

Sermon IX.

Rom. xv. 13.—“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,” &c.

It is usual for the Lord in his word to turn his precepts unto promises, which shows us, that the commandments of God do not so much import an ability in us, or suppose strength to fulfil them, as declare that obligation which lies upon us, and his purpose and intention to accomplish in some, what he requires of all: and therefore we should accordingly convert all his precepts unto prayers, seeing he hath made them promises. This gives us ground, as it were, to retort his commands by way of requests and supplications. The scripture here gives us a precedent, and often elsewhere hath made his command a promise. It is then in the next disposition, and nearest capacity, to be turned into the form of a supplication. The joy promised in the preceding verse is elsewhere commanded; and this immediately disposes the sinner to receive a new form of prayer, from a believing heart, and that not only for himself, but for others. You see how frequently such holy and hearty wishes are interjected in his writings. And indeed such ejaculations of the soul's desires, whether kept within, or vented, will often interrupt the thoughts and discourses of believers, but yet they break no sentence, they mar no sense, no more than the interposition of a parenthesis. Such desires will follow by a kind of natural resultance upon the lively apprehension of any divine excellent thing, and secret complacency in it, and a stirring of the heart to be possessed with it, will almost prevent deliberation. Such an attractive power the excellency of any object hath in the heart, that it draws it and engages it almost before any consultation be called about it. Now there is something of this in these objects which we are naturally delighted with. All at least that they want the apprehension supplies, and this draws the heart forcibly after them, as it were,

with out previous advisement. Yet because of the limitation, emptiness, and scarcity of these things, commonly the desires of men are contracted much within themselves, and run towards a monopoly of those things. They are so poor and narrow, that they cannot be enjoyed of more, without division, and the dividing them cannot be without diminution of each man's contentment, and therefore men's wishes ordinarily are stinted within their own satisfaction and possession, and cannot without some restraint of reason extend further to other men. But this is the vast difference between spiritual things and bodily, eternal things and temporal, that there is no man possessed of spiritual good, but he desires a community. It is as natural upon the apprehension of them to enlarge the soul's wishes to other men, because there is such excellency, abundance, and solidity discovered in them, as that all may be full, and none envy or prejudge another. They are like the light that can communicate itself to all, and that without diminution of its splendour. All may see it without prejudice one to another. They are such an ocean that every one may fill their vessel, and yet nothing less for them that come after. And therefore the soul that wishes largely for itself, will not find that inward discontent at the great abundance of another, which is the inseparable shadow of earthly and temporal advantages. It is cross to men's interest, that love gain or preferment, or any such thing, that others grow rich, or are advanced high in the world, for it intercepts what they desire. But it is not at all the interest of a godly soul that others be worse than himself, but rather the salvation and happiness of all men is that interest which alone he espouses.

Now for this, my beloved, before we proceed further, you may find how the pulse of your souls beats, and what your temper is, by considering what is the ordinary unrestrained and habitual wishes of your hearts. Certainly as men are inclined so they affect, and so they desire, and these unpremeditated desires that are commonly stirred up in the hearts of men, argue much the inward

temper and inclination of the heart, and give the best account of it. I think if men would reflect upon themselves, they will find that earthly things are vain, while they put on another beauty, and have a more magnificent representation in their minds, and so draw after them the choicest of their affections, that they cannot spare much real affection for spiritual things, which are apprehended more slightly and darkly, and make the lighter and more superficial impression. But certainly this will be the most natural beating of a holy heart and the ordinary breathing of it, to desire much of this spiritual treasure for themselves and others. You know what the thoughts and discourses of merchants turn most upon. It is to have good winds, fair weather, good markets, and all things that may facilitate gain, and husbandmen wish for good seasons, timely showers, and dry harvests, that there may be plenty. And generally what men's hearts are set upon, that they go abroad fervently and incessantly in longing desires after. Now truly this is the Christian's inward motion, and this is his salutation, wherewith he congratulateth others. "The God of hope fill you with all peace and joy in believing." His gain lies in another airth.⁴⁵⁰ His plenty is expected from another field, and that is from above, from the God of hope, the sweetest name (if all the rest be answerable) to be dealt withal, either for gain or plenty, for it is hope that makes labour sweet, and if it answer expectation then all is well. Therefore, in the sowing the seed of prayers and supplications, with tears, for this harvest of joy, and in trafficking for this treasure of peace, it is good that we have to do with the God of hope, who cannot make us ashamed; for he that soweth must sow in hope, 1 Cor. ix. 10. And therefore, though we sow in tears, yet let us mingle hope therewith, and the harvest shall be joy, and the plenty, affluence of peace in the Holy Ghost. Now if we believed this, would not our sorrows be deep, and our labours sweet?

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In the words you have read, there is the highest wish of a holy heart for himself and them he loves best; that one desire, if he had no occasion ever to present himself to God, but once, that he would certainly fall upon, or some such like, to be filled after this manner with all peace and joy in believing. These are the fruits of the Spirit he desires to be filled with, and feed upon,—peace as an ordinary meal, and joy as an extraordinary desert, or as a powerful cordial; and to supply what here is wanting at present, the hope of what is to come, and that in abundance. This is even an entertainment that a believer would desire for himself, and these who have his best wishes, while he is in this world. He would despise the delicacies of kings, and refuse their dainties, if he might sit at this table that is spread on the mountain of God's church, a full feast which fills the soul with peace, joy, and hope, as much as now it is capable of. Now these precious fruits you see in the words show the root that brings them forth, and the branch that immediately bears them. The root is the God of hope, and the power of the Holy Ghost. And a soul being ingrafted as a living branch by faith into Christ, receives virtue to bring forth such pleasant fruits, so that they grow immediately upon the branch of believing, but the sap and virtue of both come from the Holy Ghost, and the God of hope. Or to take it up in another like notion. This is the river which gladdeneth the city of God with its streams, that waters the garden of the Lord with its threefold stream. For you see it is parted in three heads, and every one of them is derived from another. The first in the order of nature is peace,—a sweet, calm, and refreshing river, which sometimes overflows like the river Nilus, and then it runs in a stream of joy, which is the high spring tide but ordinarily it sends forth the comfortable stream of hope, and that in abundance. Now this threefold river hath its original high, as high as the God of hope, and the power of the Holy Ghost, but the channel of it is situated low, and it is believing in Christ.

To begin then with the first of these. Truly there is nothing can

be spoken that sounds more sweetly in the ears of men than peace and joy. They need nothing to commend them, for they have a sufficient testimonial, and letters of recommendation written upon the affections of all men. For what is it that all men labour and seek after but this? It is not any outward earthly thing that is desired for itself, but rather for the peace and contentment the mind expects in it. And therefore, this must be of itself the proper object or good of the soul, which, if it can be had immediately, without that long and endless compass about the creatures, certainly a man cannot but think himself happy, and will have no missing of other things, as if a man could live healthfully and joyfully without meat, and without all appetite for it, no doubt but he would think himself the happiest man in the world, and would think it no pain to him to want the dainties of princes, but rather that he were delivered from the wearisome necessity others laboured under. Just so is it here, there is nothing would persuade a man to travel, and toil all his lifetime, about the creatures, and not to suffer his soul to take rest, if he did believe to find that immediately without travel, which he endures so much travel for. And therefore the believing Christian is only a wise man, who is instructed where the things themselves, true peace and joy, do lie, and so seeks to be filled with the things themselves, for which only men seek other things, and not as other men who catch at the shadows, that they may at length find the substance itself, for this were far about, and labour in vain.

Peace is so sweet and comprehensive a word, that the Jews made their usual compellation, "Peace be unto you,"⁴⁵¹ importing all felicity, and the affluence of all good. And indeed our

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⁴⁵¹ [The friendly salutation which the steward of Joseph addressed to his master's brethren, when they went a second time to Egypt to purchase corn, was (██████████ Shalom leikoum) "Peace be to you." After the lapse of so many ages, it is interesting to know that this still continues to be, with little variation, the common salutation of friends in the East. Salam aleikoum, "Peace be with you," is immediately acknowledged by a similar greeting, Aliekoum salam, "To you be peace."—*Ed.*]

Saviour found no fitter word to express his matchless good-will to the well-being of his disciples nor this (Luke xxiv. 36.), when he saluted them after his resurrection, "Peace be unto you," which is as much as if he had wished absolute satisfaction, all contentment and happiness that themselves would desire. Now this peace hath a relation to God, to ourselves, and our brethren. I will exclude none of them from the present wish; for even brotherly concord and peace suits well with the main subject of this chapter, which is the bearing of our neighbours' infirmities, and not pleasing ourselves, and such like mutual duties of charity. But certainly the other two relations are most intrinsic to happiness, because there is nothing nearer to us than the blessed God; and next to him, there is nothing comes so near us as ourselves. The foundation of all our misery, is that enmity between man and God, which is as if heaven and earth should fall out into an irreconcilable discord, and upon that should follow the suspension of the light of the stars, and the withdrawing of the influences of heaven, and the withholding the refreshment of the early and latter rain. If such dissension fell between them, that the heavens should be as brass to the earth, and would refuse the clouds when they cry for rain, or the herbs and minerals when they crave the influences from above, what a desolate and irksome dwelling-place would the earth be? What a dreary habitation would we find it? Even so it is between God and men. All our being, all our well-being, hangs upon the good aspect of his countenance. In his favour is all our life and happiness; yet since the first rebellion, every man is set contrary to God, and in his affections and actions denounces war against heaven, whence hath flowed the sad and woful suspension of all these blessings, and comfortable influences, which only beautify and bless the soul of man. And now there is nothing to be seen but the terrible countenance of an angry God, the revengeful sword of justice shaken in the word; all above us as if the sun were turned into blackness, and the moon into blood, and behold trouble and

darkness, and dimness of anguish.

Now whenever a soul begins to apprehend his enmity and division in sad earnest, there follows an intestine war in the conscience. The terrors of God raise up a terrible party within a man's self, and that is the bitter remembrance of his sins. These are mustered and set in order in battle-array against a man, and every one of these, as they are thought upon, strike a dart into his heart. They shoot an arrow dipped in the wrath of God, the poison whereof drinketh up his spirit, Job vi. 4. Though the most part of souls have now a dead calm, and are asleep like Saul in the field in the midst of his enemies, or as Jonas in the ship in the midst of the tempest, yet when they awake out of that deep stupidity, God will write bitter things against them, and make them to possess their iniquities; and they shall find that he hath numbered their steps, and watched over their sin, and sealed it as in a bag, to be kept in record. Then he will renew his witnesses against them, and put their feet in the stocks, and they shall then apprehend that changes and war are against them, and that they are set as a mark against God, and so they will be a burden to themselves, Job vii. 20. What a storm will it raise in the soul! Now to lay this tempest, and calm this wind, is the business of the gospel, because it reveals these glad tidings of peace and reconciliation with God, which can only be the ground of a perfect calm in the conscience. Herein is the atonement and propitiation set forth, that which by its fragrant and sweet smell hath pacified heaven, and appeased justice; and this only is able to pacify the troubled soul, and lay the tumultuous waves of the conscience, Eph. ii. 13-20; Col. i. 19-22. This gives the answer of a good conscience, which is like the sweet and gentle breathing of a calm day after a tempest, 1 Pet. iii. 21. Now it is not so much God reconcilable to sinners, as God in Christ reconciling sinners to himself, 2 Cor. v. 19. Though some men be always suspicious of God, yet they have more reason to suspect their own willingness. For what is all the gospel but a declaration of his love, and laying down

the enmity, or rather, that he had never hostile affections to his elect, and so was all this while providing a ransom for himself, and bringing about the way to kill the enmity? And having done that by the blood of Christ, he will follow us with entreaties of reconcilment, and requests to lay down our hostile affections, and the weapons of our warfare; and for him we have no more ado but to believe his love, while we were yet enemies. This, I say, carried into the heart with power, gives that sweet calm and pleasant rest to the soul, after all its tossings. This commands the winds and waves of the conscience, and they obey it. It is true that many find no trouble within, and some, upon terrible apprehensions of sin and wrath, find ease for the time in some other thing, as a diversion to some other object, and turning aside with Cain to build cities, to worldly pleasures, or employments, or company, that the noise of them may put the clamours of their conscience to silence. Some parleys and cessations men have, some treaties of this kind for peace with God; but alas! the most part make no entire and full peace. They are always upon making the bargain, and cannot close it, because of their engagements to sin, and their own corrupt lusts. And therefore many do nothing else than what men do in war, to seek some advantage, or to gain time by their delays: but O the latter end will be sad, when he shall arm you against yourselves! Were it not better, now while it is to-day, not to harden your hearts? Now, joy is the effect of peace, and it is the very overflowing of it in the soul, upon the lively apprehension of the love of God, and the inestimable benefit of the forgiveness of sins. It is peace in a large measure, pressed down, and running over, breaking without the ordinary channel, and dilating itself to the affecting and refreshing of all that is in man: "My heart and my flesh shall rejoice." This is the very exuberance and high sailing-tide of the sea of peace that is in a believer's heart. It swells sometimes upon the full aspect of God's countenance beyond the ordinary bounds, and cannot be kept within in gloriation and boasting in God. When [591]

a soul is so illustrated with the Holy Ghost, as to make a kind of presence and possession of what is hoped for, that makes the soul to enlarge itself in joy. This makes the inward jubilation, the heart as it were to leap for joy. Now, truly this is not the ordinary entertainment of a Christian. It is neither so universal nor constant as peace. These fruits so matured and ripe, like the grapes of Canaan, are not set down always upon the table of every Christian, nor yet at all to some. It is enough that he keep the soul in that healthful temper, that it is neither quite cast down or discouraged through difficulties and infirmities. It is sufficient if God speak peace to the soul, though it be not acquainted with these raptures of Christianity. This hath so much sense in it, that it is not meet to be made ordinary food, lest we should mistake our pilgrimage for heaven, and fall upon the building of tabernacles in this mount. For certainly the soul would conclude it good to be here, and could not so earnestly long for the city and country of heaven, if they had any more but some tastes of that joy to sharpen their desires after the full measure of it. It is a fixed and unchangeable statute of heaven, that we should here live by faith, and not by sense. And indeed, the following of God fully, in the ways of obedience, upon the dim apprehensions of faith, is more praiseworthy, and hath more of the true nature of obedience in it, than when present sweetness hath such a predominant influence. Besides, our vessel here is weak and crazy, and most unfit for such strong liquor as the joys of the Holy Ghost. Some liquors have such a strong spirit in them that they will burst an ordinary bottle; and as our Saviour says, "No man puts new wine in old bottles, for they will burst," Matt. ix. 17. Truly the joy of heaven is too strong for our old ruinous and earthly vessels to bear, till the body "put on incorruption," and be fashioned like unto Christ's own glorious body; for it cannot be capable of all the fulness of this joy. And yet there is a kind of all fulness of peace and joy in this life, "fill you with all joy and peace." Indeed the fulness of this life is emptiness to the next. But yet

there is a fulness in regard of the abundance of the world. Their joys and pleasures, their peace and contentation in the things of this life, are but like “the crackling of thorns under a pot,” that makes a great noise, but vanishes quickly in a filthy security, Eccles. vii. 6. It is such, that like the loudest laughter of fools, there is sorrow at the heart, and in the end of it is heaviness, Prov. xiv. 13. It is but at the best a superface, an external garb drawn over the countenance, no cordial nor solid thing. It is not heart joy, but a picture and shadow of the gladness of the heart in the outward countenance; and whatever it be, sorrow, grief, and heaviness follow at its heels, by a fatal inevitable necessity. So that there is this difference between the joys and pleasures of the world, and dreams in the night; for the present there is more solidity, but the end is hugely different. When men awake out of a dream, they are not troubled with it, that their imaginary pleasure was not true. But the undivided companion of all earthly joys and contentment is grief and vexation. I wonder if any man would love that pleasure or contentment if he were assured to have an equal measure of torment after it, suppose the pain of the stone, or such like. But when this misery is eternal, O what madness and folly is it to plunge into it! “I said of laughter, It is madness, and of mirth, What doth it?” But the Christian's peace and joy is of another nature. Yet as no man knoweth the “hidden manna,” the “new name,” and the “white stone,” but he that hath it, (Rev. ii. 17) so no man can apprehend what these are, till he taste them and find them. What apprehension, think ye, can a beast form of his own nature? Or what can a man conceive of the angelical nature? Truly this is without our sphere and that without theirs. Now certainly the wisest and most learned men cannot form any lively notion of the life of a Christian, till he find it. It is without his sphere and comprehension, therefore it is called “the peace of God which passes all understanding,” (Phil. iv. 7), a “joy unspeakable and full of glory,” 1 Pet. i. 8. Suppose men had never seen any other light but the stars of the firmament,

or the light of a candle, they could not conceive any thing more glorious than the firmament in a clear night. Yet we that have seen the sun and moon, know that these lights are but darkness unto them. Or, to use that comparison that the Lord made once effectual to convert a nobleman, if a man did see some men and women dancing afar off, and heard not their music, he would judge them mad, or at least foolish, but coming near hand, and hearing their instruments, and perceiving their order, he changes his mind. Even so, whatever is spoken of the joy of the Spirit, or the peace of conscience, and whatsoever is seen by the world of abstaining from the pleasures of the world, the natural mind cannot but judge it foolishness, or melancholy, because they do not hear that pleasant and sweet harmony, and concert of the word and Spirit, in the souls of God's children. Else if they heard the sweet Psalmist of Israel piping, they could not but find an inward stirring and impulse in themselves to dance too.

Now the third stream is hope, "that ye may abound in hope," because this is not the time nor place of possession. Our peace and joy here is often interrupted, and very frequently weakened. It is not so full a table as the Christian's desire requires. Our present enjoyments are not able to mitigate the very pain of a Christian's appetite, or to supply his emptiness. Therefore there must be an accession of hope to complete the feast and to pacify the eagerness of the soul's desire, till the fulness of joy and peace come; and if he have spare diet otherwise, yet he hath allowance of abundance of hope, to take as much of that as he can hold, and that is both refreshing and strengthening. Truly there is nothing men have, or enjoy, that can please, without the addition of hope unto it. All men's eyes are forward to futurity, and often men prejudice themselves of their present enjoyments, by the gaping expectation of, and looking after things to come. But the Christian's hope being a very sure anchor cast within the vail, upon the sure ground of heaven, it keeps the soul firm and steadfast, though he be not unmoved, yet from tossing or floating; though

it may fluctuate a little, yet his hope regulates and restrains it. And it being an helmet, it is a strong preservative against the power and force of temptations. It is that which guards the main part of a Christian, and keeps resolutions after God untouched and unmaimed.

Now, my beloved, would you know the fountain and original of these sweet and pleasant streams? It is the God of hope, and the power of the Holy Ghost. There is no doubt of power in God, to make us happy and give us peace. But power seems most opposite to peace, especially with enemies and it seems whatsoever he can do, yet that his justice will restrain his power from helping us. But there is no doubt but the God of power, as well as hope, both can and will do it. He hath this style from his promises and gracious workings, because he hath given us ground of hope in himself. He is the chief object of hope, and the chief cause of hope in us too. Therefore we would look up to this fountain, for here all is to be found. [593]

But I haste to speak a word of the third thing proposed, viz.: The channel that these streams run into. It is believing, not doing. Indeed this stream once ran in this channel. But since paradise was defaced, and the rivers that watered it turned another way, this hath done so too. It is true, that righteousness and holy walking is a notable mean to preserve this pure, and unmixed, and constant. For indeed the peace of our God will never lodge well with sin, the enemy of God, nor can that joy, which is so pure a fountain, run in abundance in an impure heart. It will not mix with carnal pleasures and toys. But yet the only ground of true peace and joy is found out by believing in another. Whatsoever ye do else to find them, dispute and debate never so long about them, toil all night and all day in your examinations of yourselves, yet you shall not catch this peace,—this solid peace, and this surpassing joy, but by quite overlooking yourselves and fixing your hearts upon another object, that is, Jesus Christ. “Peace and joy in believing,” and what is that believing? Mistake

it not. It is not particular application at first. I delight rather to take it in another notion, for the cordial assent and consent of the soul to the promises of the gospel. I say but one word more, viz.: meditation and deep consideration of these truths is certainly believing, and believing brings peace, and peace brings joy.