him thus universally angry with us, but the universality of our sins against him? When the passengers ask, 'Wherefore hath the Lord done thus to this great city?' the answer is made, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, and worshipped other gods,' Jer. xxii. 8, 9. To such a fearful height may the sins of the children bring the mother, that that church, which now enjoys such abundance of truth and peace, may be poisoned with heresy and wounded with schism, and suffer an utter dereliction. The whole people is guilty of sin; and why, for their sins, may not God be angry with the whole people, yea, and long angry too? for it will be very long before that fault be amended which hath so long been committed.

God came to low conditions in the behalf of Sodom; Abraham brought him down to *ten*. But he came to lower conditions in the behalf of Jerusalem; he brought himself down to *one*: 'See if you can find a man, if there be any that seeketh the truth in the whole city, and I will pardon it,' Jer. v. 1. Oh, how epidemical is that wickedness where not one escapeth the corruption! We have found the Lord angry enough with a whole people for the sin of one man: 'Lord, hath one man sinned, and wilt thou be angry with the whole congregation?' Num. xvi. 22. No; God's vengeance, when it is the hottest, makes difference of offenders, and knows how to distinguish between the heads of a faction and the train. Though neither be faultless, yet the one is plagued, the other pardoned. 'Depart from the tents of these wicked men, lest ye be consumed in their sins.' So soon as the innocent are severed, the guilty perish. One Achan sins, all Israel suffers. One David sins in pride, seventy thousand of his subjects suffer in the plague. One Saul slew the Gibeonites, three years' dearth lies upon the Israelites for it. The blood of those Canaanites, shed against covenant almost forty years before by the then king, is now called for of the whole people. They had all sins enough, but God fixeth his eye of anger upon this. Every sin hath a tongue, but that of blood outcries them all; and if justice do not revenge the murder of one, God will require it of the whole nation. When seven of Saul's sons were hanged up, God was entreated for the land, 2 Sam. xxi. 14. Then 'shall the clouds drop fatness, and the earth run forth into plenty: then shall the valleys stand thick with corn, and the little hills rejoice on every side.' Some drops of blood shed in justice procure large showers from heaven. A few carcasses laid in their graves are a rich compost to the earth. There can be no peace where blood cries unheard, unregarded; but when it is expiated by the blood of the offenders, there will be a cessation of the judgments. 'Phinehas executed judgment, and the plague stayed.' One contrary is ever cured by another; take away the cause, and the effect will cease. Prayer is very powerful, but doing of justice more available. The whole congregation were at their prayers, and those prayers were steeped in tears; yet still the plague raged and God's anger continued. But when Phinehas had run those two adulterers through with his javelin in the act of their sin, the plague was stayed. So blessed a thing is it for any nation that justice is impartially executed.

Thus the universality of sin calls for the universality of repentance, or else it will provoke God's anger to strike us with universal judgments. If the whole people be guilty, the whole people must fall to deprecation. Such was the Ninevite's repentance, 'every man turning from his evil ways,' John iii. 8. We have sinned, even the whole nation; and, as if we had not sins enough of our own, we borrow of our neighbour. What nation under heaven do we trade withal, from whom the sins of that nation are not brought hither? And those are merchandises that might well be spared. Are we all in the transgression, and do we lay the burden of repentance upon some few? If we expostulate with God, 'Lord, hath one man sinned, and wilt thou be wroth with the whole congregation?' may he not much more justly expostulate with us, 'Hath the whole congregation sinned, and is it enough for one man to repent?' Is the whole garment foul, and must only the skirts be washed? Is the whole building ruinous, and do we think it a sufficient reparation to patch up one corner of it? No; the plaster of our repentance must be fully as large as the orifice of our wickedness, or we cannot be healed. But still God is angry with us, yea, though we were his own people. For—

IV. God may be *angry with his own people*; which is the fourth proposition. 'I will visit their sins with a rod, and their iniquity with scourges; but my mercy will I not utterly take from them,' Ps. lxxxix. 38. Though he do not take his mercy from them, yet he may be angry with them. He is our Father, and never did father in sweeter terms entertain the dearest treasure of his blood than God doth us, when he vouchsafes to call us his *people*. Yet, did you never see a father angry with his child? Indeed, there is great difference between that wrath of God which is toward his own people and that which comes upon the children of disobedience, Col. iii. 6. They differ three ways.

1. In respect of *continuance*. His anger upon reprobates is eternal, not extinguished with their bloods, but pursuing them from earth to hell. To his people it is but temporary, it lasts but a moment, 'Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning,' Ps. xxx. 5. 'He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger for ever,' Ps. ciii. 9. When he was very angry with his idolatrous Israel, Moses does but put him in mind that they were his own people, and he was pacified, Ex. xxxii. 11. 'For a moment, in a little wrath, he hides his face from us,' Isa. liv. 8. 'Rejoice not against me, O my enemy, for though I fall I shall rise again,' Mic. vii. 8. But for the wicked 'his wrath abideth on them,' John iii. 36.

2. In respect of the *measure*. It is milder towards his own people than to others. For the unrighteous he proportions his judgments, not to their strengths, but to their deserts. For his own people he proportions his corrections, not to their deserts, but to their strengths. For the former he minds not what they can bear by their powers, but what they have deserved by their sins. For the other he considers not what their sins deserve, but what their spirits can sustain. His most bitter wrath to his people is always sweetened with his mercy. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions,' Ps. xcix. 8. He brings a scourge in one hand, and a pardon in the other; and while he draws blood of the flesh, he brings peace to the soul.

3. In regard to the *end*. The wicked are vessels of wrath, Rom. ix. 22; and, as their sin makes them fit for God's anger, so his anger makes them fit for destruction. But for his own people, 'they are chastened of the Lord, that they might not be condemned with the world,' 1 Cor. xi. 32. Whether he inflict on them punishments for sin, or suffer them to fall into sins for punishments, yet all shall work to their good. His corrections are but medicines, 'bringing forth the quiet fruit of righteousness,' Heb. xii. 11. He lets them fall into some heinous crime, but it is to waken their repentance. Small spots on a garment are not minded; we seldom are so curious as to wash them out. But when a great spot comes, a foul stain, we then scour and cleanse it, to get out that, and so we get out all the little spots too. Sins of a lesser size never trouble us, we mind not the washing of *them* with a few sorrowful tears; but when a great sin comes, and disquiets the conscience, then repentance, that old laundress, is called for, and in that larder we wash out both the great offences and the rest. So God suffers us to fall into some gross and grievous sin, as a father suffers his little child to burn his finger in a flame, that his whole body may not fall into the fire.

All these differences are expressed by the prophet Isaiah. (1.) For the *time*. 'Doth the ploughman plough all the day to sow?' Isa. xxviii. 24. God doth not continue ploughing all day long furrows upon our backs, but when he hath broken up the fallow ground of our hearts, he then sows in

the seed of his comfort. (2.) For the *measure*. 'Hath he plagued Israel, as he hath plagued the enemies of Israel?' Isa. xxvii. 7. He smites his Israel in the branches and in the bunches, cuts down some of his superstitious boughs, and plucks off clusters of her rotten grapes; but the wicked he smites at the very root. (3.) For the *end*. The furnace of his wrath shall but purge away our dross, and make us pure metal, fit for the stamp of his own image.

Yet, for all this, God hath been grievously angry with *his own people*. Yea, their sins anger him most of all, because, together with wickedness, there is unkindness. As dearly as he loves them, their sins may provoke him. Our interest in God is so far from excusing our iniquities, that it aggravates them. Of all others, the transgression of his own people shall not pass unpunished. The nearer we are to him, the nearer do our offences touch him; as a man more takes to heart a discourtesy done by a friend than a great injury by a stranger. Pagans may blaspheme, and bezzle, and defile the marriage bed, and yet God let them alone; but he will not endure these sins in his own people. The more he loves us, the greater should be our love to him. Now, love and unkindness cannot stand together. If we revolt from our Maker, as Absalom thought Hushai had renounced David, may he not justly expostulate with us, 'Is this thy kindness to thy friend?' There is no such irksome disobedience as where God looks for service. 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not,' John i. 11. Oh! that could not choose but trouble him! As Demades said to Philip of Macedon, and at a time when he well deserved it, *Cum fortuna tibi Agamemnonis personam imposuerit, nonne pudet te Thersitem agere?* When fortune hath made thee an Agamemnon, art thou not ashamed to play Thersites? When God hath honoured us for his own people, with the noble name of Christians, is it not a shame for us to play the pagans? 'Happy are the people that are in such a case, yea, blessed are the people that have the Lord for their God.' Yet that people may so far anger him that he will take away, not only their temporal, but even their spiritual happiness. Those seven churches of Asia were God's own people, yet the gospel was not fastened to their territories, as the old Romans pinioned their goddess *Victoria*, or their apish posterity do the Catholic faith, to their own infallible chair. But as they had a time to breathe, so they had a time to expire; and so hath my fourth proposition. There is but one gradation more.

V. God may be angry with *his people that prayeth*. Wherein we have two main observations. First, The wonder that God will be angry at our *prayers*. Second, The answer which resolves the wonder, shewing why our very prayers may anger him. Either of these is backed with three circumstances. 1. For the wonder that '*God is angry with his people that prayeth.*'

1. All the other conclusions are easily granted. God may be *angry*, and angry very *long*, and angry with the *whole* people, and angry with his *own* people: all this because of their sins; but that he should be angry at their *prayers*, this is the wonder. He hath commanded us to pray, and will he be offended with us for doing his command? Angry against us for our prayer! He hath commanded us to prayer as the only means to assuage his anger; and yet, is he angry at our prayer? Phinehas prayed, and his anger was pacified, Ps. cvi. 30; Aaron prayed, and the plague ceased; and will he now be angry with the people that prayeth? He is a God that heareth prayer: 'O thou that hearest prayer, to thee shall all flesh come,' Ps. lxxv. 2; and does he now reject prayer? He hath so styled his own house, *oratorium*, the house of prayer; and to them that pray unto

him in his house he hath promised peace, saying, 'In this house will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts,' Hag. ii. 9. Peace and wrath are contraries; how should prayer procure peace, when God is angry at prayer? Prayer is so noble, that under it is comprehended the whole worship of God: 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,' Rom. x. 13; and yet will God be angry at the prayer of his people? It is a great honour that God will vouchsafe to speak unto man, but a far greater honour that man is allowed to speak unto God; the very angels stand in admiration of it; and yet what comfort is there in that, when God is angry at the prayer of his people? What blessing is there which our prayers cannot infeoff us in? We send up prayer to God with the same confidence that Adenijah sent Bathsheba to Solomon: 'the king will deny thee nothing;' and will God be angry at prayer? It is the only means we have to pacify him, prayer; and shall our prayer anger him? Alas! what hope is left us, when God is angry at prayer? This hath often turned away his wrath, and does it now incense his wrath? If we should not pray, he would then be angry; and when we do pray, is he angry too? What! neither way pleased? What is the reason why there is so much empty cask in God's cellar, but for want of prayer? 'Ye have not, because ye ask not,' James iv. 2; and shall not prayer obtain favour? 'O Lord, what shall I say,' it was the complaint of Joshua, Josh. vii. 8, 'when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies?' So, what shall we say, what shall we do, when God turneth back our prayers? Why is it called the throne of grace, before which we present our prayers, if that throne send forth nothing but beams of wrath? We look for grace, and a favourable audience of our petitions; but, alas! what shall become of us, when God is angry at our very prayers?

2. How wonderful is the power of prayer! 'Let me alone,' saith God (Exod. xxxii. 10) to Moses; who would look for such a word from God to man, as 'Let me alone'? As yet Moses had said nothing; before he opens his mouth, God prevents his importunity, as foreseeing the holy violence of prayer. Moses stood trembling before the majesty of his Maker, as fearing his dire revenge; and yet that Maker doth, after a sort, solicit Moses for leave to revenge, 'Let me alone.' As it was afterwards said of Christ concerning some places, 'He could do no miracles there, because of their unbelief,' so one would think that God could do no judgments here, because of Moses's faith. 'Let me alone.' Why? Can that resist God? Yes, prayer can resist him. Such is his mercy, that he hath, as it were, obliged his power to the faith of our prayer. He enables us to resist himself: '*scipsum vincit*.' The fervent prayer of the faithful can bind the hands of the Almighty. What is there that God can do which prayer cannot do? O mighty, I had almost said almighty, prayer! What a hand is that which can hold omnipotence! What wings are those which can overtake infiniteness! Yet, alas! we now mourn over prayer as David did over Jonathan: 'How are the mighty fallen!' 2 Sam. i. 25. Prayer hath lost her force with God when God is angry with prayer. Her wings are clipped that she cannot mount. Her bow is broken; she cannot shoot an arrow that reaches the mark. She is become a widow, as it was lamented over Jerusalem (Lam. i. 1), desolate and solitary, that was a princess among the provinces, and a queen among the nations. She sits weeping in the dust, and hath almost forgot the use of speech. She mourns not so much for Mary's *abstulerunt Dominum*, for she knows where to find him; as that our sins *abstulerunt Domini favorem*, and she knows not how

to pacify him. And how should she, when God is angry with his people that prayeth? Where is the strength of this Samson? What is become of that power, which was wont to command heaven and earth? The visible heavens have been opened by prayer, for so Elias brought down rain, James v. 18. The invisible heavens have been opened by prayer, for so the penitent malefactor got from the cross to paradise. So Stephen saw the 'heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God,' Acts vii. 56. *Omnia vincentem vincit*. It was wont to be an especial favourite of God; but now, alas! it is cast out of favour, for God is angry with prayer. 'Thou hast covered thyself with a thick cloud, that our prayer should not pass through,' Lam. iii. 44. This is a woful condition of our souls, when the Lord is angry at our prayers; when he will not hear them, nor answer them; it is a cause of sadness in us, but much more when he is angry with them. 'Therefore will I deal in fury; though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them,' Ezek. viii. 18. This is fury indeed: before the ancients of Israel had said, 'The Lord seeth us not, he hath forsaken the earth.' There they deny God eyes, and here he denies them ears. A burning wrath, as the original hath it: 'How long wilt thou smoke against the prayer of thy people?'

8. And of *thy people*. This increaseth the wonder. For God to stop his ears against the prayers of the heathen, to reject the petitions of idolaters, to despise a devotion done before images and painted blocks, is no marvel. For they dishonour him in their prayers, and God will be angry with anything that eclipseth his glory. But he does not use to slight those that serve him, and continue in his holy worship. It is strange that he should be angry at the prayer of his own people. Angry with those whom he hath chosen, angry with them long, and angry with them at their very prayers. This must be some extraordinary wrath; and so you have all the circumstances that may advance the wonder.

Now for the answer, that takes off this admiration, and satisfies us with some reasons why God may be angry with his people that prayeth. God is never angry at his people without a cause, and it must be a great cause that makes him angry with them in their devotions; whereof we have three considerations.

First, There may be infirmities enough in our very prayers to make them unacceptable. As if they be *Exanimés*, without life and soul: when the heart knows not what the tongue utters. Or *Perfunctoria*, for God will have none of those prayers that come out of feigned lips. Or *Tentativa*, for they that will *petere tentando*, tempt God in prayer, shall go without. Or *Fluctuantes*, of a wild and wandering discourse, ranging up and down, which the apostle calls 'beating the air,' as huntsmen beat the bushes, and as Saul sought his father's asses. Such prayers will not stumble upon the kingdom of heaven. Or if they be *Prepropera*, run over in haste, as some use to chop up their prayers and think long till they have done. But they that pray in such haste shall be heard at leisure. Or *sine fiducia*; the faithless man had as good hold his peace as pray; he may babble, but prays not; he prays ineffectually, and receives not. He may lift up his hands, but he does not lift up his heart. Only the prayer of the righteous availeth, and only the believer is righteous. But the formal devotion of a faithless man is not worth the crust of bread which he asks. Or *sine humilitate*, so the pharisee's prayer was not truly *supplicatio*, but *superlatio*. A presumptuous prayer profanes the name of God instead of adoring it. All, or any, of these defects may mar the success of our prayers.

Secondly, But such is the mercy of our God, that he will wink at many infirmities in our devotions, and will not reject the prayer of an honest heart because of some weakness in the petitioner. It must be a greater cause than all this that makes God angry at our prayers. In general it is sin. 'We know that God heareth not sinners: but if a man doth his will, him he heareth,' John ix. 31. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer,' Ps. lvi. 18. They be our sins that block up the passage of our prayers. It is not the vast distance between heaven and earth, not the thick clouds, not the threefold regions, not the sevenfold orbs, not the firmament of heaven, but only our sins, that hinder the ascent of our prayers. 'When ye make many prayers I will not hear you.' Why? 'Because your hands are full of blood,' Isa. i. 15. God will have none of those petitions that are presented to him with bloody hands. Our prayers are our bills of exchange, and they are allowed in heaven, when they come from pious and humble hearts; but, if we be broken in our religion, and bankrupts of grace, God will protest our bills; he will not be won with our prayers. Thus sin is the general cause.

Thirdly, In particular, it is the hypocrisy of sin, or the sin of hypocrisy, that makes God so angry with our prayers. When we honour him with the prostration of our bodies, and solicit him with the petitions of our lips, and yet still dishonour him in our sinful lives, is not this hypocrisy? When we speak before him in the temple as suppliants, and sin against him abroad as rebels, is not this hypocrisy? Like the outlaw that sues to the king for a pardon, and yet resolves to live in rebellion. We will not part with our beloved sins, and yet beg the removal of judgments; will not this dissimulation make God angry with our very prayers? If we shall, Judas-like, kiss his throne with the devotion of our lips, and betray his honour with the wicked works of our hands, should he not be angry at our prayers? We make as if we did lift up our hands unto him, but, indeed, we stretch out our hands against him; if this be prayer, it is such a one as deserves anger. Fear can make the devil himself fall to his prayers: 'I beseech thee, torment me not,' Luke viii. 28. Another request he made which Christ granted; but it was in wrath, not in favour. The pride of our hearts, the covetousness of our hands, the blasphemy of our mouths, the uncleanness of our lusts, the wickedness of our lives; these make God angry with our prayers. If we could be thoroughly angry with our sins, God would cease to be angry with our prayers; but, so long as we run on in those sinful courses upon earth, let us look for no favourable audience from heaven. Do good and continue it, and then pray for good, and have it. It hath been said, '*Loquere ut te videam*,' Speak, that I may see thee; so saith God to man, '*Operare ut te videam*,'* Work, that I may hear thee. If we dishonour God's name by our oaths and blasphemies, and upon every trivial occasion toss it in our profane mouths, in vain we pray, '*Sanctificetur nomen tuum*.' Hallowed be thy name. If we hear the gospel preached, and receive no instruction by it, nor give any regard or obedience to it, in vain we pray, '*Adveniat regnum tuum*.' Thy kingdom come. If the current of our affections and actions runs cross to the will of God, in vain we pray, '*Fiat voluntas tua*.' Thy will be done. If we extort the bread of the poor out of their hands, or seek to live by violence or oppression, in vain we pray, '*Panem nostrum da nobis quotidianum*.' Give us this day our daily bread; for this is to attempt to have it, whether God will or no; he does not give it, but we snatch it. While we are indulgent to our darling sins,

* Qu. '*Audiam?*'—Ed.

and will not part with the dear delights of our bloods, in vain we pray, '*Dimitte nobis debita nostra*.' Forgive us our trespasses. While we seek to revenge our wrongs upon others, and bear malice in our hearts, our '*Sicut nos dimittimus*,' as we forgive them that trespass against us, doth but beg for vengeance on our own heads. All the while that we listen to the suggestions of Satan, and like the allurements of the world, and awaken our own lusts to tempt ourselves, it is but a mockery to pray, '*In tentationem ne nos inducas*.' Lead us not into temptation. While we seek that which is evil, and run with greediness into evil, in vain we pray, '*Libera nos a malo*.' Deliver us from evil. We do but flatter God, and compliment with him, when we conclude with, '*Tuum est regnum, potentia, et gloria*.' Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory; for it is our own glory we seek after, not his. All this cannot keep him from being angry with our prayers. So long as his people rebelleth, he will be angry with his people that prayeth. For some use:—

If God be angry with them that pray, what will he be with them who do not pray? with them that break his laws, and never cry him mercy? with them that live in wickedness, and never ask him forgiveness? 'The ungodly call not upon the Lord,' Ps. xiv. 4; will he not be much more angry with them? God is not in all their thoughts, but they are in the thoughts of God. He thinks of them with indignation, and will remember them to their cost. 'Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem,' Ps. cxxxvii. 7. Yes, he will remember them in the day of their destruction.

If God be sometimes angry at our prayers, how will he brook our curses? If he beat back our petitions, how will he take vengeance on our blasphemies? 'Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing,' James iii. 16; but God will not accept of a blessing from a mouth that is used to cursing. If he may be so angry with a people that prayeth, what will his wrath do to a people that sweareth? Think this, ye that, if it were possible, would swear God out of his throne, and the Judge of all the world out of his tribunal, your very prayers are abominable; your blasphemous breaths have put a stink into all your sacrifices. That tongue is fit for nothing but flames, which so flameth with oaths and execrations. Your prayers cannot be heard by reason of your sins, but your blasphemies shall be heard and plagued notwithstanding your prayers. If the instrument gives a harsh sound, there is trouble instead of music; a jarring organ grates the ears rather than delights them. Our sins have put all our instruments out of tune, and for them God is angry at our very prayers.

There is no way to take off his anger, but by turning from our wickedness. If we break off our sins, 'he will leave a blessing behind him, even a meat-offering, and a drink-offering to the Lord,' Joel. ii. 14; he will both give and take our sacrifice. Let us do thus, and 'prove him whether he will not open the windows of heaven,' Mal. iii. 10. Our repentance and our righteousness shall open heaven, so that our prayers may go up for a blessing, and a blessing shall come down upon our prayers. Prayer is *vox fidei*, as John Baptist was *vox Christi*: if we mourn and do not pray, our faith hath lost her voice; and prayer without faith, is John without Christ, a voice without a word. Faith is the soul, and repentance is the life of prayer, and a prayer without them hath neither life nor soul. If we believe not, we are yet in our sins; if we repent not, our sins are yet in us; and so long as this state continueth, no wonder if God be angry with his people that prayeth. But first, 'will I wash my hands in innocency, and then will

I compass thine altar,' Ps. xxvi. 6. 'Then shall my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands, like the evening sacrifice,' Ps. cxli. 2. When, with the sword of severe and impartial repentance, we have cut the throat of our sins, and done execution upon our lusts, then let us solicit heaven with our prayers; then pray, and speed; then come, and welcome; no anger, but all mercy then. Then the courtiers about the King in heaven, shall make room for prayers. Then the Prince himself will take our prayer into his own hand, and with a gracious mediation present it to his Father. Then '*mittimus preces et lacrymas ad Deum legatos.*' Then is that court of audience ready to receive and answer our ambassadors; which be our prayers and our tears. Then Saint John sees twelve gates in heaven, all open, and all day open, to entertain such suitors.

This is our refuge, and that a sure one. Although the enemy begirts the city with never so strait a siege, and stop up all the passages, yet he cannot block up the passage to heaven. So long as that is open, and God in league with us, there may be relief and succour had from thence by prayer. Faith is a better engineer than was Dædalus; and yet he could make a shift to frame wings, with which he made an escape over those high walls wherein he was imprisoned. '*Restat iter calo, tentabimus ire.*' Let Pharaoh be behind, and the Red Sea before, the high rocks and mountains on every side, yet Israel can find a way for all that. When there is no other way to escape danger, a Christian can go by heaven, and avoid all by prayer. As it is the heaviest malediction, 'Let his prayer be turned into sin:' so it is a happy blessing when our sin is turned into prayer, when sin is so done away that prayer may take place. Then shall Jacob's ladder be never empty of angels; our prayers ascending to heaven, and God's blessing descending on us. Then shall prayer disburden our hearts of all sorrows, and God shall fill them with his sweet comforts. Then shall we sing with cheerful voices, 'Blessed be the Lord, that hath not turned away our prayer from him, nor his mercy from us,' Ps. lxxvi. 20. Amen.