

THE CHRISTIAN WEAK, YET STRONG.*

SERMON XIV.

2 Cor. xii. 10,

For when I am weak, then am I strong.

THE text is a gospel-paradox, best understood by experience. The Christian is a mystery, a mystery to the world; the saints are hidden ones, yea, in a great measure they are a mystery to themselves; so is the Christian life. The apostle in the text, tells us one of the great mysteries of the Christian life, and that is meat out of the eater: "I take pleasure," says he, "in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake." Christianity teaches not a Stoical apathy, no man is more sensible of the weight of his burden than a Christian; yet he can not only bear a heavy burden patiently, (which I believe is a mystery to many of us), but he even finds a pleasure in a burden he is not able to stand under. After sense has considered a trial, gone out and in through it, and found nothing but bitterness, faith can discover a great deal of sweetness in it. The Christian well exercised, may get some glorious sights in his trials and temptations, that afford a refined pleasure.

1. It is a sweet sight for a Christian to see himself standing a candidate for glory, and on his trials for heaven, 1 Pet. i. 6, 7, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness, through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Christ."

2. It is sweet to see Christ dragging the corrupt will to the cross, and driving the nails through it, for its mortification: Jam. i. 3, "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."

3. It is sweet to see Christ, in order to the starving of lusts blocking up the passes by which provisions might be brought to them.

4. To see the soul out of weakness made strong, and the devil outshot with his own bow. This account of it the text gives, "For when I am weak," that is, when I am weak in myself, "then am I strong" in Christ; ver. 9, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my

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strength is made perfect in weakness." The Lord allowed the temptation to continue with him till he was driven out of himself, and was brought to confess he was not man enough for it, and then the Lord gives him strength against it.

1. In the text there is something supposed, namely, that the Christian is not always weak in the sense of the text; he has not always the due sense of his weakness; sometimes his locks are cut, and yet he will go out as at former times. It is no small piece of Christian labour to keep a due sense of our weakness and insufficiency. When the Christian is strong in himself, then he is dead weak. If the devil can but get the man blown up with conceit of his own ability to stand his ground against him, then he has him fair before the wind, as Peter. Hence it is that some will stand before great temptations, and fall before less ones.

2. In the text, there is something expressed. When the Christian is weak in his own sight, then he is really strong; he baffles the temptation, he stands the trial, when he sees he is not man enough for it. Sometimes the devil rages, drives furiously by temptations, persecutions, and the like; but unless he raise the dust, so as to blind the Christian's eyes, that he see not his own weakness, nor the strength of the grace without him in Christ, instead of driving him off his way, he will drive him to Christ, in whom he is enabled to stand, so as to come off a conqueror. I take up the sense of the verse in this

Doct. That when the Christian is weak, then he is strong; weak in his own eyes, strong in Christ.

In discoursing upon this subject, I shall consider the following points.

I. What is that weakness, which paves the way to spiritual strength?

II. Offer some remarks for confirming this point.

III. Give some reasons of the doctrine. And,

IV. The illustration of these will make way for a large practical improvement, in various uses of the subject.

I am then,

I. To shew what is that weakness which paves the way for spiritual strength.

1. There is in it a holy bent of the heart to that work, to which strength is required, with an honest desire and resolution to go through with the work. If a man hath no mind for the work, it is all one in that respect, whether he be weak or strong: Matth xxvi. 41, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the Spirit in-

deed is willing, but the flesh is weak. But the Christian, however weak,

(1.) Aims honestly at the performance of every duty. Like David he has respect unto all God's commandments, Psalm cxix. 6: he dares not baulk any of the laws of Christ; the whole law is written in his heart by divine grace, and he labours to write it over in his practice; he has no objection to any duty he knows to be enjoined of the Lord, but says, "I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right," Psalm cxix. 128.

(2.) He is honestly resolved to resist temptation, and mortify lusts. This is what must be done, though he knows not well how; he concludes, that though there be a lion in the way, he must be forward: "I have chosen," says he, "the way of truth," Psalm cxix. 30; his feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; he dares not think to fail with every wind, nor to go back and lie down in the embraces of his lusts, for it is to be supposed God has set fire to his rest there.

(3.) He has laid his account with the cross, and resolves to continue his weak shoulders under it, at Christ's call: Matth. xvi. 24, "If any man," said Jesus, "will come after me, let him deny himself, take up the cross and follow me."

He is resolved to follow the Lamb, though he should lie at the end of it, and never to leave the way of the Lord, for all the storms that Satan may raise in it; he prefers Christ's cross to the world's crown; and what he cannot keep with a good conscience, he will reckon himself better without than with it.

2. A sense of utter inability, and insufficiency, to go through with that work, or any part of it: 2 Cor. iii. 5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." Though his designs are noble and generous, he knows he has nothing in himself to accomplish them; for ye must know, that the Christian's confession of weakness is no compliment, they are children that will not lie; it is no preposterous modesty or diffidence, that blinds a man to his own ability. But he sees things as they really are, and believes himself no more weak than he is. When he looks over all his inventory, of what he is, and what he has in himself, he sees nothing to depend upon, either in point of doing or suffering.

The Christian lies fairest for spiritual strength, when he is so low and weak in his own eyes, as that he dare not trust to anything for his through-bearing, that is not Christ's or in Christ: "They are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh," Phil. iii. 3. A

man is no more weak in his own eyes than he has reason.—The Christian considers himself as weak,

(1.) When he dare not trust to his own stock of natural or acquired abilities for suffering for Christ. These things may sometimes carry a man through what is duty for the matter, but oftentimes they leave a man in the lurch, and can never help a man to do any good thing that God will accept; and no wonder; for saith Jeremiah, chap. xvii. 5, 6, “Thus saith the Lord God, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land not inhabited.” See also Isa. xl. 29—31.

(2.) When he dares not trust to the principles and resolutions of his heart. Nature is mighty venturous in religion, when it is flushed with vigorous resolutions. The Scribe said unto Jesus, “I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest,” Matth. viii. 19. But when the temptation or trial comes, they fall down like the walls of Jericho; the fire-edge soon wears off the spirit that is not stayed on the Lord.

(3.) When he dares not trust to vows and engagements. Every gracious soul will give itself away to the Lord, but they will not trust to these bands, but to him to whom they are bound: Isa. xlv. 24, “Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” If men trust to their own vows, they will find them a sorry fence, that will go like Samson’s withs when he heard the Philistines were upon him.

(4.) When he dares not trust to his own endeavours: Psalm cxxvii. 1, “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.” A Christian must be as diligent and vigorous in his way of duty, as if he were to do all alone; but if he would see the success of these endeavours, he must look for it from another quarter, as if he had done nothing. If the saint will not learn this lesson otherwise, God will let him work on, till he work himself out of breath, and so lie down at the Lord’s feet, as the church did: Isa. xxvi. 8, “We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have, as it were, brought forth wind, we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth.”

(5.) He dare not trust to the good frame he sometimes finds his spirit in. A good frame is a precious ointment to refresh the weary traveller, but is not a staff to lean upon, 1 Chron. xxix. 17, 18; it may be quickly lost, Psalm cvi. 13, “They soon forgot his works;” it is a tender bud of heaven that is easily nipped, as Peter at the

voice of a maid. It is a heavenly fire that needs continual supply, or else it will go out; if the Spirit of God cease to pour in oil, that lamp will soon be extinguished.

(6.) He dare not trust to habitual grace. Paul had a good stock of it, but he durst not venture to live on it: Gal. ii. 20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." The grace within the saints is a well, the streams of which are often dry, but to the grace without them in Christ; they can never come wrong, for it is an overflowing fountain. How quickly would the branch wither, if it were left to the sap within itself, but the sap in the stock keeps the branch green: "He that eateth me," saith Jesus, "even he shall live by me," John vi. 7.

3. There is the weak soul turning to a strong God for strength, in the way of believing, 2 Chron. xx. 12, "O our God! wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do; but our eyes are towards thee." When the strong man goes into himself, and musters up all the forces and powers of his soul, for the duty, or against the temptation, the weak man, that lies fair for strength, goes out of himself to muster up the forces of heaven by faith.—I may take up this in three things.

(1.) The weak man that becomes strong, truly believes that God has treasured up in Christ the strength and furniture of all the heirs of glory, for their work, 1 Cor. i. 30, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace," John i. 16. Since Adam fell, he never trusted any of the saints with their own stock, but has made the Mediator the great Trustee of divine grace, that if they would be supplied, they must go to him for it.

(2.) Jesus Christ with all his salvation, being offered in the way of the everlasting covenant, the weak soul by faith lays hold on that covenant, and Christ therein, for sanctification, as well as justification. Thus the weak creature is joined to a strong God, the empty soul is joined to him in whom all fulness dwells; so that in this sense, though he have nothing, yet he possesseth all things, viz. in Christ his head; they are complete in him, Col. ii. 10.

(3.) He believes the promises of the covenant, and, on the credit of them, ventures on duty against sin, and takes up the cross: 2 Chron. xiv. 11, "Help us, Lord, our God, for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude." Though resolutions, engage-

ments, and vows, be not to be trusted, yet a man may safely trust the promise; it is the blessed contrivance of the second covenant, that all our duties are there wrapt up in promises; and whenever we are called to do or suffer, the covenant has a promise of strength for it, and the Christian, sensible of his weakness, trusts it.—I am,

II. To confirm this point.—For this purpose, I offer these remarks.

1. The Christian, when he closeth his own eyes, sees best; when he trusts least to his own understanding, he is best directed, according to the promise: Prov. iii. 5, 6, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Carnal wisdom is an ill judge betwixt sin and duty; and if men renounce it not, and singly give themselves up to the divine conduct, they will be ready to stumble at noon-day: 1 Cor. iii. 20, "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." Lot lifted up his eyes, Abraham closed his, and left his choice to the Lord, Gen. xiii. 9, 10. This is the reason why godly simplicity oftentimes carries men well through, while carnal policy leads men into the ditch; and weak shrubs stand, while lofty cedars are blown over, that God may stain the pride of all glory.

2. When he ventures on the difficulties in the way of duty, not knowing how to remove them, he gets best through. This was the case with Abraham, when called to offer up his son, Gen. xxii; but when he went down to Egypt, there was a difficulty in the way, which he would not leave to the Lord to remove, but fell on ways and means of his own, and came off shamefully, Gen. xxii; overfast, overloose in this respect, 1 Cor. iii. 16, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, for it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiueſs." A little faith is more valuable than much carnal foresight. Leave difficulties in the way of duty on the Lord, if ever you would get safe through them: Psalm xxxvii. 5, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."

3. The Christian soldier fights best when the violence of the enemy sets him to his knees. Paul experienced this, when he besought the Lord thrice, and got a gracious answer; and so he recommends it to others, 2 Cor. xii. 8, "Praying always (says he) with all prayer," Eph. vi. 18. It was in this last posture that Jacob got the notable victory, Gen. xxxii. 24. Hence it is said of him, Hos. xii. 4, "Yea, he had power over the angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spoke with us." Did temptations and troubles set us to our knees, the

devil would be outshot. Did the threats of the enemies at this time, but cast professors out of their beds of sloth down to their knees, the Lord's work would quickly triumph over the enemies of it.

4. The lower the soul lies, it is the nearer the throne above: Isa. lviii. 15, "For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." A man will get a better view of the stars from the bottom of a deep pit than from the top of a mountain. The soul is never nearer the divine communications, than when shame and blushing make him stand afar off with the publican, smiting on his breast. The soul in that case will get the kindly invitation, "Come up hither;" when the self-conceited presumptuous sinner will hear, "Go down yonder."

5. The duty a Christian is called to, and sees himself most unable for, he performs best. Peter, when he thought himself well buckled for a confession for Christ, denied him at the voice of a silly maid; but when he had better learned the duty of self-denial, he boldly stood upon defence, Acts iv. 13. A man had better be in the dark, than walk in the light of his own sparks. A Christian never goes so actively through a duty, as when he leaves his own furniture for it behind him, throws it down in point of confidence, and takes up the promise.

6. The temptation that to a man is most contemptible, is most dangerous: Prov. xxviii. 14, "Happy is the man that feareth always; but he that hardeneth his heart, shall fall into mischief." Many times the devil's wounded men do more execution than his formidable army set in battle array. Lot kept his ground in Sodom, when among a company of incarnate devils, but fell foully when he thought himself in no hazard in the cave. If ye would stand, ye must never despise the meanest, nor think the greatest temptation insuperable. The meanest is too hard for you, the strongest too weak for the strength that you may have in your God.

7. The Christian that stands before the Lord with trembling legs, is the meetest to take up Christ's cross, and will bear it best. He that dare say least, is the man that will do most: Isa. xl. 30, 31, "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." He that ventures on the hour of trial, merely with a Roman courage or natural briskness of spirit, has but a weak reed to lean to.

There is none more likely to be a disgrace to religion, than the presumptuous self-confident professor, that wants nothing to support the cause of God, in the time of trial, but only other professors' hearts like his heart. The best and surest backing Christ will have, will be from those that tremble when he shall roar like a lion, Hos. xi. 10, see also Isa. xxxv. 4—6.

8. The Lord's people thrive best, when they have nothing but from hand to mouth. The most enriching time they have, is when felt needs are always driving them to God's door, and making them hang on about his hand: Rom. v. 3, 4, "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." The Christian that has most trials, has most experiences. Many battles afford variety of spoil to the Christian soldier; and a tract of smoothness in a man's lot, is ordinarily a dead time with the Christian, as to trading with heaven; he has not much outgiving, and has as little income. When David going against Goliath, got on Saul's armour and dress, 1 Sam. xvii. 38, he could not go with them; but when he had nothing but the staff, and the bag of stones out of the brook, he went freely, and succeeded.

As the fire burns most vigorously in a keen frost, so faith acts most vigorously when it has nothing to animate it but the naked word of promise. But when all is laid to a person's hand as they would wish, faith is so clogged that it cannot readily go with them.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

SERMON XV.

2 Cor. xii. 10,

For when I am weak, then am I strong.

WE now proceed,

III. To give some reasons of the doctrine, or shew, That when the Christian is weak, then he is strong; weak in his own eyes, strong in Christ.

Among other reasons which might be assigned, we shall mention the following.

I. Because he who is thus weak will not enter on difficulty but when he is called to it; and God's call to his people for any piece of work implies a promise of strength: Psalm xci. 11, "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

Self-confidence is venturous, thinks nothing too high for the man. Hence, he does not stay till he be led, but runs into temptation; no wonder than he comes foul off, like Peter in the devil's ground, the high-priest's hall. But the first thing the weak man does, is to be sure of his call, knowing there can be no ground for confidence without it. And he will not be over soon satisfied with it, but ponders the path of his feet, Prov. iv. 26.

2. He is driven out of himself to the Lord Christ, the fountain of strength: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord," says the Psalmist, Psalm lxxxiv. 5, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God," Psalm lxxi. 16. He leaves the rotten ground of self-confidence, and trusts in him that raiseth the dead, and calleth things that are not as though they were, and out of the mouths of babes perfects praise. The power of heaven is engaged in his favour; he believes, therefore is not left to be ashamed. This is a sure way for strength: for,

(1.) It lies on the honour of God, to strengthen the soul that depends upon him alone, according to his word, and that in point of his veracity; God's word of honour is good security; also in point of his goodness and gracious nature. Trust reposed in a generous man is a strong tie upon him in favour of the party trusting him. And I think there is much in that word, Jer. xxxix. 18, "For I will surely deliver thee, because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the Lord." Lot would rather that any evil that was to come should have fallen on himself and family, than on his guests; the reason is in these words: "For therefore came they under my roof," Gen. xix. 8. Humanity teaches people to preserve the life of a little bird, that flies into their bosom to be preserved from a ravenous bird. And they that take Ruth's way may be sure of the blessing she got: Ruth ii. 12, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

(2.) Because it sweetly answers to the grand device of God touching the sanctification of sinners. For, (1.) The treasures of sanctifying grace are all laid up in Christ, "who of God is made unto us sanctification," 1 Cor. i. 30, and from him all gracious influences are to be derived: "Out of his fulness we are to receive, and grace for grace," John i. 16. Accordingly the sinner comes to him, as the famished Egyptians to Joseph. (2.) They are to be derived from him by faith according to our needs; this is the appointed mean for conveyance of grace and strength from Christ, Gal. ii. 20. Accordingly the soul believes, that is, trusts in him for supply. Now, when the soul takes God's own way for strength, how can it miss it.

(3.) Because the glory of God's grace appears best in such a case. Thus it was with Paul, to whom God said, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." When Christ cured the blind man, he anointed his eyes with clay. The grace of God works best alone; and therefore the Lord, to stain pride, and prevent men from sacrificing to their own net, brings them very low before he appears to work for them, that his work may be wonderful, Deut. xxxii. 36.

Lastly, Because in that case the grand stop of divine communications is removed; the vessel is empty, and so the oil runs. Self-confidence is diametrically opposite to the grand device of sanctification revealed in the gospel. That a man should trust himself, was the fundamental maxim of the Pagan morality, but revealed religion plainly overturns it: Prov. xxviii. 26, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." It is practically set up in the hearts of all men by nature, but grace overturns it: Matth. xvi. 14, "If any man, (saith Jesus) will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

IV. I am now to make some practical improvement of this subject,

1st, In an use of information.

1. Learn, that they who were never carried off their own bottom for sanctification, have their religion yet to begin. It is a fundamental error in practice, for men to think, that though they need the righteousness of Christ for justification, yet they need but activity and diligence with their natural powers for holiness. This is as absurd, according to the scriptures, as to say the cripple needs but to ply his limbs, and so shall be cured. It is an evidence,—(1.) That thou hast never got a view of the corruption of nature, the plague of thine own heart; thy plague is in thy head—(2.) That thou hast never felt the need of Christ for all his salvation, yea, for the principal part of it, that is, sanctification, which is the great design of the whole mystery of the gospel of Christ. And,—(3.) That therefore self has yet Christ's room in thy heart. Thou actest from thyself, and consequently to thyself, and so art rejected of God in all that thou dost.

2. We are taught, that they make foul work, at communions who,

(1.) Bind themselves to the Lord for work, but lay not hold on the everlasting covenant for strength. I will not deny but the sacrament is a seal of our engagement to the Lord; but, according to the scripture, it is mainly a seal of God's full covenant to believers, as appears from the words of institution; and therefore I think the main work of a communion-occasion is that Christians receive a full Christ, lay hold of a full covenant, suited to all their

needs, and be no more faithless, but believing. They mistake also,

(2.) Who come to that ordinance without a deep sense of their wants, weakness, and imperfections. They who would have any thing at Christ's door, should be very sensible of their rank poverty at home: Luke i. 53, "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." They should be capable to lay their fingers on their sores, and tell what aileth them—Those mistake also,

(3.) Who are at no pains to prepare for that ordinance, and to bring strength from heaven for the management of it: "Without me (says Jesus) ye can do nothing," John xv. 5; if nothing, how will they of themselves manage such a great and solemn work? therefore they have much need of intercourse with heaven by faith and prayer.—Those err,

(4.) Who depend upon their own preparation. It is hard work to prepare the heart for a communion; but it is harder to be denied to it, and trust nothing to it when we have prepared. It is hard to be wrestling with an ill heart, till it be brought to some tolerable frame; but harder to trust all to free grace.

3. We may learn that none are so ready to be a prey to the devil as the presumptuous, self-confident sinner. This is a train which, when laid for a man, will quickly blow him up. The poor trembling saint will keep his feet, when such an one's bent bow will quickly break,—In a word, we may conclude,

4. That the best way to stand is to be much in the work of undermining our self-confidence, and razing the grounds of it, shoveling away the mire in which that flag grows; we would thus be brought into firm ground, and would grow up into Christ.—I now proceed to,

2dly, An use of comfort. This is comfortable to humble souls,

(1.) In the case of the church of God. This church is very weak at this day; she is weakened by mischiefs established by laws, by divisions, but above all, by the provocations of her members against the Lord; she is cast into a decay of true tenderness, and practical godliness; she is far gone on in it: she has many enemies powerful and subtle, and there are few to stand against them, a weak company, weak heads, hearts, and hands; never fewer, perhaps, of the nobles and gentry of Scotland to take her by the hand, than at this day. But it is very like she will be weaker yet, ere she recover strength, and many she trusts to now will leave her, that her army, like Gideon's, may be brought to a small remnant, ere the tents of Midian fall. But the farther the arm of flesh goes from the church of God, the nearer is the arm of God drawing to her.—There is comfort,

(2.) In your own case. It is no doubt the perplexing question of serious souls, How will I go cleanly through? Religion is no easy work at any time, but it is like to be harder than ordinary in our time. How will we get the Lord's way kept? Christ's cross borne? If we faint at little trials, what shall we do under greater ones? But remember, when you are weak, then are you strong.—I shall only add,

3dly, An use of exhortation. I exhort you to keep up a due sense of your own weakness, and trust for your through-bearing in the Lord.

(1.) Keep up a sense of the weakness of your heads, and lean not to your own understanding in the point of sin and duty; but be much hanging about the Lord's hand for light to clear your mind as to the way in which you are to walk.

(2.) Keep up a sense of the weakness of your hearts, and depend not upon your own strength for carrying you on in the way of duty when known, but go to the Lord for strength. In order to prevail with you, I mention the following motives:—

[1.] This is necessary, to evidence your sincerity in what you have been doing. You have been taking a guide, professing yourselves incapable to guide yourselves, and a supporter, because you are unable to support yourselves. Honour him, follow him, and depend upon him.

[2.] You will have need of strength; be sure you will be tried; public trials seem to be abiding us, private trials you may lay your account with particularly; Satan is most busy at such a time.

[3.] You will never get through in your own strength; you have no reason to trust to yourselves, whatever the present frame and purposes of your hearts be. For, *1st*, Many sad instances have been of those who have got the slip of their own hearts, that thought they had as good reason to be confident as you, that they would never go back; witness Noah, Lot, David, Solomon, and Peter. *2dly*, Many that pretend fair are real nothings. We have need the Lord would hold the glass before our eyes, that we may see ourselves, our state and frame. *3dly*, The best have very deceitful hearts: Jer. xvii. 21, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?" And it is a general maxim, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool," Prov. xxviii. 26. We are very much unacquainted with ourselves, with our own hearts, we know not what manner of spirits we are of, Luke ix. 55. The root of wickedness lies within us.

Lastly, Keep up the sense of your weakness, and trust to the Lord alone, and you will be strengthened with all might, so that

you can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth you, Phil. iv. 13.

I shall offer some considerations to impress this on your spirits.

I. You will have need of strength, if you intend to reach heaven. Indeed, if you have taken your last sight of Immanuel's land, and have no mind for the Lord's work, but to turn your back on his way, and go with the stream, you may sit at your own ease, Satan will see to your swift progress, and will not leave you till he have you cast into the oven of God's wrath. But otherwise you must go against the stream, and you must have strength.

(1.) Strength for the duties of religion, and these are as large as the law, which is the rule of duty, and it is exceeding broad. Thou must now set thyself to internal and external obedience, thy duty to God and man; give the obedience of heart, lip, and life; thou must be universal in obedience, otherwise thou art hypocritical in it, and so rejected; thou must have an holy conversation; thine eye must ever be on the Lord, and his holy law; holiness must go through all your actions, your civil and natural actions. "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God;" and surely for all this you need strength.

(2.) Strength for temptations. You must now resolve to enter the lists with a subtle devil, that has now more than five thousand years' experience in the art of tempting. How will you stand? With his agents in the world, he will fight against you with tongue, feet, and hands, and that too may be ere long; and your most dangerous enemy is within; you have innumerable tempters within you: Jam. i. 14, "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." There are many snares in the world, but none so dangerous as the corruption that is within each of our own hearts; this will ever be ready to break out, and embrace its friends whenever they come near.

(3.) Strength for the cross. Have you engaged with a crucified Christ? You must take up your cross, and bear it; and this will require strength, (1.) To bear your every day's cross. Go times as they will, you will find every day will have the evil thereof. (2.) Your holiday's cross, in the church's troubles: "Thou hast (says Jeremiah) called, as in a solemn day, my terrors round about," Lam. ii. 22, and how heavy that may be, we know not; but if the devil's time be short, he will be sure to have great wrath. We have had a cheap religion of it for many years, and therefore it has got many customers: but if the after-reckoning were come, which seems to be making haste, it is to be feared that many of us will throw it down again, and say, We never intended to have it at that rate.

2. You have no strength in yourselves answerable to that work ; and therefore, without doubt, you will never be able of yourselves for the least of it : 2 Cor. iii. 5, " Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is of God." Two things evidence this.

(1.) Our stock of strength was spent ere ever it came to our hands. The first Adam got it, Eccl. vii. 29. God hath made man upright, and he by falling left us without strength, Rom. v. 6. And thus the unregenerate world lies in wickedness, unable to recover themselves, but are held captive by Satan in chains of lusts, not to be broken by the power of nature.

(2.) Though, since Adam fell, God has given strength to his people, yet since that time God never trusted any mere man with his own stock of strength ; but he has put a common stock of it into the hand of the Mediator, to be distributed by him according as the duties of his people require, and as they make application to him for it ; and no man can come, saying with the younger brother, Luke xv. 12, " Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me," intending to set up and stand by himself. But he must come to stay at home, and receive his daily provision at his Father's table, and out of his hand, according to his necessities. The believer, being first by faith united to Christ as the head of influences, wherein all fulness dwells, must depend on him as the members on the head, the branches on the stock, and by faith derive strength from him continually, which cannot be, but under this sense of weakness which we press upon you, John i. 57 ; 1 Cor. i. 30 ; John vi. 57. Therefore, I say confidently, that, be ye saints or sinners, ye have nothing in you to trust for the work of religion, if it be not Christ in you ; and, be your stock always what it will, it is a very weak one, and you must not trust to it.

Lastly, You will get enough of strength in Christ, if you take this way to it, living and going out of yourselves, under a sense of utter weakness, to the Lord Christ, as the head of strengthening influences. If you ask, What is that ? I answer, It is the soul's discerning an utter inability in itself for any spiritually good action, but withal believing that God has treasured up sufficient strength in the Mediator, to be communicated to those that are his, and therefore embracing a full Christ for all, as held forth in the everlasting covenant ; and then venturing on duties, watching against temptations, and taking up the cross, upon the faith and credit of the promises of the covenant, trusting that they shall be made out to him ; which trust may be weaker or stronger, but according to the strength of it, so is the income of strength to the soul. In this way

the weak go from strength to strength. Thus shall you be helped to go through the most difficult duties acceptably, though not perfectly, to stand against the strongest temptations, to mortify the most powerful lusts, and to bear the heaviest crosses. This has made Christians attain to an eminent pitch of holiness, joyfully to embrace a prison, banishment, a gibbet, a fire, and the most cruel torments enemies could invent. The more you are emptied of yourselves, placing confidence in the Lord, the more will you be strengthened with might in the inner man; and when you shall be perfectly unselfed, if we may so express ourselves, so that there shall be no more of it to marr the communication betwixt Christ and you, then you shall be perfectly holy, and set above the reach of all evil; but because we are not properly divested of self-confidence in this world, therefore we do not arrive here at perfect strength. But all the saints, however, will give their testimony, that "when they are weak, then they are strong."—Amen.

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THE INTERESTING INQUIRY.\*

SERMON XVI.

MATT. xx. 6,

*Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

IN the beginning of this chapter, Christ spake a parable concerning the kingdom of heaven, the scope of which is to shew, that those who, by conceit of themselves and their actings for God, do place themselves among the first and chief favourites of heaven, shall be rejected of God, and treated as the last; they shall receive the last of Heaven's favours; while they who, through a feeling sense of unworthiness, dare not make such advances, shall be brought forward from among the last, where they placed themselves, and advanced to the first rank, where they shall be placed of God, who gives heaven as a gift to them that do not plead for it as a debt. This is plain from the occasion and conclusion of this parable: the vineyard is the church; the householder is Christ, whose vineyard it is; his going out at several hours is the call of the gospel at several times, coming to some sooner, to others later; the market-place is wherever the gospel comes. Our text is a pithy

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