

THE  
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS  
OF  
TRUE BELIEVERS.

I. IN RELATION TO GOD IN CHRIST, AS THEIR REFUGE AND PORTION.

PSALM cxlii. 5.

*I cried unto thee, O Lord, I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion,  
in the land of the living.\**

THAT is a pertinent question to put to each of you, which was proposed to Elijah in the cave, *What dost thou here, Elijah?* 1 Kings xix. 9. Sure I am, you have weighty business to do here, whether you lay it to heart or not. Ye are in this world as in a weary land, a wilderness, a place of great danger, and of great wants: and if you have felt it so, ye are come with a design to seek a refuge, where ye may be in safety; and a portion for your souls, whence your wants may be supplied. Our text discovers where ye may find both: *I cried unto thee, O Lord, I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion in the land of the living.*

These words shew us the course David took for relief in most straitening circumstances. He was hiding himself in a cave, that of Adullam or Engedi, for fear of Saul, by whom he was in hazard of his life. His spirit was like to sink under the burden of perplexing fears and griefs; he was in the utmost perplexity, ver. 3. *My spirit was overwhelmed within me*, says he. He was deserted by all, and as an outcast that nobody cared for, ver. 4. *I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.* In this case he betakes himself to the Lord by prayer. And here,

1. We may notice his praying in that case, *I cried unto thee, O*

\* The first sermon on this text was preached at Ettrick, August 19, 1722, immediately before the administration of the Lord's supper.

*Lord.* Though his case was extremely heavy, yet it did not render him incapable of praying, but quickened him to that delightful exercise, and caused him to cry to heaven out of the belly of the earth. Fears, sorrows, and perplexities on any account whatsoever, are gone too far, when they restrain prayer to the Lord: yet it may be the case of a saint, as of Asaph when he said, *I am so troubled that I cannot speak*, Psal. lxxvii. 4. Such would do well to hearken to that word, Cant. ii. 14. *O my dove,—let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice: for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.* The best ease for a heart full of trouble and grief, is to give it a vent into the bosom of a gracious God, as appears from the title of Psal. cii. *A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord.* Hannah found it so in her comfortable experience, 1 Sam. i. 18. *who having poured out her soul before the Lord, went her way, and her countenance was no more sad.*

2. His faith in prayer, *I said, Thou art my refuge, and my portion.* He said it not only with the mouth, but also and chiefly in and with his heart (as the word is often used.) His heart and soul said it, upon the discovering of the Lord's holding forth himself in his word, the ground of faith, for a refuge and portion to the sons of men. And here three things are to be observed.

1st, Faith's discerning the Lord Jehovah's fulness for and suitability to the soul's case: and this must be by the perspective of the word, illuminated by the Spirit. The psalmist saw the Lord by faith, perfectly suited to his case, in the several exigencies thereof.

(1.) He was compassed about with evils threatening to swallow him up, and in all the creation he could find no place to flee to where he might be safe: *Refuge failed me*, says he, or, *A place to flee to is perished from me.* But by faith he discerns a refuge above him, though there was none in all the world. Above me thou art a refuge; and if I can get there, I would be safe.

(2.) He was under many wants, and there was none to supply them. Though he could have got a place to flee to in the earth, where he might have been safe; yet how could he live in it? for no man cared for his soul or life, ver. 4. But faith discerns Jehovah to be a portion, that one may live on, when the world will afford him nothing. Thou art a portion; and if I can get that, I will have enough.

2dly, Faith's discerning the soul's liberty of access to the Lord as a refuge and a portion. This also must be by the perspective of the word, illuminated by the Spirit. The gospel-offer casts open the door of the refuge, and proclaims the portion to be free to every man that will take it, Rev. xxii. 17. which general offer is equiva-

lent to a particular one; as if the Lord should say, The refuge is open for you and you, every one of you, so that you may flee to it without fear; and the portion is free for you and you, and every one of you, and you may take and use it as your own, without fear of vitious intromission. Hence our Lord says, *He that believeth shall be saved*, Mark xvi. 16; and the apostle, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved*, Acts xvi. 31. And this offer the Spirit of the Lord carries home on the soul, that the man believes the offer is to him in particular, the refuge is open to him, the portion free to him, according to the word, 1 John v. 11. *This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life.*

3dly, Faith's appropriating of the Lord as a refuge and portion, to itself, *Thou art my refuge, and my portion.* The Lord speaks by his Spirit in his word, and says to the soul, "I am a safe refuge and a full portion, and I am willing and offer myself freely to be thy refuge and thy portion." The soul believes God, and says, "Then, Lord, thou art my refuge and my portion; even so I take thee." And thus the bargain is closed, and the soul takes possession of the refuge and portion which was offered. This is that direct acting of faith, in the cave, which the psalmist reflects upon with pleasure afterwards. I said it then.

And it shines bright in sincerity as faith unfeigned. "Away with all other refuges, as refuges of lies. Lord, I take thee for my refuge, and thou art my refuge, where I shall be in safety, as desperate as my case appears to be. And I take thee not only as my refuge, but my portion; and my portion from this moment, as well as my refuge. I design not to take the crown of Israel for my portion on earth, and thee for my portion in heaven, when that is gone from me; but thou art my portion now even in the land of the living, for my heart to live upon while in this world, as well as in the next."

As this text affords a large field of discourse, I shall only at present take notice of one doctrine from it, viz.

Doct. The soul that would have safety and satisfaction, must take the Lord Jehovah for a refuge and portion to itself, saying whatever others say, that he is its refuge and portion.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall a little at present consider the nature of this refuge and portion. And here I will offer a few things,

1. Concerning the refuge.
2. Concerning the portion.

First, Concerning the refuge, I offer the following particulars,

1. The Lord Christ, or God in Christ, is the refuge itself: Is. iv. 6. *There shall be a tabernacle—for a place of refuge. The Branch of the Lord, ver. 2. viz. the Man whose name is the Branch, Zech. iii. 8. and vi. 12. is the tabernacle here spoken of, which is for a place of refuge, as appears by comparing John i. 14. The Word was made flesh, and dwelt (Gr. tabernacled) among us; and Is. xxxii. 2. A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest,—as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. A man, who is also JEHOVAH, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, Jer. xxiii. 6. None less than a God, the eternal God, is or could be a sufficient refuge for guilty creatures; no arms less strong than the everlasting arms could bear the weight, Deut. xxxiii. 27. Yet sinners could never have taken refuge in an absolute God, more than dry stubble could be safe in a consuming fire, Heb. xii. ult. For our God is a consuming fire. Wherefore, that God might be a refuge for sinners, he put himself in our nature, he took upon him our flesh. The fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in Christ, Col. ii. 9. Thus he became our refuge, which we might safely flee to. But a God out of Christ no sinful creature can deal with to its salvation, but to its certain destruction. For thus saith Jehovah himself, Is. xxvii. 4, 5. *Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together. Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me.* None that know God will dare to approach him out of Christ.*

2. This refuge is by a legal destination a refuge for lost mankind, for sinners of Adam's race: 2 Cor. v. 19. *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.* John iii. 14, 15, 16. *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.* This destination gives men a right to flee thither for safety, which sinners of the angelic tribe have not; for as to sinners there is a man-love, though no angel-love, called *the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man*, Tit. iii. 4. Hence the call to the refuge is directed to men, Prov. viii. 4. *Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men; and to the people, Psal. lxii. 8. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him.* And this call is their warrant, *God is a refuge for us*, *ibid.* Wherefore, be what ye will, if ye be men or women, if of the lost family of Adam, stand not disputing whether ye may enter this refuge, and take possession of it for yourselves or not: your warrant to enter it is clear, and your safety upon your entering it infallibly sure.

God knows who are his, and for whom the High Priest died, and for whom the refuge was designed in the eternal decree of election. These are secrets, on the knowledge of which your warrant to enter the refuge does not depend. You must first enter, upon the warrant of the legal destination of the refuge registered in the word, whereby it is appointed for sinful men; and then ye will know what concerns you in these secrets. Remember, the cities of refuge were appointed not for Israel only, but for the stranger and sojourner among them, Numb. xxxv. 15. If a stranger and a sojourner would not believe that he might have access to the cities of refuge, because he was not an Israelite, and therefore would flee for refuge to his own country, no wonder he fell by the hand of the avenger of blood.

More particularly, I will tell you of four sorts of men, whom God in Christ is a refuge for; and I am sure each of us may find our name among them. He is a refuge,

(1.) For the oppressed: Psal. ix. 9. *God will be a refuge for the oppressed.* Are ye oppressed by sin? Do ye find it holding you down as a giant doth a weak man, so that your souls are saying, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Rom. vii. 24. Are ye oppressed by Satan? Do ye find the strong and subtle adversary an overmatch for you? Are ye oppressed by the world? by the men of the world, in your goods, in your name and reputation, or on any other account are you crying out of violence and wrong? are ye oppressed by the things of the world, the cares, business, or frowns of the world? Here is a refuge for you; come in hither unto a God in Christ, saying, *O Lord, thou art my refuge:* and, *O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me,* Is. xxxviii. 14. And there is a promise for your safety, Psal. lxxii. 4. *He shall break in pieces the oppressor.* This promise is branched out to your several cases;—As to the oppression by sin, Micah vii. 19. *He will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.*—As to Satan, Rom. xvi. 20. *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.*—And as to the world, John xvi. ult. *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

(2.) For outcasts, Psal. cxlii. 4, 5. the text and context. Are there any among us to whom the world's face is quite changed, and the brooks of comfort in it are dried up, and they are so tossed, chased, and harassed in it, that they have forgotten their resting-place? are any of you *become a stranger unto your brethren and an alien unto your mother's children?* Psal. lxix. 8. Is it grown such a strange world, that even "your own familiar friend, in whom you trusted, which did eat of your bread, hath lifted up his heel against

you?" Psal. xli. 9. and that wherever ye turn yourselves in it, to find rest and refuge, the door is cast on your face? Here is a refuge for you; here is one open door; come in thou blessed of the Lord: Psal. cxlvii. 2. *The Lord gathereth the outcasts of Israel.* It seems the Lord minds to have you in: he is doing with you as a father with a stubborn son run away from out of his father's house, thinking to shift for himself among his friends, and not come back: the father sends peremptory word through them all, saying, "In whosoever house my son is skulking, presently turn him out of doors, and let none of you take him in; and if he come in, give him not one night's lodging, nay, let him not heat in your house." Wherefore is all this, but just to get him back again to his father's house?

(3.) For debtors, broken men, unable to pay their debts, Is. xxv. 4. "Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm." Herein David was a type of Christ; for "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, gathered themselves unto him," 1 Sam. xxii. 2. All Adam's family is drowned in debt. Our father Adam made a bond, wherein he bound himself and his heirs to perfect obedience to the law, as the condition of life to him and all his, and that under the penalty of death in its utmost extent. This bond is the covenant of works. And when he subscribed it, he had enough to pay the round sum, and so to secure heaven and glory for him and his. But alas! by his own mismanagement he broke, and could never more pay it: so the bond lies upon the head of all his heirs, till getting into the refuge, they are discharged of it upon their pleading the Cautioner's payment, Rom. vi. 14. *Ye are not under the law, but under grace.* Whence it is evident, that those who are under grace in this refuge, are not any more under the law, or under that bond, and that they who are not in the refuge, under grace, are still under the bond, the law as the covenant of works. And know, O sinner, that thou art liable in payment both of the penalty and principal sum contained in the bond: "For it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. And either of these are farther out of your reach to pay, than the buying of the richest inheritance in the world is out of the reach of a beggar in rags. And though perhaps ye know it not, there is a caption out against you, and ye know not what moment ye may be laid up in prison upon it, from whence ye can never come forth, Matth. v. 25, 26. But here is a refuge for you, into which as soon as ye enter, your debt is paid, Rom. vii. 4. "Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ."

(4.) For criminals liable to death by the law, Heb. vi. 18. Sinners, ye have by your crimes against the King of heaven, forfeited your life, and laid yourselves open to the stroke of justice: the avenger of blood is at your heels; and if you be seized by justice, and fall into the hands of an absolute God, you perish for ever. But here is a refuge for you, which will afford a rest to your weary souls, Matth. xi. 28. a hiding place, where ye shall be safe, Isa. xxxii. 2.

3. The gate of this refuge, through which sinners enter, is the vail of the flesh of Christ, rent, torn, and opened to let in the guilty creature unto *JEHOVAH* as a refuge, Heb. x. 19, 20. It is only by a crucified Christ the sinner can come unto God comfortably, John x. 9. The sinner fleeing for refuge, must fix his eyes in the first place on the wounds of our glorious Redeemer, and come by the altar unto the sanctuary, Rom. iii. 25. When Jacob had seen the ladder set on the earth, whose top reached heaven, representing Christ not only as God, but as man descending into the lower parts of the earth by his death and burial, he saith, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven," Gen. xxviii. 17. Without such a costly gate sinners had never had access to God as a refuge.

4. The covert in this refuge is the righteousness of Christ. Hence Christ is called, "The Lord our righteousness," Jer. xxiii. 6; and the apostle glories in that righteousness "which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith," Phil. iii. 9. The sinner getting in under this covert is safe from the reach of revenging justice, the curse of the law, and the hurt of any thing, Luke x. 19. Isa. xxvii. 3. This covert, which is ever over the head of the sinner from the moment he enters the refuge, is threefold plies.

(1.) The satisfaction of Christ's death and sufferings, 1 John ii. 2. *He is the propitiation for our sins.* Thus they are under the covert of the Mediator's blood, through which no revenging wrath can make its way, Cant. iii. 10. with Rom. viii. 1. This is imputed to the believer, who is reckoned to have suffered in Christ, even as he sinned in Adam. Hence the apostle says, *I am crucified with Christ*, Gal. ii. 20.

(2.) The righteousness of Christ's life and conversation, who obeyed the commands of the law as a public person, as well as he suffered the penalty of it in that capacity, Rom. v. 19. "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." So that his obedience is theirs too, and all the good works that he did, for the space of thirty-three years that he lived in the world: the believer has them all in order,

to found his plea for heaven upon, Rom. viii. 4. *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us.*

(3.) The holiness of his birth and nature, Heb. vii. 26. "For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners." This also is theirs and upon them: John xvii. 19. "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." Not as it were imputed to them in the point of gospel sanctification, as Antinomians say; but in point of justification, as a part of the law-demand of righteousness for life; which law requires for that end, not only satisfaction for sin, but also good works, and not only good works, but a good and holy nature, having no bias to evil, Exod. xx. 17. all of them perfect in their kind. And as Christ's satisfaction for sin is the only solid plea against the first, and the righteousness of his life the only solid plea against the second; so the holiness of his birth and nature, is the only solid plea against the last: Rom. iv. 5, 8. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.—Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Hence Christ says of the spouse, *Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee*, Cant. iv. 7.

5. The several apartments in this refuge for the various cases of the refugees, are all the attributes and perfections of God the Lord ЖЕHOVAH, Prov. xviii. 10. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." And hence the sinner's refuge is said to be *in God*, Psal. lxii. 7. Every thing in God is a refuge to the man who is once under the covert. Is he in perplexing difficulties that he knows not how to be rid of? let him flee into the room or chamber of the divine wisdom. Is he under any thing quite above his ability? let him flee into the chamber of the divine power. Is he under guilt? let him flee into the chamber of divine mercy. Does the law bend up a process against him for debt already paid by his Cautioner, take him by the throat, saying, Pay what thou owest, or I will cast thee into the prison of hell? let him flee into the chamber of divine justice, 1 John i. 9. *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.* And so in other cases.

6. The boundaries of the refuge are the everlasting covenant, Psal. xlvi. 7. *The God of Jacob is our refuge.* It is God's covenant title. The borders of the cities of refuge were to be nicely marked: for upon the outside of the line was death to the criminal, on the inside life, for death could not come over the line, Numb. xxxv. 26, 27. Sinners without the covenant, there is no refuge for you; but come within, and none can touch you there.

7. Lastly, The sinner's entering into the refuge is by faith, as in



the text, *I said, Thou art my refuge.* Of which more afterwards.

SECONDLY, Concerning the portion, I offer only two things.

1. The same God in Christ who is the refuge for poor sinners, is also the portion for them to live on: *Thou art my portion in the land of the living.* They are but silly refuges that men can find in the world; they may be starved out of them, and forced by want to abandon them. But God in Christ is a refuge for us: and he is a portion in the refuge; and those who take refuge in him, need never go abroad without the border of their refuge to bring in provision for themselves.

2. God in Christ is what one may live on, Psal. xvi. 5, 6. "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." The men of the world cannot understand this: but the experience of the saints in glory puts it beyond question; and so does the experience of the saints on earth: witness David, Psal. lxxii. 25. "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee:" and Habakkuk, chap. iii. 17, 18. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." One may live upon that happily, which is commensurable to all his desires, for the perfecting of his nature, and maintaining it in its perfection. And this, no creature can be to a man, but God is and will be to all who take him for their portion.

In him the man has a dwelling-place, Psal. xc. 1. raiment, Rev. fiii. 18. meat and drink, John vi. 55. and all in a word, Phil. iv. 18. 2 Cor. vi. 10. And hereto belongs the sanctification of the soul, in the beginning, progress, and consummation of it, as that which is for the perfecting of the soul, 1 Cor. i. 30. So that as sure as the soul is made safe in Christ, it is sanctified in Christ, Isa. xlv. 24. "Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength."

I shall now make some practical improvement of this subject; which I shall discuss briefly in a twofold use.

USE I. Of trial. Hereby ye may know whether ye be believers or not, and will be welcome guests at the Lord's table.

1. What is your refuge? where take ye shelter, or what is your refuge from avenging justice, the curse of the law, and the wrath of God for your sins? If ye flee for refuge to your own working, doing, and suffering, your repentance and reformation, your case is bad,

But is the covert of Christ's righteousness your only refuge, and, renouncing all other pleas, do you hold by that? then God is your refuge, Psal. lxii. 6. Do you make him your refuge, and flee to him, when pursued by sin, Satan, and an evil world? Alas! most men either seek no refuge from sin, or they make themselves, their own strength, wisdom, or resolution, their refuge. But the believer makes God his refuge for all.

2. What is your portion? Many pretend to make God their refuge, but the world and their lusts are their heart's choice for a portion. But the believer takes God in Christ for a refuge and portion too, not only for a defence from evil, but for a treasure of provision to live upon even in the world. The world's good things they may take for comforts, but God alone for the portion of their souls. And therefore whatever fondness they may sometimes fall into, through temptation, for other things, they will shew God is their portion in the case of competition. Like the child, who may be fond of others that caress it, yet prefers its mother to all others.

USE II. I exhort you to take God in Christ this day for your refuge and portion.

*First*, O flee into this refuge. For motives, consider,

1. Ye need a refuge: for your souls are in the greatest hazard; the avenger of blood is pursuing you: and ye are in an evil world, and judgment is fast approaching on the land wherein ye live. It is high time for you to look out a place of safety.

2. There is no other safe refuge for you. Have ye not already found other refuges, where ye expected safety, fail you? and so will ye find it unto the end. Death will cast you out of them all. But if ye flee by faith into this refuge, it will never fail nor disappoint you.

This refuge is open to you. God in Christ is ready to embrace you with open arms, and afford you all manner of safety, from revenging justice, the fiery law, hell, wrath, an evil world, and sin, the worst of all enemies.

*Secondly*, Take God in Christ for your portion this day. For motives, consider,

1. The Lord is willing to take you for his portion. When all the world is divided into two parts, such as will believe in Christ, and such as will not; though the latter may be great and wise men in comparison of you, and ye never so little worth, he says, They shall be my portion, Deut. xxxii. 9. *For the Lord's portion is his people: and will not you say, Thou art my portion?*

2. There is no shadow of just competition betwixt the Lord and all other portions. Ye will get the double portion, a first-born, by taking him for your portion. He is a full, complete, satisfying por-

tion, and a lasting portion that will never decay. Now the all is divided into two parts, God himself, and the world and all that is in it, chuse you this day which shall be your portion. And remember that upon this choice your everlasting happiness or misery depends.

But one may say, How shall I take the Lord for my refuge and my portion? how shall I say, *Thou art my refuge, and my portion?*

1. Be sensible of thy need of a refuge and a portion to thy soul, which it cannot find among the creatures, as the prodigal deeply felt, Luke xv. 14. Till the vanity of created refuges and portions be discovered, and they appear refuges of lies, the soul will never take God in Christ for its refuge and portion, Jer. xvi. 19, "O Lord, my strength and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit."

2. Believe God in Christ to be a safe refuge and a full portion. The soul will never come to Christ, till it be persuaded that that safety and satisfaction is to be found in him, which is to be found no where else, Luke xv. 17.

3. Believe the gospel-offer with particular application to thyself, namely, That the Lord is offered for a refuge and portion to thee. This is the report of the gospel; and he who does not believe it, makes God a liar, 1 John v. 10.

4. From a steadfast resolution of spirit to take God in Christ for thy refuge and portion, to venture to flee into the refuge and lay hold on him as thy portion, upon the warrant of the gospel-offer, as the prodigal did, *I will arise and go to my father, &c.* Luke xv. 18.

5. Renounce all other refuges and portions, and lay the whole stress of thy safety and provision, for time and eternity, upon God in Christ, saying, "Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel," Jer. iii. 23. "God is a refuge for us," Psal. lxii. 8. Bid farewell to the refuges of lies, lift thy confidence and dependance from off all others, and fix it upon God in Christ, upon the warrant of the word, saying as Psal. lxii. 5. "My soul, wait thou only upon God: for my expectation is from him."

6. *Lastly*, Resolutely cleave to the Lord as thy refuge and portion, saying with Job, chap. xiii. 15, *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: Thou art my refuge and portion, I will seek no other, I can take no other, for time and for eternity.*