

THE NATURE OF PRAYER.

EPH. vi. 18.—*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints.*

PRAYER is a duty of natural religion, and by God's appointment is one of the chief means by which Christ communicates the benefits of redemption to sinners; and this important duty is enjoined in these words. In which we have,

1. The duty itself, *praying*. This is recommended and enjoined to all, as ever they would stand, and not be ruined by their spiritual enemies.

2. The amplification of this weighty subject; where notice,

(1.) The time of it, *always*, or at every season. We must always be in a praying frame, and miss no season wherein God calls for it, but in every season of prayer be praying, 2 Sam. ix. 7.

(2.) The kinds of prayer, *all prayer*, i. e. all sorts of prayer, public, private, secret, ordinary, extraordinary, &c. petitioning prayer, for good things, here called *prayer* in a strict sense; supplicatory prayer, deprecating evils, called *supplication*.

(3.) The manner of prayer. [1.] It must be *in the Spirit*; not with the lip, tongue, and memory only, but with the heart or inward man, or rather by the Spirit of God, with his assistance. [2.] With *watchfulness*, keeping the soul in a wakerife disposition for it, and in it, that the heart wander not. [3.] *With all perseverance*, continuing instant in it, whatever may occur to discourage us.

4. Those we are to pray for, *all saints*; not only for ourselves, but others, especially, though not only, for the children of God.

The text affords the following doctrine.

Doctr. 'Prayer is a duty always necessary to be performed in the several kinds of it, and in the right manner, and in which we are to be concerned, not only for ourselves, but for others.'

To discover the nature of prayer, which in our Catechism is said to be 'an offering up of our desires to God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies,' I will consider the parts of prayer in general, and in particular,

I. Prayer, generally considered, consists of three parts.

1. Petition, or prayer strictly and properly so called, whereby one desires of God the supply of one's wants, begs the good necessary for himself or others, and deprecates evil inflicted or feared. *Praying always with all prayer, &c.*

2. Confession of sin, Dan. ix. 4. It is so very natural that sinners coming to God to ask mercies should make confession, that it is a very necessary part of the sinner's prayer; and prayer is so called, Neh. ix. 3. And the deeper one is in confession, he readily speeds the better in prayer.

3. Thanksgiving for mercies, Phil. iv. 6. God prevents us with his benefits, we are deep in his debt, ere we come to ask of him; and therefore it is necessary that thanksgiving have a place in our prayers. And it also is called 'praying,' Luke xviii. 11.

II. Let us consider the parts of prayer in particular. These are,

1. Prayer properly so called, or petition.

2. Confession of our sins.

3. Thanksgiving for mercies.

FIRST, Prayer properly so called, or petition.

Here I shall shew,

1. Wherein the formal nature of prayer consists.

2. To whom we are to pray.

3. In whose name we are to pray.

4. By whose assistance acceptable prayer is performed.

5. For whom we must pray.

6. For what we are to pray.

7. How we are to pray, if we would pray rightly and acceptably.

8. Whether all such prayers are accepted, heard, &c.

FIRST, Wherein does the formal nature of prayer consist? It lies precisely in offering up our desires to God, for things that we need. It is a motion of our hearts towards God, to move him as it were to look favourably on us, Psal. lxii. 8. a pouring out our heart before the Lord; a lifting our soul to him, Psal. xxv. 1. a presenting our supplications to him, as petitioners, Dan. ix. 18.

We command our inferiors, we demand of our equals; we may by some deed of our own lay an obligation on, and some way excite an inclination in, any man, even our superior, to help us; but none of these ways can work with God. What then remains but a religious and submissive offering of our desires to God, for his help, who knows our hearts? And this is what we call prayer. Hence,

1. There may be prayer made to God without words. The desires of the heart offered to God though not clothed with words, is prayer, truly and properly so called, Exod. xiv. 15. Words are not necessary from the nature of prayer, but on the account of ourselves, to affect us the more, and to honour God with our bodies as well as our souls.

2. There can be no prayer, properly so called, without the desires of the heart going out to God. Prayer without intention, say the

Jews, is like a body without a soul. A flourish of the best chosen words, without suitable affection going along with them, is not prayer before the Lord, but the carcase of prayer, wanting the soul and life.

SECONDLY, To whom we are to pray? We are to pray to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to God only; not to saints, angels, nor any creature whatsoever. For,

1. Prayer is an eminent part of religious worship, Joel ii. 32. and religious worship is only to be given to God, Matth. iv. 10. 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.' The holy angels refuse it, Rev. xxii. 8, 9. and the saints also, as in the case of Peter, Acts x. 25, 26.

2. The object of prayer and of faith are the very same, Rom. x. 14. For the ground of prayer is faith. Therefore, since we are to believe in God, and not in the creature, we must pray to him only. So our Lord directs us, 'Our Father, which art in heaven.'

3. Because God only is qualified (if I may so speak) for hearing prayer. He only is able to search the heart and know it, 1 Kings viii. 39. He only is omnipresent to hear every where, Psal. lxxv. 2. He only can pardon the sins and fulfil the desires of his people, Psal. cxlv. 18, 19.

THIRDLY, In whose name are we to pray? In the name of Jesus Christ, and of no other, neither saint nor angel, John xiv. 13. 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, *says he*, that will I do.' * We must go to the Father, not in the name of any of the courtiers, Col. ii. 18. but in the name of his Son, the only Mediator, 1 Tim. ii. 5. Here consider,

1. What it is to pray in the name of Christ.

2. Why we must pray in his name.

First, Let us consider what it is to pray in the name of Christ.

1. Negatively. It is not a bare faithless mentioning of his name in our prayers, nor concluding our prayers therewith, Matth. vii. 21. The saints use the words, 'through Jesus Christ our Lord,' 1 Cor. xv. 57. but often is that scabbard produced, while the sword of the Spirit is not in it. The words are said, but the faith is not exercised.

2. Positively. To pray in the name of Christ is to pray,

1st, At his command, to go to God by his order, John xvi. 24. 'Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name, *says he*: ask, and ye shall receive.' Christ as God commands all men to pray, to offer that piece of natural duty to God; but that is not the command meant. But Christ as Mediator sends his own to his Father to ask supply of their wants, and allows them to tell that he sent them, as

one recommends a poor man to a friend, John xvi. 24. just cited. So to pray in the name of Christ is to go to God as sent by the poor man's friend. So it imports,

(1.) The soul's being come to Christ in the first place, John xv. 7. 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' He that would pray aright, must do as those who make Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend first, and then made their suite to their king, Acts xii. 20.

(2.) The soul's taking its encouragement to pray from Jesus Christ, Heb. iv. 14.—16. 'Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' The way to the throne in heaven is blocked up by our sins. And sinners have no confidence to seek the Lord. Jesus Christ came down from heaven, died for the criminals, and gathers them to himself by effectual calling. He, as having all interest with his Father, bids them go to his Father in his name, and ask what they need, assuring them of acceptance. And from thence they take their encouragement, viz. from his promises in the word. And he gives them his token with them, which the Father will own, and that is his own Spirit, Rom. viii. 26, 27. 'Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.'

2dly, It is to direct our prayers to God through Jesus Christ, Heb. vii. 25. 'Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.' Chap. xiii. 15. 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name;' depending wholly on Christ's merit and intercession for access, acceptance, and a gracious return.

(1.) Depending on Christ for access to God, Eph. iii. 12. 'In whom we have boldness, and access with confidence by the faith of him.' There is no access to God but through him, John xiv. 6. 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me.' They that attempt otherwise to come unto God, will get the door thrown in their face. But we must take hold of the Mediator, and come in at his back, who is the Secretary of heaven.

(2.) Depending on him for acceptance of our prayers, Eph. i. 6. 'He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.' Our Lord Christ is the only altar that can sanctify our gift. If one lay the stress of the acceptance of his prayers on his frame, enlargement, tenderness, &c. the prayer will not be accepted. A crucified Christ only can bear the weight of the acceptance of either our persons or performances.

(3.) Depending on him for a gracious return, 1 John v. 14. 'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.' No prayers are heard and answered but for the Mediator's sake; and whatever petitions agreeable to God's will are put up to God, in this dependence, are heard.

Secondly, Why must we pray in the name of Christ? The reason of this may be taken up in these two things.

1. There is no access for a sinful creature to God without a Mediator, Isa. lix. 2. John xiv. 6. Sin has set us at a distance from God, and has bolted the door of our access to him, that it is beyond our power, or that of any creature, to open it for us. His justice staves off the criminal, his holiness the unclean creature, without there be an acceptable person to go betwixt him and us. Our God is a consuming fire: and so there is no immediate access for a sinner to him.

2. And there is none appointed nor fit for that work but Christ, 1 Tim. ii. 5. It is he alone who is our great High Priest. None but he has satisfied justice for our sins. And as he is the only Mediator of redemption, so he is the only Mediator of intercession, 1 John ii. 1. 'If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' The sweet savour of his merit alone is capable to procure acceptance to our prayers, in themselves unsavoury, Rev. viii. 3, 4.

FOURTHLY, By whose assistance is acceptable prayer performed? By the help of the Holy Spirit, Gal. iv. 6. Rom. viii. 26. There are two sorts of prayers. (1.) A prayer wrought out by virtue of a gift of knowledge and utterance. This is bestowed on many reprobates, and that gift may be useful to others, and to the church. But as it is merely of that sort, it is not accepted, nor does Christ put it in before the Father for acceptance. For, (2.) There is a prayer wrought in men by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Zech. xii. 10. 'I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications:' and that is the only acceptable prayer to God, Jam. v. 16. *effectual*, Gr. *inwrought*. The right praying is praying in the Spirit. It is a gale blowing from heaven, the breathing of the Spirit in the saints, that carries them

out in the prayer, which comes the length of the throne. Now, the Spirit helps to pray,

1. As a teaching and instructing Spirit, affording proper matter of prayer, causing us to know what we pray for, Rom. viii. 26. fore-cited; enlightening the mind in the knowledge of our needs, and those of others; bringing into our remembrance these things, suggesting them to us according to the word, together with the promises of God, on which prayer is grounded, John xiv. 26. 'The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost,—shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you.' Hence it is that the saints are sometimes carried out in prayer for things which they had no view of before, and carried by some things they had.

2. As a quickening, exciting Spirit, Rom. viii. 26; the Spirit qualifying the soul with praying graces and affections, working in the praying person sense of needs, faith, fervency, humility, &c. Psal. x. 17. 'Thou wilt prepare their heart.' The man may go to his knees in a very unprepared frame for prayer, yet the Spirit blowing, he is helped. It is for this reason the Spirit is said to *make intercession* for us, namely, in so far as he teaches and quickens, puts us in a praying frame, and draws our petitions, as it were, which the Mediator presents.

This praying with the help of the Spirit is peculiar to the saints, James v. 16; yet they have not that help at all times, nor always in the same measure; for sometimes the Spirit, being provoked, departs, and they are left in a withered condition. So there is great need to look for a breathing, and pant for it, when we are to go to duty: for if there be not a gale, we will tug at the oars but heartlessly.

Let no man think that a readiness and volubility of expression in prayer, is always the effect of the Spirit's assistance. For that may be the product of a gift, and of the common operations of the Spirit, removing the impediment of the exercise of it. And it is evident one may be scarce of words, and have groans instead of them, while the Spirit helps him to pray, Rom. viii. 26. Neither is every flood of affections in prayer, the effect of the Spirit of prayer. There are of those which puff up a man, but make him never a whit more holy, tender in his walk, &c. But the influences of the Spirit never miss to be humbling but sanctifying. Hence says David, 'Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee,' 1 Chron. xxix. 14; and says the apostle, 'We have no confidence in the flesh,' Phil. iii. 3.

FIFTHLY, For whom must we pray ?

First, Negatively.

1. Not for the dead. David ceased praying for his child when once dead, 2 Sam. xii. 21—23. It is vain and useless; for as the tree falls, it must lie. We have neither precept nor promise about it; and it was raised upon the false opinion of purgatory. But the dead are in an unalterable state, Heb. ix. 27. 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.'

2. Nor for those who are known to have sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost, 1 John v. 16. for God has declared that sin to be unpardonable. This is very rare, and therefore one would beware of rashness in this matter.

Secondly, Positively.

1. In general, we are to pray for all sorts of men living, 'for kings, and all that are in authority,' 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2. for Christians, Jews, Mahometans, Pagans, noble and ignoble, &c. They are capable of God's grace and favour, and we are to desire it for them. But we are not to pray for every particular person whatsoever, 1 John v. 16. 'There is a sin unto death; I do not say he shall pray for it.' So that it is an unwarrantable petition, that God would have mercy on, and save all mankind, for the contrary of that is revealed. Yea, we should pray for all sorts of men who shall live hereafter, as our Lord did, John xvii. 20. 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.' But,

2. In particular, we are to pray, not only for ourselves, as Jacob did for deliverance from the hand of his brother Esau, Gen. xxxii. 11. but for,

(1.) The whole church of Christ upon earth. Hence says the text, *Praying always with all prayer,—and supplication for all saints.* To no party must we confine the communion of prayers, to whom God has not confined his grace. All the members of the mystical body must share particularly in our prayers, because they are the members of Christ, whatever difference be betwixt us and them in lesser things. The sympathy betwixt the members of the same body of our Lord requires this. And it is a sad sign not to be so affected, Amos vi. 6. 'They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.'

(2.) Magistrates: 'Kings, and all that are in authority,' 1 Tim. ii. 2. It was about 300 years after Christ ere the magistrates were Christians, nevertheless the apostle bids pray for them; because the quiet and peace of the commonwealth and kingdom depends much on their management; and infidelity, or indifference in religion, does not make void the magistrate's just and legal authority, nor free

the people from their due obedience to him. Their hearts are in the Lord's hand, Prov. xxi. 1. Their influence is great, so is their work, and so are their temptations; and if they be evil men, there is the more need to be earnest with God on their behalf. Let us bless God that we have a Protestant King on the throne, remembering how seasonably the Lord sent him, and how much depends on his safety, and the safety of his royal family.

(3.) Ministers, Col. iv. 3. Psal. cxxxii. 9. There is a near relation betwixt the people of God and their ministers. They have a weighty work in their hands, which, if it misgive, will not only be their own loss, but the people's. People may have a minister so straitened, as to do them no good, Col. iv. 3. Though he be not so, yet he may be useless to them: therefore says the apostle, 1 Thess. v. 25. 'Brethren, pray for us.' I leave it with that, Rom. xv. 30. 'Now I beseech you, brethren for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.'

(4.) Our Christian acquaintance, Jam. v. 16. 'Pray one for another.' Communion of prayers is a special benefit of Christian friendship and acquaintance. And it is no small mercy and encouragement to have interest in their prayers, who have interest at the throne of grace.

(5.) The place and congregation we live in, and are members of. The captives at Babylon were to pray for the place they lived in, Jer. xxix. 7. how much more should we pray for a Christian congregation whereof we are members? The better it be with them, it will be the better with you; so contrariwise.

(6.) Our families and relations. The nearer any stand related to us, we have the more need to be concerned for them at the throne of grace. We find Job sacrificing for his family, Job i. 5. a master praying for his servant, 2 Kings vi. 17. and a servant for his master, Gen. xxix. 12.

(7.) *Lastly*, We must pray for our enemies, Matth. v. 44. This is hardest to bring men to. But we have the express command of Christ for it, and his example, Luke xxiii. 34. followed by the martyr Stephen, Acts vii. 60. Nay, forgiving them is necessary to our forgiveness: 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.' There may be much selfishness in praying for those that love us; but that kindly concern for our enemies makes us liker God, Matth. v. 45.

SIXTHLY, For what we are to pray?

We are to pray for things agreeable to God's revealed will, and for such things only, 1 John v. 14. 'And this is the confidence that

we have in him, that if we seek any thing according to his will, he heareth us.' We may not present unto God unlawful desires, nor petitions in favour of our lust, Jam. iv. 3. These must needs be an abomination, and a daring affront to a holy God. And indeed wicked things are so much the more wicked, as they are brought into our addresses to a holy God.

The matter of our prayers must be regulated by the word of God, wherein he has shewn what is pleasing to him, and what is not so. The signification of God's will and good pleasure as to the good to be bestowed on men, and our prayers, are to be of equal extent. Wherefore, let us see that whatever we pray for be within the compass of the command or the promise.

Such are all things tending to the glory of God, Matth. vi. 9. or to the welfare of the church, Psal. cxxii. 6; to our own good, temporal, spiritual, or eternal, Matth. vii. 11; or that of others, Psal. cxxv. 4.

SEVENTHLY, How are we to pray, if we would pray rightly and acceptably?

1. Understandingly, understanding what we say, 1 Cor. xiv. 15. Therefore they must be in a known tongue. And to repeat words before God, while we know not what they mean, can never be prayer indeed.

2. Reverently, Eccl. v. 1. We must maintain an outward reverence in expression, voice, and gesture; since in prayer we are before the great God: an inward reverence especially, having an awful apprehension of the majesty of God before whom we appear, Psal. lxxxix. 7. Heb. xii. 28. Fear and trembling becomes a creature, much more a guilty creature, before a holy God. And fearless presumptuous addresses to God are the produce of a hard heart.

3. Humbly, Psal. x. 17. with a deep sense of our own unworthiness and sinfulness on our spirits. In prayer we come to beg, not to buy or demand our right, and therefore should be sensible of unworthiness, Gen. xxxii. 10; and the more grace, the more unworthy will we be in our own eyes, Gen. xviii. 27. And going to God, we must turn our eyes inward, with the Publican (Luke xviii. 14), on our own evils of heart and life.

4. Feelingly, being deeply affected with a sense of our needs, like the prodigal, Luke xv. 17, 18, 19. Alas! what does it avail to go to God with an insensible heart; to sit down at his table without spiritual hunger; to come to his door rich and increased with goods, in our own conceit! Such are sent empty away. Therefore it is a piece of very necessary preparation for prayer, to look over our wants, ere we go to prayer.

5. Believingly, Matth. xxi. 22. 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.' He who prays acceptably must be endued with saving faith, Heb. xi. 6. An unbeliever cannot pray acceptably, Rom. x. 14. Hence the prayers of the unrenewed man are all lost in respect of gracious acceptance. Moreover, the believer must be in the exercise of faith in prayer, which must be mixed with faith.

One must have a faith of particular confidence in prayer, as to the things prayed for, Mark xi. 24. 'What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall receive them.' For where that is altogether wanting, the prayer can never be accepted, Jam. i. 6. 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.' Since it must needs be highly dishonouring to God, to come to him to ask, without any expectation from, or trust in him, as to what is asked.

Quest. How may one have that faith? *Ans.* By applying the promises, and believing them. If the things be absolutely necessary, the promise makes these very things sure to them who come to God through Christ for them, as peace, pardon, &c. If they be not, then the promise secures God's doing the best, that either he will give the very thing desired, or what is as good. And we are to believe accordingly.

6. Sincerely, Psal. cxlv. 18. Hypocrisy and dissimulation in prayer, when the heart goes not along with the lips, mars the acceptance of prayers. There are feigned lips, Psal. xvii. 1. when the affections do not keep pace with the words in prayer: when sin is confessed, but the heart not humbled under it; petitions are put up, but no serious desire of the things asked. See Jer. xxix. 13.

7. Ferrently, Jam. v. 16. Cold, lifeless, and formal prayers, are not of the right stamp. We should, as in a most weighty matter, be boiling hot, Rom. xii. 11. Importunity in prayer is most pleasing to God. It consists not in a multitude of words, Matth. vi. 7; but in a holy earnestness of heart to be heard, Psal. cxliii. 7; and pleading with the Lord, by allowable arguments, as one who is in deep earnest, Job xxiii. 4. A heart warmed by a live-coal from God's altar will produce this.

8. Watchfully, *watching unto prayer*, as in the text; taking heed to our spirits, that they do not wander. Wandering thoughts in prayer mar many prayers. They come on like the fowls on the carcase, and will devour it, if not driven away. A carnal frame of heart is the mother of them, and rash indeliberate approaches to God help them forward.

In that case one should be like the builders of the wall, having

the trowel in the one hand, and the sword in the other, resolutely to resist vain thoughts, and refuse to harbour them. Nay, turn the cannon on the enemy, consider them as affording new matter of humiliation, and a clamant occasion of plying the throne of grace more closely. If they be striven against, they will not mar your acceptance; but if not they will.

9. Perseveringly; *watching thereunto with all perseverance*, as in the text. When we have tabled our suit before the throne, we must not let it fall, but insist upon it, Luke xviii. 1. Hold on, with one petition, one prayer, on the back of another, till it be granted, Isa. lxii. 1. 'In due time ye shall reap, if ye faint not.'

Lastly, Dependingly, waiting upon the Lord with humble submission to his holy will, and looking for an answer, Micah vii. 7. We must come away in a waiting depending frame. No wonder those prayers be not regarded, which we never look after, and are not concerned for the answer of.

EIGHTHLY, Are all such prayers accepted, heard, and answered?

1. An unrenewed man cannot thus pray, neither are such a one's prayers at any time accepted, Prov. xv. 8. 'The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,' John ix. 31. 'God heareth not sinners.'

2. God's own people do not always thus pray, neither are all their prayers accepted. For, says the Psalmist, Psal. lxxvi. 18. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.'

3. But all such prayers, being the produce of God's Spirit in the saints, are presented by the Mediator; and are accepted, heard, and answered by the Father, though not presently answered, Psal. xxii. 2. yet they shall be answered in due time, either by granting the very thing desired, 1 John v. 15. or something as good, Gen. xvii. 18, 19. 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

SECONDLY, The second part of prayer is confession of our sins. Here we shall show,

1. What sins we are to confess.
2. The necessity of confession.
3. How we are to confess sin.

First, The sins we are to confess are, original and actual sins, sins of omission, commission, heart, lip, and life, Psal. li. 4, 5. In a word, all our sins, so far as we are capable, (for 'who can understand his errors?' Psal. xix. 12.) but especially those which most wound the conscience, we are to be particular in, with their aggravations.

Secondly, Let us consider the necessity of confession. (1.) It is necessary to clear the Lord's justice in proceeding against us, Psal.

li. 4. 'Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.' (2.) The nature of the thing requires it, in order to obtain pardoning mercy, Prov. xxviii. 13. 'Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy.'

Thirdly, How are we to confess sin?

1. Fully, without hiding any thing wilfully, Prov. xxviii. 13. 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper.' God knows all our sins, and all the circumstances of them! so that it is in vain to mince our confession, and it speaks a heart not duly humbled.

2. Freely and voluntarily, pouring out the heart like water, and not merely making the confession as extorted. Whenever grace touches the heart, it will make it come freely.

3. Sincerely, confessing it with shame, sorrow, hatred of it, and a real purpose of reformation; otherwise it is but a mock confession.

THIRDLY, The third part of prayer is thanksgiving for mercies. Here I shall shortly shew,

1. What is the matter of this thanksgiving.

2. The necessity of it.

3. How we should give thanks.

First, The matter of it is,

1. Spiritual mercies, Eph. i. 3. These are mercies for our souls, and lead to everlasting happiness; and therefore are most to be prized. They challenge the warmest and the most grateful acknowledgments from all who have received them.

2. Temporal mercies from the womb till now, Psal. cxxxix. 14. These call for the most thankful acknowledgments every day, for they are new every morning. And we ought to be thankful for mercies conferred, not only on ourselves, but also on others, particular persons or societies. So did the apostle, as to Philemon, Phil. ver. 4. 'I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers.' And so he did as to the Philippians, chap. i. 3. 'I thank my God, upon every remembrance of you.'

Secondly, Let us consider the necessity of thanksgiving.

1. It is all that we can render to God for good or benefits received, Hos. xiv. 2. namely, to acknowledge debt, and be thankful. Ingratitude among men is reckoned a great sin and scandal, and fixes an odious character on the person: but how much greater a sin and scandalous offence is it to be unthankful to God for the mercies which we enjoy, and that we never deserved at his bountiful hand! It is the character of heathens, Rom. i. 21. O let it not be that of Christians!

2. It is the way to get more. Unthankfulness mars the course of

divine communications; but to the thankful it is opened, Phil. iv. 6. Ingratitude among men provokes the liberal person to withhold his hand; and so does it provoke the holy God, the giver of all good, to restrain his favours. Alas! it is more natural to us to ask than to give thanks. Among ten seekers (the lepers), whom Christ cured of a very inveterate disease, there was but one thanker; and he is specially noticed in the gospel-history. We should never beg a mercy from the Lord, without heartily thanking him for all we have formerly received, as this is the ready way to procure more.

Thirdly, How should we give thanks? With enlarged hearts, wondering at undeserved goodness; with deep humility for mercies conferred on such mean and unworthy creatures; with hearty resolutions to improve them for God's glory and honour; and with warm desires to receive more favours from the hands of God, our bountiful benefactor.

I shall conclude with a few inferences.

1. To live without prayer is a godless and graceless life. It is no better than the life of beasts, unsuitable to the rational nature of man, contrary to the design and end of his creation, and highly unbecoming one who is a candidate for immortality. It exposes the sinner to the severest strokes of God's justice; and, persisted in, will land him in hell. O let us all be excited to a life of prayer, remembering that we cannot be Christians without it. To pretend to be a Christian, and not to live a life of prayer, is a palpable contradiction.

2. The missing of the answers of prayer is our own fault, we pray amiss. If we always prayed in faith, and in the manner formerly observed, we would not be disappointed. Let us then be induced to pray in a right manner, and wait particularly on the Lord for gracious acceptance, and a favourable answer.

3. It is through Jesus Christ that the communication with heaven is opened and obtained. Let us then pray in his name, depend upon his intercession, and present all our petitions to God through him; for him the Father heareth always.

4. We need the Spirit of prayer, in order to our praying aright. Let us then cry incessantly for the Holy Spirit, and his influences; for we know not what to pray for as we ought. Let us look for his quickening influences to quicken our dead hearts, and warm our frozen affections, that we may send up our hearts unto God, and wing our desires to heaven.

5. Be exhorted to give yourselves unto prayer in all the sorts of it. Be men of prayer, as David was, Psal. cxix. 164. 'Seven times a-day do I praise thee.' How may this shame many Christians who

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.