

pray but twice a-day? And how does it condemn all who restrain prayer before the Lord? O let us be induced to make conscience of this important and delightful duty; without the exercise of which, we behave no better than the beasts that perish, and are a company of ungrateful monsters, that shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God. Pray evening and morning, and at all convenient seasons. Be always in a praying frame, and be devout and lively in all your applications to the throne of grace. Omit no season of it, not even amidst your daily employments; for even then ye may send forth pious thoughts towards heaven, and maintain communion with God while you are engaged in your daily labours: 'Pray without ceasing.'

I might have spoken of occasional and stated prayer; of public, private, and secret prayer; and of ordinary and extraordinary; but I shall drop all these, and only give you next a discourse on secret prayer.

A DISCOURSE ON SECRET PRAYER.

MATH. vi. 6.—*But thou, 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.*

HAVING opened unto you the nature of prayer in general, before I proceed to the explanation of the Lord's prayer, it will not be improper to discourse a little of that too much neglected duty, secret prayer; concerning which our blessed Lord gives directions in this passage of scripture. And this he does negatively, ver. 5. cautioning against performing that important duty with vanity and ostentation, to gain the applause of men. (2.) Positively, in the text. Wherein consider,

1. The duty itself urged by the Lord. And in it we may observe, (1.) The duty supposed: *When thou prayest.* That this is to be understood only of secret prayer, is manifest from the text, and the preceding verse. Public prayer cannot be meant; for where else is that to be performed but in the congregation? Not family-prayer, which is not performed in a closet, and which must be done by more than one. Not ejaculatory prayer, which may be done any where, in any company, and whatever one be doing, as in the case of Nehemiah, chap. ii. 4. Therefore we must understand here solemn secret prayer; which, in the text, the Lord takes it for granted that his disciples made conscience of.

(2.) The place to be chosen for it: *Enter into thy closet*; that is, a secret place, where you may be out of the view of others: for secret prayers are not to be restrained to secret chambers, as Christ's praying on a mountain does evidence.

(3.) The care that we should take lest our secret place become public: *Shut thy door*, so as others may not see thee, and so thou fall a sacrifice to hypocrisy, vanity and ostentation.

(4.) The duty itself commanded: *Pray to thy Father which is in secret*. Where we have, [1.] The object of prayer, *thy Father*, namely in Christ; intimating to us, that when we go to God, we should go to him as he is our Father in Christ, able and ready to help us, and reconciled to us in him. [2.] A designation which the Father gets, *which is in secret*; who knows as well what thou sayest in a secret place as what thou sayest in public; for he is omniscient and omnipresent.

2. The motive whereby he presseth secret prayer, viz. God's reward, who will openly reward service done in secret, which the world knows not of. And those who make conscience of this duty in faith and fervency, are no strangers to those rewards and advantages that are to be met with in this heavenly traffic.

The text affords the following doctrine.

Doct. 'Secret prayer is a necessary duty incumbent on all.'

In discoursing from this subject, I shall,

I. Confirm the doctrine.

II. Shew the necessity of secret prayer.

III. Answer some cases relating to this duty, in order to clear it further to you.

IV. Make some practical improvement.

I. I am to confirm the doctrine, or shew that secret prayer is a necessary duty incumbent on all. This will be clear, if ye consider,

1. Christ's express command in the text, which is to us instead of all reasons. His will is a sufficient ground of our duty. He commands nothing but what is just and right in itself, good for us, and conducive to his glory. And the command of God should be a prevalent motive with all to practise constantly this duty, which is attended with so much pleasure and profit.

2. The Spirit of God, by the apostle, Eph. vi. 18. calls for it, 'Pray with all praying,' viz. all sorts of prayer, of which secret prayer is one. There are many exhortations to this duty in holy scripture, which manifestly shew the importance and necessity of it; such as that, 1 Thess. v. 17. 'Pray without ceasing;' which must denote secret prayer, as well as other kinds of that exercise.

3. The practice of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath set a fair and

striking example of this duty to all his followers. He was in strict propriety a man of prayer, and spent much time in this delightful exercise; as we may see from Matth. xiv. 23. 'And when he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.' Mark i. 35. 'And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.' Thus he retired from his public labours to converse in secret with his heavenly Father, and prevented the dawning of the day to hold communion with heaven. Compare 1 John ii. 6. 'He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.' The neglect of secret prayer is an incontestible evidence of one's being a stranger to Christ.

4. The practice of the saints of God, who were all diligent in the performance of this excellent duty. Thus the Psalmist says, Psal. v. 3. 'My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.' And how often this holy man was employed in this exercise, he tells us, Psal. lv. 17. 'Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.' Which practice of his may make even the best of us blush, who usually confine our secret devotions to the morning and evening, and perhaps on very slight occasions, intermit sometimes one of these seasons. But this pious man, though a crowned head, and involved in much business, was yet oftener at the throne of grace; for he says, Psal. cxix. 164. 'Seven times a-day I will praise thee.' O that we could imitate so noble an example of sequestration and retirement from the world! Thus also Daniel 'kneeled upon his knees three times a-day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God,' chap. vi. 10. and that at a time when prayer to God was made a capital crime. Thus also we find that Cornelius the Roman centurion, a proselyte to the Jewish religion, was one that 'prayed to God always,' Acts x. 2; and that it was secret, and not family-prayer in which he was employed, when the angel appeared to him, is evident from ver. 7; for on the departure of the heavenly messenger from him, who certainly spoke to him in a retired chamber, he called some of his domestics, to dispatch them for Peter to come to him, as the angel had directed. Thus likewise we find, that good king Hezekiah was no stranger to this delightful exercise; for when the prophet Isaiah was sent with a heavy message to him, announcing his death, 'he turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord,' Isa. xxxviii. 1, 2. Compare Cant. i. 7. And indeed to which of the saints can we turn in any age who neglected this duty? Habitual neglect of prayer is

not the spot of God's children. No sooner does grace take possession of the soul of any person, but behold that person will pray, as Saul did at Damascus, after the extraordinary appearance of the Lord Jesus to him on his journey to that city, Acts ix. 11.

Thus we have express divine precepts, apostolical injunctions, and the approved practice of our Lord Jesus, and of all the saints, to recommend this duty to us; and wo unto us if we neglect it.

II. I proceed to shew the necessity of secret prayer. It is not necessary in regard of merit, as if we could procure heaven by it. The only ground of eternal life in the mansions of bliss is the righteousness of a crucified Redeemer. Beggars pay no debts, but confess insufficiency, saying with the prophet, Dan. ix. 5. 'We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts, and from thy judgments.' But it is necessary,

1. In regard of the command of God. He by a plain and express command requires it; and that command binds it as a necessary duty upon us. To neglect it, therefore, is a direct violation of the command of the great God and Lawgiver; and to make conscience of it is a necessary and proper act of obedience to the divine will.

2. To give God the glory of his omniscience and omnipresence. When we pray to *our Father which is in secret*, we plainly declare, that we believe he knows and sees all things, that the darkness and the light are alike unto him; and that he is the witness and inspector of all our actions, and will call us to an account for all our thoughts, words, and actions, which are well known to him.

3. To evidence our sincerity, that it is not to be seen of men that we pray; that we are not actuated from motives of ostentation and vain-glory, but from regard to the divine command, and a sincere desire to serve God; though indeed it will not hold that all such as pray in secret are sincere; for, alas! men may be very assiduous in this duty, and yet be far from being sincere Christians, or accepted of God therein.

4. In regard that none know our case so well as ourselves: and therefore, though the master of the family pray in the family, yet we ought to pray by ourselves, in order to make known our particular case and wants unto God, which none other can know, and to ask such blessings and mercies of him as we stand in need of, and are suitable to our circumstances.

5. In regard that, if we know our own hearts, we cannot but have somewhat to say unto the Lord, that we cannot, nor would it be at all proper to say before others, respecting both confession of

sins and supplication for mercies. Hence the spouse says, Cant. vii. 11, 12. 'Come, my Beloved, let us go forth unto the field: let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves.'

6. In regard of our wants continually recurring on our hands, and daily and hourly temptations, that may call for this exercise, when family-prayer cannot be had. What man is so well supplied, both as to temporal and spiritual blessings, as to have no occasion for asking supplies from above? Man is a needy and indigent creature in all respects; as a creature he lives on the bounties of providence, and as a Christian on the grace which is in Christ Jesus; and therefore he must daily apply to the throne of grace for necessary supplies in both. And as we are daily surrounded with temptations, and have no strength to resist or repel them, we must fetch in strength from God in Christ by prayer, lest we fall and be overcome by the temptations in our way.

Thus it appears from these considerations, that prayer is a necessary duty incumbent on all. And surely all who have tasted that the Lord is gracious will make conscience of this important and useful exercise.

III. I proceed to answer some cases concerning this duty, which will tend to clear it further unto you.

Quest. 1. What is the proper season of this duty of secret prayer? or when are we called to this exercise?

Ans. 1. We are doubtless to be very frequent in this duty. Thus we are called to 'pray always,' Eph. vi. 18. and 'without ceasing,' 1 Thess. v. 17. that is, at all proper times, and to be continually in a praying frame, or to pray inwardly, though we utter not a word with our lips.

2. Whenever God calls us to it, putting an opportunity in our hands, and moving and inciting us to it, then we are to go about it. Thus, when the Lord Jesus says, 'Seek ye my face;' our hearts should say unto him, 'Thy face, Lord, will we seek,' Psal. xxvii. 8. And thus we have daily calls and invitations to this duty, which we should carefully regard, and conscientiously embrace, lest we quench the Spirit, and provoke the Lord to harden our hearts from his fear.

3. The saints in scripture have sometimes been more, sometimes less frequent in this exercise. Thus David was sometimes employed thrice, sometimes seven times a-day in prayer, Psal. lv. 17, and cxix. 164. and Daniel three times, even at a very perilous juncture, Dan. vi. 10. From whose practice the frequency of performing this duty evidently appears.

4. Morning and evening at least we should pray, and not neglect this duty. This appears from our Lord's practice, Mark i. 35. Matth. xiv. 23. both cited above; from the practice of the saints in scripture, Psal. lv. 2. and v. 2. formerly quoted; and from the morning and evening sacrifice under the legal dispensation, which were daily offered, and should excite us to offer up unto God daily the morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and praise. And the very light of nature teaches us so much; that when we are preserved through the silent watches of the dark night, and from the perils we may be exposed unto in that gloomy season, we should acknowledge the goodness and kindness of God therein; and that when we are preserved through the day, from the many snares and temptations we are liable to amidst the cares and distractions of our business, we should bless God for his preserving and protecting mercy, and commit ourselves, and all our concerns, into the hand of God, when we are going to take necessary rest, that we may fall asleep under a sense of his love, and may rise again to resume the business of our callings with his blessing and favour.

Quest. 2. What is the proper place for secret prayer?

Ans. A secret place is the most proper for this exercise; and though every body has not a closet, or retired apartment, into which he may go and shut the door, yet any place where he may be retired from the view and observation of others, answers the purpose; though in other respects it be a public place, yet if it be dark, and the voice kept low, it is justly a secret place. And to a place of that sort did our Lord retire for secret prayer, Matth. xiv. 23. perhaps not having proper conveniency in the place where he lodged all night. And indeed there is not a person but may meet with such a secret place every day, if he have a disposition for this exercise.

Quest. 3. What gesture are we to use in secret prayer?

Ans. 1. Holy scripture does not bind us to any gesture particularly: but we find these four gestures of the body in prayer spoken of there, viz. standing, Mark xi. 25; lying along on the face, Matth. xxvi. 39: kneeling, Dan. vi. 10. Eph. iii. 14: and sitting, 2 Sam. vii. 18.

2. Whatever the gesture be, let it be a reverent one, that may express a humble and reverent frame of spirit. Hence we are commanded to 'glorify God in our bodies.' 1 Cor. vi. 20.

3. I shall say these two things for the further determination of this question. (1.) Let it be such a gesture as is conformable unto, or flows natively from, the present disposition of the heart. Thus in extraordinary cases we find the saints were wont to fall on their

faces, 2 Sam. xii. 16. And so likewise did the Lord Jesus in the garden, on the eve of his sufferings, Matth. xxvi. 39. (2.) Yet let it be always to edification; and let that gesture be chosen which is most conducive to devotion, and occasions least distraction in the duty: as if kneeling be dangerous for the body, and so may tend to disturb the mind, let another gesture be chosen that is not attended with these inconveniences: though kneeling is certainly the most eligible gesture, and expressive of that humility which must ever accompany this exercise. And the same thing we may say of closing the eyes, or keeping them open; though praying with the eyes shut is certainly to be preferred.

Quest. 4. What are we to say of the voice in secret prayer?

Ans. 1. The duty may be performed without using the voice, as was done by Moses in the strait the children of Israel were reduced to, after their escape from Egypt, when high and inaccessible mountains were on each side of them, the Red Sea before them, and the Egyptian host at their heels ready to cut them off. In this dilemma we find that great man crying to the Lord, though not with an audible voice, Exod. xiv. 15. Thus the voice is not to be used when people cannot do so without being heard, or when through weakness of body, or disquiet of mind, they are unfit for speaking with the tongue.

2. Yet where the voice may be used, and that with convenience and propriety, it should be made use of; and that, (1.) Because we are to glorify God with our bodies; and particularly our tongue is given to be an instrument of glorifying God; 'Awake, my glory,' says David, Psal. lvii. 8. (2.) Because the voice is of good use in secret prayer, to stir up the affections, and to stay the mind from wandering. Yet an affected loudness of the voice, whereby the secret prayer is made public, is a sad sign of great hypocrisy, which every serious Christian will guard against.

Quest. 5. Is secret prayer a sure mark of sincerity? or can one pray in secret, and yet be an hypocrite?

Ans. This is not out of the reach of the hypocrite? A hypocrite may come this length, and much farther. Judas was among the rest whom our Lord taught to pray in secret, and ye all know what was his fate. But though a hypocrite may continue a long time, nay, many years, in the practice of secret prayer; yet it is scarcely to be thought that he will always do so, if he live a long life: For, says Job, 'Will he [the hypocrite] always call upon God?' chap. xxvii. 10. It is not to be thought that he will, as he has no communion with God in the duty. And therefore adds the same holy man, 'Will he always delight himself in the Almighty?' It is com-

munion with God that is to be enjoyed in secret prayer, and the delight the soul has in it, that inclines a person to persevere in that exercise.

Inst. But if one pray not to be seen of men, can he be an hypocrite?

Ans. Yes, he may. For the terrors of God scalding the conscience, and a desire to lay the ferment thereby brought into the mind, may excite one to the duty, and put the applause of men entirely out of the mind. But secret prayer, conscientiously practised, and attended with manifestations of the Lord's love and favour, smiles of his face, returns of what was asked, continued faith and fervency, are undoubted signs of sincerity.

I come now to the improvement of this subject.

USE 1. Of information. It shews us,

1. That they have great reason to suspect themselves, who are strangers to this duty of secret prayer; and that on the following grounds.

(1.) Because they come not the length of many hypocrites, who shall never come the length of heaven. There are many such who will not, for any consideration, omit their secret prayers every day: which is a thing good in itself, but they make them the ground of their acceptance with God, and so will perish notwithstanding. How much more must those perish who live in the habitual neglect of this duty!

(2.) Because they look not like the saints, whose disposition has been to seek communion with God in secret, as in the case of the spouse, Cant. vii. 11. and many others. What, can ye pretend to be saints, and yet live so very unlike them?

(3.) Because it seems they are very unacquainted with themselves, that knowing nothing to confess to, or ask of God, but what they can do before any. Did men know their misery and their wants, and had a suitable sense thereof, they would not be strangers to secret prayer.

(4.) Because it looks too hypocritical-like to have others to be witnesses to all our duties.

2. Then there is much hidden work in religion. True religion is not all exposed to the view of others. Attending on public ordinances in the church, and going the round of family-worship, is not that in which the whole of religion consists: for many may be diligent enough in these exercises, and yet strangers to vital heart-religion. But they that are truly religious in the eye of God, are such who not only perform outward duties, but worship God in spirit, and hold communion and intercourse with him in secret

prayer, without which they can no more live, than without bread and water.

USE II. Of exhortation. Be exhorted then, all of you, to set about this duty of secret prayer. And this exhortation I address to you who never yet began this exercise, and to you who, though ye have perhaps formerly done something this way, yet now have left it off. To press this, I offer the following motives,

1. It is a piece of worship expressly commanded of God, in the text, and it is directly required by him, Eph. vi. 18. Will ye then counteract God's express command? If ye do, it will be at your peril.

2. Are ye not engaged to this duty? Are not the vows of God upon you for the performance of it? Were ye not baptised in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to worship them, and that in all parts of worship, of which prayer is a principal one? Have not some of you been admitted to the Lord's table, when ye professed to renew your baptismal engagements? And perhaps some of you have sick-bed vows on you to that purpose.

3. Have ye not secret sins, secret wants, and secret temptations? and shall ye not have secret prayers adapted to each, requesting of the Lord the pardon of your secret sins, the supply of your secret wants, and grace to resist and overcome your secret temptations?

4. *Lastly*, This is your known duty; and therefore remember, that 'the servant that knew his master's will, but did it not, shall be beaten with double stripes.' Wherefore I charge you, as ye will answer to God at death and at judgment, and as you love your own souls, and would not eternally perish, to set about this necessary and important duty.

But some are ready to muster up a variety of objections against this duty, the chief of which I shall endeavour to obviate.

Object. 1. I have no time for secret prayer, for my work and business. *Ans.* 1. This is thy greatest work, even the salvation of thy soul, in comparison of which all thy other work is a mere trifle: and wilt thou take time for thy other work, and not for this work, that challenges thy utmost care and attention? 2. Fools' haste is no speed. To rise out of bed, and to go immediately to secular work, is foolish cursed haste. How canst thou look for a blessing on thy work without prayer? 3. Rise the sooner every morning, that you may not be scrimped as to time for this exercise, as our blessed Lord did, Mark i. 35. How wilt thou answer to God at the great day, for spending that time in sleep, which thou shouldst have spent in secret prayer? Daniel would not omit this exercise, though at the hazard of his life.

Object. 2. We are so wearied with our work through the day, that we are not able to pray in the evening. *Ans.* 1. What difference is there betwixt you and the beasts that take their ease when their work is done, without any more ado? 2. You will take your meat for your bodies, though ever so weary; and why will ye not think of and provide meat for your perishing souls? John iv. 6, 32. 3. Notwithstanding ye may be tired, do what ye are able. We are not commanded to tell you to make your prayers short or long; but by no means to neglect secret prayer altogether, which is very dangerous. But I suppose, that when you say your body is not able to subsist with secret prayer, that yet if ye could gain a sixpence at that very time, you would spend twice as much more time for that paltry gain; and yet slight the concerns of your souls, under this frivolous pretence.

Object. 3. We have no convenient place for secret prayer. *Ans.* Find out once a willing heart for this exercise, and I shall engage you for it you shall find a place. Are there not barns, byres, out-houses, and fields, for you to retire to? Will not these rise up and witness against thee that neglectest this duty, at the great day? For my part, I would rather go to prayer, even within a dwelling-house, in the place where the beasts stand, or behind a bed, or at the back of a house, ere I should neglect it. God requires all men to pray, but he does not require all men to have chambers and closets.

Object. 4. But there are prayers in our family, and I join therein; what needs more! *Ans.* Poor soul! hast thou no more to say of thyself to God, but what the master of the family says? Alas! thou knowest not thyself, and the dreadful case thou art in by nature; which if thou didst, thou wouldst not think joining in prayer with others enough. Thou thinkest it sufficient that the master of the family pray for thee, and the other members of his family, and thou liest by without concerning thyself about duty for thyself; wilt thou think it enough, that he go to heaven for thee, and thou be shut out for ever?

Object. 5. But (says the master of the family) I pray with my family, and I hope that is enough for me. *Ans.* In this command in the text, Christ has not excepted thee, neither dare I. Again, dost thou so well discharge family prayer, that thou hast no escapes or failures to be matter of secret prayer? I tell you plainly, that God will not have his worship halved: He will have either the whole or nothing. Being conscientious in family-prayer is good, but can never excuse the neglect of secret prayer, which is as much thy duty. Yea, the more thou art helped to discharge family-duty, the more

wilt thou be inclined to the practice of secret duty. The false mother was for dividing the child, not the true one.

Object. 6. Some women that have children to nurse and wait on, think that frees them from this duty. *Ans.* It is a sad observation of many women, who, while they are unmarried, and are not involved in the cares and troubles of a family, have some profession and practice of religion; but as soon as they get a house to manage, and have the care of young children especially, they cast off all religion, as if they had no more concern therein. But surely the very sight of the child whom thou hast conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity, should remind thee of thy original guilt and corruption, and incite thee to apply to the blood and Spirit of Christ for pardon and cleansing, and be a powerful spur to thee to set about this great duty of secret prayer. And remember, that the welfare of thy own soul, and that of the child, is more than that of the child's bodily welfare, which deserves but the second care in comparison of the other. I would not have you by any means to cast off the care of the young one's temporal welfare; but thou mayst so observe times and seasons, as thou mayst take time for this duty morning and evening, though it be not immediately after thou risest, or before thou liest down. Thou mayst even do it when thou art rocking the cradle, or suckling the child. Alas! it had been telling many, that they had had the womb that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck.

Object. 7. God knows the heart, and what needs so much ado about praying in secret, as if God knew not what we wanted, or what we would be at, till we sit down on our knees, and tell him? *Ans.* God knows the heart of such an objector to be a graceless heart, and his end to be destruction, Matth. vii. 15, 20; and his heart to be a foolish atheistical heart, that will not call upon God, Psal. xiv. 1. Again, what is this but to argue God's command to be foolish? He bids us pray, and you say it is needless. O daring presumption! Though the Lord not only knows your heart, but has a mind to give blessings to poor sinners, he will have you seek them by prayer: 'For these things,' says he, 'will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, that I may do it for them,' Ezek. xxxvi. 37. God never confers signal mercies on his people, without first pouring out on them the Spirit of faith and prayer, and determines them to seek ardently the very thing he has a mind to grant them. And this method is for the glory of his name, and for our real benefit.

Object. 8. Age and infirmity will not suffer me to go about that duty. *Ans.* Will it suffer you to do your business in the world, and will it not suffer you to manage your soul's business, which is

of infinitely greater importance? It would seem, that the nearer we draw to the grave, the more active we should be in preparing for it. It were good, that old people would mind heaven more, and the world less, as they have so short a time to stay here. The concerns of the other world should mainly ingross their care and attention, and they should then redouble their diligence in improving their span of time, and doing that which perhaps they too much neglected in the days of health and vigour. 'The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness,' Prov. xvi. 31. 'But the sinner being an hundred years old, shall be accursed,' Isa. lxxv. 20. Let this sound an alarm to all the old sinners among you, that ye may yet apply to the merciful Redeemer, who sets even some to work in the vineyard at the eleventh hour. It is sad to be tottering under the miseries and infirmities of old age, and to have no prospect of a happy landing. Fly then to Christ, thou old decrepit sinner, while his call reaches thee, lest thou speedily perish without remedy.

Object. 9. I am too young to mind secret prayer. *Ans.* You are too old never to have entered on God's service. Remember that Josiah, when he was but eight years old, began to seek the Lord God of his father David. Obadiah, Ahab's steward, feared the Lord greatly from his youth. John Baptist was sanctified from the womb; and so was the prophet Jeremiah. Timothy knew the holy scriptures from a child. You can never begin to be religious too soon. None ever repented that they sought the Lord; but all have repented that they did not begin to seek him sooner. You are as liable to death as the oldest person here, have a soul as precious as theirs, and as much need to mind your best and eternal interests as they. Up then and be doing, without putting off a moment longer.

Object. ult. I cannot pray. *Ans.* The truth is thou wilt not pray, Psal. x. 4. If thou hadst a will to the duty, thou wouldst soon learn. But if thou wouldst learn to pray, go to God that he may teach thee, as Christ taught the disciples; and consider the absolute need thou hast of divine instruction in this matter. Use the one talent, and God will increase it. Wherefore set about this weighty duty, and neglect it not. Think seriously with yourselves, whether those who are now in hell, and when they lived neglected secret prayer like you, would do so still if they were in the world again. I scarcely think they would. Pray now, therefore, lest ye repent your neglect, when it will be too late, and ye are tormented in the lake of fire and brimstone. Again, think with yourselves how you will get this criminal neglect digested on a death-bed, when ye are ready to leap into eternity, without having once prayed for God's

mercy through Christ to your souls; and how you will get it digested before the awful tribunal of God, when he will drive you from his blessed presence for ever. Think with yourselves how precious time is, and what a sad business it is to spend it in pursuing the world and lying vanities, and neglecting communion with God, wherein lies the life of the soul. What! will ye delay it yet a while? O do it not! for delays are dangerous. Will ye be so foolish as to venture all to two or three words on a sick-bed or death-bed? Perhaps you will not get one, but may be hurried away in a moment. Consider that awful passage, Prov, i. 24—28. ‘Because I have called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.’

Exhort. 2. Be frequent in this duty, morning and evening at least, and at other times, when your conveniency will allow, and go not only to it now and then. Consider,

1. God’s express command, which ties you to *pray always, continually, and without ceasing*. This does not mean, that you should do nothing but pray, or spend your whole time in this exercise. No; but denotes frequency, and embracing every opportunity that offers for so delightful and profitable a duty. It says you should be always in a praying frame, never having your minds so much ingrossed in worldly concerns, as to be indisposed to call upon God in prayer.

2. Frequency in this duty is a good sign of a good frame and an excellent mean to maintain and preserve it. They who are not frequent in this exercise, do thereby shew that their frame and disposition is not spiritual, but carnal, much under the conduct of sense, and attachment to sensible things. Whereas, if a person were frequent in this duty, it would be a token of a heart weaned from the world, and much conversant in the things of God.

3. *Lastly*, It is dangerous to grow slack and remiss in this duty, as mournful experience has testified in the case of many. They who having been for years frequently employed in this heavenly exercise do at last turn careless, restrain prayer before the Lord, or but now and then bow a knee before him, do thereby declare they have lost the life and relish of the power of religion, and are in the high road to apostasy. There are not wanting instances of such having returned with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. Others have been made signal monu-

ments of judgment, and set up as beacons to backsliders. And some who have had the root of the matter in them, have had such a storm raised in their consciences, as has made them a terror to themselves, and all around them; and it has cost them much and sore wrestling with God ere they recovered the light of his countenance. For the Lord's sake, then, and your own soul's sake, be frequent in this exercise, and grow not remiss therein, lest ye feel the vengeance of God's temple.

Exhort. 3. To parents and masters of families. I beseech and intreat you by the mercies of God, by the love ye bear to the Lord Jesus, and the regard ye have to the souls of your children and servants, not only to pray in secret yourselves, but by all the means that are competent to you, by command, advice, exhortation, &c. to stir them up to this duty of secret prayer. For motives consider,

1. It was the practice of John the Baptist, yea, and of Christ himself, the great Prophet of the church, Luke xi. 1. Thus this duty comes recommended by the best authority, and the most excellent approved patterns. Christ taught and urged his disciples to pray, and for that end gave them an excellent directory, suited to their then state; and which ye would do well to make your rule in instructing your children and servants.

2. God expressly commands it, Deut. vi. 7. 'Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.' Thus they were to be daily employed in this duty, not only to let their children know what they were bound to do, but to press them to the performance of it. And this command being of moral obligation, is equally incumbent upon you that are Christian parents and masters of families; and ye have far superior advantages for this exercise than the Israelites had, a small part of the Bible having been then written; whereas ye have the whole of it among your hands.

3. God commends the practice in Abraham, Gen. xviii. 19. 'I know him,' says Jehovah, 'that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.' Thus, if thou make conscience of this duty, thou wilt tread in the steps of the father of the faithful, and receive tokens of the divine approbation, by the Lord's blessing thy family, and prospering thy outward concerns, and be an example to others to excite them to their duty. This will be the ready way to have dutiful and affectionate children, and obedient and careful servants.

4. Consider the engagements which thou tookest on thee at the

baptism of thy children, to train them up in the good and holy ways of the Lord; to inform them of their natural depravity, impotency, and aversion to what is good, of the method of salvation by the obedience and death of Christ; and to press them to yield themselves to the Lord, by taking hold of his covenant by faith. Thou became then engaged to instruct them in the principles of our holy religion, to shew them their duty to God and man, and to observe his ordinances and commandments. And canst thou fulfil these thy engagements, unless thou be at pains to instruct them, and especially to stir them up to the practice of secret prayer.

5. *Lastly*, Their souls are committed to thy charge; and if they perish through thy neglect, their blood will be required at thy hand. Ah! my friends, Papists and others will rise up in judgment against you, who take more pains on their children, to breed them up in their false and corrupt doctrines, and their idolatrous and superstitious courses, than ye to instruct them in the pure doctrines and precepts of religion. If thou now neglect their religious education and instruction, thy lost children and servants shall curse the day that ever they saw thy face, who tookest no more care of them than of thy beasts. Oh! let this melancholy consideration excite and stir thee up to thy duty now, lest thy children and servants rise up in judgment against thee, and be a dreadful addition to thy condemnation.

What shall we do then? may ye say.

1. As soon as they can speak perfectly, give them a few words to speak to God upon their knees every morning and evening, and see that they do so. Let these words consist of a short confession of sin, an acknowledgement of God's goodness in preservation, and an application for pardon through the blood of Jesus.

2. When they advance farther in years, give them the help of a form, composed chiefly in scripture-words, and particularly that which Christ taught his disciples. And be sure to vary and enlarge any form you give them, from time to time; and in a little time, by reading the Bible, and duly considering their own case and wants, they will be able to pray without a set form; for it is often observed, that where young ones make conscience of practising the helps that are given them, and take pleasure in the duty, the Holy Spirit strikes in with his assistance, and lays suitable matter of prayer before them; so that even some very young persons have been found to pray with great fluency and fervour, to the admiration of those who happened to overhear them.

3. Pray frequently with your children; which will be an excellent means to instruct them both as to the matter and manner of

the duty, and have a powerful influence upon them to induce them to pray for themselves. And indeed I must say, if parents made more conscience of this practice, in praying with their children, the young ones would not discover such aversion to the duty as many do; nor would there be such a numerous fry of young prayerless sinners among us, who, though they have not learned to pray, yet are great proficient in speaking vain and idle words, and in cursing and swearing.

4. Furnish them daily with proper materials of prayer, which ye can extract from the Lord's word, your own observation of the state and temper of your souls, the disposition and inclination of your children, the sins and vanities they are most addicted to, your knowledge of their peculiar wants and desires, and what appears to be suitable to their circumstances and situation.

5. *Lastly*, Carefully observe, whether they perform this duty or not; that you may encourage them when they do well, and check and rebuke them when they neglect it. Shew them that you are influenced by a regard to the command and authority of God, and are actuated with a hearty zeal and concern for the salvation of their souls in all you do in this matter, whether respecting the encouragements and advices you give them, or the rebukes and chastisements you administer to them, in case of non-compliance, neglect, or careless performance of the duty enjoined. This will have no small influence upon them to comply with your instructions and directions, and by degrees conquer their aversion to the exercise; and you may come, through the divine blessing, to see the happy fruit of your labours and endeavours.

Thus I have endeavoured, as briefly as I could, to lay before you the nature, importance, and necessity, of this excellent duty of secret prayer, and have removed the most material objections that can be made against it. If any of you, then, shall continue in the habitual neglect of this exercise, and so perish, your blood will be upon your own head, for I have delivered my own soul. But I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak: and I hope there will no more henceforth be a prayerless person among us. Which God of his infinite mercy, grant.