

FEAR AND HOPE, OBJECTS OF THE DIVINE COMPLACENCY.*

SERMON VII.

PSALM cxlvii. 11,

The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

THERE are times of danger in which the event is very doubtful, but even then the safety and success will always be on the side the Lord casts them. In consequence, it is an important question, How may we engage him on our side? Certain it is, his pleasure lies not in created strength. Horse and foot, courage and strength, may be on the side which God will disown, and which shall be worsted: "By strength," says he, "shall no man prevail," 1 Sam. ii. 9. His pleasure is in the strength of grace: "He will keep the feet of his saints;" or, as it is expressed in the text, "The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy."—In which words we have,

1. The character of those whose part the Lord will take in all their trials and troubles, and in all their encounters with their enemies. The first part of their character is, they are fearers of God. They have the awe of his majesty upon their spirits.—The second is that they hope in, or rather for his mercy. They, in a becoming manner, wait and patiently seek for relief from God, and that in the way of mercy through Christ, not for any thing in themselves.—Observe next the mixture of these parts of their character: They do not only fear God but hope in him; for fear without hope will sink into raging despair. They not only hope, but fear, for hope without fear will turn into presumption. These two God hath joined together, let not us put them asunder.

2. The privileges of these persons, whoever may be displeased with them, and however much they may be displeased with themselves, God takes pleasure in them. He accepts their persons, and their services, and he will show himself to be on their side. They shall not hope in vain; however hapless their case be in itself, they shall get a merciful relief in due time.

From these words, observe this

DOCT. The Lord takes pleasure in those, who, whatever case they be in, entertain a holy fear of him, with a kindly hope in his mercy.

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In discoursing which, it is intended,

I. Shortly to describe this holy fear, that in all cases ought to be entertained, with a hope of the Lord's mercy.

II. To describe that kindly hope of his mercy, to be entertained in all cases, along with this holy fear.

III. To shew the necessity of keeping up this holy fear and kindly hope in all cases together in the soul.

IV. To show what is that pleasure the Lord takes in such.

V. To confirm the doctrine of the text.

VI. To make a practical improvement of the different parts of the subject.

I am, then,

I. Shortly to describe this holy fear, that in all cases ought to be entertained, with a hope of the Lord's mercy. This fear of God is,

1. An awe and dread of his majesty and transcendent greatness: Psalm lxxxix. 6, 7, "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the Lord? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence of all them that are about him." With this the lightness and vanity of the heart is to be repressed. The soul must entertain high and honourable thoughts of God, as a sovereign of independent being, in whom all perfections do concentre, must look up to the clouds, and behold him on his throne in heaven, and so bring itself thereby to a profound reverence of his greatness.

2. A reverence of his absolute, his unlimited authority and power: "Fear him," said Jesus, "who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him," Luke xii. 5; he can command us whatsoever he will, and dispose of us as he pleaseth. Let us have a reverential regard to the uncontrolable sceptre he sways over all creatures. Since he doth in heaven and in earth what seemeth good unto him, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou? we should silently submit to his disposals.

3. A fear of offending him in any thing: Psalm iv. 4, "Stand in awe, and sin not." This is a fear, and caution, and circumspection, which we should always carry about and never lay aside. We walk amidst many snares; Satan and a corrupt heart are ready to entangle us; but God cannot away with sin; it is the only offence we can give him. He is well pleased to see us afraid of offending him, to see the poor sinner affrighted at every thing that is provoking to him, and keeping up a holy tenderness this way.

4. A fear of imputing iniquity to him, or harbouring hard and unbecoming thoughts of his majesty, Job i. 22, "In all this Job

sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." The proud heart casting off the fear of God, arraigns and condemns the conduct of holy Providence as rigorous and unrighteous; and so murmurs against the Lord. But holy fear silenceth the mutiny of these unruly passions, and says, "He does all things well, is holy and righteous in all his ways and works."

5. A dread of going out of his way for help, however hard the case be: Isa. viii. 13, 14, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread; and he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence, to both the houses of Israel; for a gin and for a snare, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be taken." Holy fear takes off the wheels of the chariot of impatience and unsanctified haste, which drives furiously to get out of that case in which infinite wisdom has placed us. The soul dare not adventure to shake off the yoke, till the Lord put to his own hand and take it off.

Lastly, A dread of his holy hand in his judgments: Amos iii. 8, "The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophecy?" This fear keeps the heart from slight thoughts of them, and furnishes awful thoughts of a smiting God, the weight of whose hand no man is able to bear. And there is here a dread of the hand of the Lord lying on their person for the past: Heb. xii. 5, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." The man noticeth the stroke, and what impressions of anger are engraven on it, and so he putteth his mouth in the dust, if so there may be hope, Lam. iii. 29. Whatever he meets with, he takes it as from the Lord, and reverenceth the hand that smiteth.—There is, (2.) A dread of what the Lord may inflict upon him: Psalm cxix. 120, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." The fearer of the Lord sees, that whatever be his stroke, it is less than his deserving. They say as Ezra, chap. ix. 13, "Thou, our God, has punished less than our iniquities deserve;" and therefore submit themselves, lest the Lord make the stroke greater, and punish us seven times more.—Let us now,

II. Describe that kindly hope of his mercy, to be entertained in all cases along with this holy fear. It is,

1. A firm persuasion of the good, gracious, and bountiful nature of God, who delights not in the misery of his creatures; Psalm xxv. 8, "Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way." Ezek. xviii. 23, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God; and not that he should re-

turn from his ways and live?" God is the fountain of all goodness to be found in man or angel, and so is himself a boundless ocean of goodness. He loves to have poor sinners entertaining these kindly thoughts of him. And well may they do so, even under hard pressures, for God lays not on man more than is meet or right, Job xxxiv. 23; and even this he does with a kind of holy reluctance, for "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," Lam. iii. 33.

2. A hope of mercy to all their unrighteousness, through Christ. This is the great hope, called the hope of the gospel, Col. i. 23. For it is the main hope purchased by Christ to lost sons of Adam, and held forth to them in the gospel, Heb. viii. 12, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." To cast away this hope, is at once to throw dishonour on the mercy of the Father, and the blood of the Son, and the efficacy of his Spirit; to cast it away, is to please Satan, and to ruin our own souls.

3. A hope of good by their afflictions, trials, and troubles: Rom. viii. 28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." It is the Lord's ordinary way to bring his people nearer him by afflictions: "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I kept thy word," Psalm cxix. 67; yea, by this way, also, does he bring in those that are strangers to him, Hosea v. 15, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek my face; in their afflictions they will seek me early." When the Lord will not use a rod upon a person, that is a terrible sign; but there is always hope when the Lord is at pains with a rod; and to hope for this good, is the way to advance it.

4. A hope of support and protection under their afflictions: Heb. xiii. 5, 6, "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." The Lord can carry persons through deep waters, and yet keep them from sinking, for he is the lifter up of the head. However high the waters swell, they are still under the check of him whom the winds and the seas obey. The everlasting arms underneath, though not seen in the time, secure the sinner from sinking to the ground, and bring him safe ashore. Now, faith and hope is the way to bring in that support.

5. A hope of seasonable relief, on having such deliverance in due time, as shall be best for God's honour and their good: Psalm xlii. 5, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him for

the help of his countenance." The Lord has many ways of giving relief from trouble. Sometimes he makes the storm blow off, and restores a calm; sometimes he hides them in the grave, and gives them a blessed exchange, for an afflicted life in this world, a joyful happy life in another world. It becomes us to hope for his mercy, in whatever way he may send it: Heb. x. 35, "Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward."

6. A hope of eternal life in a better world: 1 Pet. i. 13, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, (for what?) for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." These hopes will never please God that are confined to the things of this world. He has provided and offers better things to poor sinners; there is a hope laid up for us in heaven, Col. i. 5. While that hope remains firm and well grounded, happy is the soul, whatever be its case; and since he offers it, and makes it over to whosoever will embrace Christ, that hope should never be cast away while we are here.

7. A waiting for the mercy needed and desired: Psalm xxvii. 14, "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." The hoping soul will wait for God, and bear till his time come, however long it may seem to be. He hath the times and seasons in his own hand. He knows what is the fittest time for giving a mercy, and we must leave it in his own hand, and wait on him: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord: behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience, till he receive the former and the latter rain; be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

Lastly, All this hope is to be grounded only on the free grace of God through Jesus Christ, and the precious promises of the word, held forth to us in him, 1 Pet. i. 13, quoted already. Therefore it is called hope for his mercy: "Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." Psalm cxix. 49. If hope be founded on any work or merit in ourselves, or be not bounded by the promise, that is to say, if we hope for what God has not promised, then it cannot be pleasing to him; so that his hope follows faith's embracing Christ in the gospel, and resigning the soul to the Lord; which being done, hope goes and stands upon the watch-tower, to behold and wait for all promised good things coming with Christ from God in due time to the soul.—We now proceed,

III. To shew the necessity of keeping up this holy fear and kindly hope together in all cases.—They are necessary to keep an even bal-

ance in the soul at all times, ready to fall either to the one hand or the other. God's voice to us, is, Isa. xxx. 21, "This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." But, O! how apt are we to go off the road, especially if we are obliged to traverse the mountains of darkness and affliction, of desertion and temptation. But this fear and hope will hedge us on every hand, that we turn not to the right hand or to the left; whereas, if either be wanting, there is a wide gape, at which we will readily fall into the mire.—But more particularly,

1. They keep the soul from splitting on rocks on both hands. We are in this world as on a sea, therefore had need to take care. The way we pass is beset with two dangerous rocks; one on the left, despair, where thousands split; another on the right, presumption, where ten thousands have been shipwrecked; some fall on them in a dead calm, they are fearless and careless, and ere they are aware they dash on the rock of presumption, and go to the bottom; Job xxi. 13, "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave." To others a storm arises, they are tossed, grow hopeless, and then split on the rock of despair. Whereas holy fear would carry us safe by the one, and kindly hope by the other, whatever storms blow: "Which hope," says Paul, "we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail," Heb. vi. 19.

2. They keep the heart in a due mean between carnal security and torturing anxiety. Holy fear keeps men awake, while fearless souls are sleeping within the sea-mark of wrath, not knowing when a wave may come and sweep them away. They may be saying, like the rich man, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine rest; eat, drink, and be merry. But God may then say, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee," Luke xii. 19, 20. Kindly hope composes the heart, and calms the disturbed spirit, while others destitute of it are tormenting themselves. Fear keeps from soaring too high, hope from sinking too low.

3. They keep notably to the duty of praying, which is necessary in all cases, and is a messenger often to be sent to heaven, especially in times of trouble: Psalm l. 15, "And call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Fear stirs up to the duty, hope draws to it. Fear fills the soul with reverence for God, and makes it to be in deep earnest in its addresses; hope guards it against terror and confusion in its applications to the throne. Fear carries off presumptuous confidence; but hope makes it hang upon mercy and grace.

4. They help on patience and resignation to the will of God, without which no man is master of himself: Luke xxi. 19, "In your patience possess your souls." Hope looks for better things, a calm after a storm; fear tells us, such a stroke, ill carried, may bring on a worse. Thus the soul is in a holy manner both flattered and frightened into contentment with its lot. Thus it is kept from despising the chastening of the Lord, which many do, with their natural courage, and from fainting under his rebukes, as weak-hearted ones are liable to.

Lastly, They arm us on every hand against our adversary the devil: James iv. 7, "Submit yourselves therefore to God; resist the devil, and he will flee from you." There are two things, one of which the devil drives at continually: Either, (1.) To go forward with all ease in the way of sin; for, says the liar, there is no hazard; and thus whole shoals of sinners go on to the pit. But the fear of God will repel this temptation. Or, (2.) Not to offer to return to God, or go to Christ; for, says the murderer, there is no hope. But the kindly hope repels this. By this last he attacks the awakened sinner, and by the former the secure one. Whatever be your case, then, get your souls possessed of this kindly hope and holy fear. Beware of quitting either hope or fear. Are you at ease, and your hope great? O balance it with fear, lest having too much sail without ballast, ye suddenly be overcast and overwhelmed. Are you in trouble, and your fears great? O buoy up your souls with hope, lest ye sink altogether. For motives, consider,

1. The want of any of them makes you a prey to your grand enemy, 1 Peter v. 8, "Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist stedfast in the faith." Whichever of the avenues of the soul stand open, the enemy will enter by it; and once he get in, you know not what havoc he may make there. Are you fearless? he will have his snares fitted for that case. Are you hopeless? be sure he will take his advantage of it.

2. The safety of the soul in this sinful and ensnaring world depends on your entertaining both. The mariner may easier sail the ocean without his compass, the blind man go over his heights and depths without his guide, than you go through this world without these; for the worst that can befall them is the death of the body, but your souls will be ruined.

Lastly, The want of either is highly dishonourable to God. Is there a God in heaven, and will you not fear him? Has his Son died to purchase hope to sinners? and has he declared in his word, that he would have you hope in and for his mercy, and will ye not

do it? Mal. i. 6, "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts." By the want of fear, you declare you value greatness; and by the want of hope, that you can put no trust in his word.—I come now,

IV. To shew what is that pleasure which the Lord takes in such.

1. He approves them in so doing. The Lord says, Thou didst well that it was in thine heart, though Satan may suggest it to be presumption, Psalm cxv. 11, "Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; he is their help and their shield." What God requires to be done, he will surely approve of when it is done, this he requires, and therefore will approve of it.

2. He accepts of them; he is well pleased with the persons that do so. The exercise of these graces is a piece of very acceptable service to God, which he takes off sinners' hands for Christ's sake, though it be attended with many imperfections. That unbelief which remains in the hearts of them that fear God, makes them suspect they will be very unwelcome to hope for good at the Lord's hand; but it is a mistake, for such exercise is very pleasing to the Lord.

3. The Lord delights in them that do so. Their name may be Hephzibah, for the Lord delighteth in them, as a father does in his child, who both fears him, and hopes for good at his hand.

(1.) The Lord delights in their persons. Jer. xxxi. 20, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still, therefore my bowels are troubled for him: I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." They are accepted in the beloved; their fear carrying them to Christ, and their hope fixing them upon him as the storehouse of all blessings. Being covered with imputed righteousness, they are all fair and lovely in the eyes of the Lord, there is no spot in them, Song iv. 7.

(2.) He delights in their graces. Song iv. 16, "Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits." Holy fear and hope are the fruits of his own Spirit in the souls of his people, that grow up there as in a garden, being watered with the dew of heaven. They are leading graces, which bring along with them a train of others, all tending to promote holiness in heart and life.

(3.) In their duties. Prov. xv. 3, "The prayer of the upright is his delight." Where the fear of the Lord has place, the duties of religion will get room; the soul will be afraid of neglecting to pay its due homage unto the Lord; and hope being joined thereto, will bring them to the Lord with expectation of good at his hand; and this is the Lord's delight.

(4.) In their company. Song v. 1, "I have come into my garden, my sister, my spouse." He loves to have them near him, hanging about his hand, conversing with him, receiving his word from his mouth, and making their requests known to him: Song ii. 14, "Let me see (says he) thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." The mighty God, who has his higher house in heaven, has the contrite spirit for his lower house.—I shall now proceed,

V. To confirm the doctrine of the text, or shew, that "the Lord taketh pleasure in those, whatever case they be in, who entertain a holy fear of him, with a kindly hope in his mercy,"—For this purpose, consider,

1. This is answerable and agreeable to the revelation of God's mind in his word, what he has made known of himself both in the law and in the gospel. The fear of God is the great purpose of the law, hope for his mercy through Christ is the great purpose of the gospel. The law was given in such an awful manner, as might fill sinners with the dread of the great Lawgiver; the gospel brings in the blessed hope to lost sinners, so that this fear and hope, answering the design of both, cannot miss of being very pleasing to God.

2. It glorifies God in his glorious perfections, discovered to us in the face of Jesus Christ. The great end of the gospel contrivance is, to shew the glory of God in Christ as in a glass: 2 Cor. iv. 6, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Now, the entertaining of these two, fear and hope, doth at once give him the glory of all these. Holy fear gives him the glory of his awful majesty, inflexible justice, infinite power and holiness; kindly hope gives him the glory of his free grace, mercy, love, and goodness: and the joining of these two together gives him the glory of his infinite wisdom, that hath found out the way to give vent to both in the sinners' case.

3. It is agreeable to the Spirit's work of grace on the soul, whereby the sinner is first cast down, and then lifted up. The Spirit of God coming to the elect soul, finds it secure, careless, and presumptuous, thinking itself "rich and increased in goods, and standing in need of nothing," Rev. iii. 17. The Spirit then discovers what a God, and what a law, the sinner has to do with, and so works this holy fear in the heart. When the soul is awakened, it is ready to despond; and the Spirit, by the doctrines of the gospel, works this hope. Thus the sinner comes and cleaves to Christ.

Lastly, The Lord is very gracious unto such. They are entertained with some off-fallings while they hang about his hand in the

ordinances and duties of religion: Psalm lxxv. 4, "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." Yea, they are filled as with marrow and fatness; God makes known his secrets to them, even the secrets of his covenant: Psalm xxv. 14, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant." He shews them also the secrets of his word: Luke xxiv. 32, "And they said one to another, Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" Also the secrets of his works, and the dispensations of his providence. And at length they shall be admitted to the full fruition of him in a better world; they shall enter into the joy of their Lord, and be for ever with him.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

SERMON VIII.

PSALM cxlvii. 11,

The Lord taketh pleasure in those that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

HAVING, in the preceding discourse, briefly gone through the doctrinal part, it only remains, that, in the

VI. And last place, I make a practical improvement of the whole; in doing which, I propose to enlarge at considerable length, by adverting to the different parts of this subject.—I begin,

I. With an use of information. It informs us,

1. That God in Christ is full of good-will to poor sinners. Since he will have them thus to depend upon him as children on a father, fearing and hoping in him; he it is who will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth, 1 Tim. ii. 4. Is not this a plain proof that he hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth? Eccl. xviii. 13, and that their ruin is of themselves, if they should perish; that he does not cast them off that hang by him, nor cast them out that come unto him, John vi. 37.

2. That however prosperous and favourable our case be, we have ground to keep up a holy fear upon our spirits: "Happy is the man that feareth alway," Prov. xxviii. 14. Whether it be that our outward state in the world, or our spiritual state, be peaceful, easy, and prosperous, still there is ground to fear, for we are in hazard of offending God in it. There is no way so plain and even, but

we may stumble in it. Outward prosperity ruins many: "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them," Prov. i. 31. And even in a prosperous state of the soul, there is no safety in being secure and careless, for in the managing of that we are apt to offend: 2 Cor. xii. 7, "Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations, there was given unto me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." No paradise on the earth but the serpent may be found there; and if one were wrapt up to the third heavens, like Paul, they will bring back with them a corrupt heart, ready to give them a slip, or lead them astray. We are in danger of a heavy turn and sad change in our condition, we are "to serve God with fear, and rejoice with trembling," Psalm ii. 11. See how quickly David's prosperity was changed: Psalm xxx. 7, "Thou didst hide thy face and I was troubled." Job's condition, both temporal and spiritual, how suddenly was it changed? Sovereignty lifts up and casts down, and the anger of a jealous God may soon be stirred, so as to make a mighty overturn in one's condition; therefore we should not be "high-minded, but fear," Rom. xi. 20.

3. It informs us, that however low one's case be, there is still room for hope while here; therefore we should always entertain a kindly hope: Psalm xliii. 5, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted in me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance, and my God." One may yet be at his wits end with his difficulties, knowing of no outgate, but yet he may have ground of faith and hope, because—so great things have been done by our merciful God, as to raise us up. He made a world out of nothing, he has raised the dead, and particularly Christ, while the whole elect's sins lay as a grave-stone on him. What, then, hinders him to do a great work for us, when he has done a greater? In him we may trust that he will yet deliver us, 2 Cor. i. 10—Whatever our case be, we are not the first that have been in it, and delivered too in God's own way. Psalm xxii. 4, "Our fathers trusted in thee, and thou didst deliver them." People are apt to say, Never one was in such case as theirs. But, "is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time which was before us," Eccl. i. 10; and suppose it were new, yet faith and hope in God are not in vain; for he has a new cure for a new case, Isa. xliii. 18, 19. Whatever our case be, can it be worse than a lost case? Luke xix. 10, "The Son of man came to seek and save that which is lost." Can it be worse than a self-destroying case? Hos. xiii. 9, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." Can it be worse than a case in

itself quite hopeless, even as dry bones? Ezek. xxxvii. 11, 12, but even by the Spirit of the Lord these bones can be made alive.—It is not beyond the reach of the power of God. Gen. xviii. 14, “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?” who can be so low, as that the everlasting arms cannot raise up? with God nothing is impossible. A word from heaven can make all things take a happy turn, for saying and doing are but one thing with God. God says to the sinner, Believest thou that I can do these things? If thou dost, there is a ground of kindly hope.—In a word, the covenant of promise reaches to, and includes mercy of all kinds, necessary to make us happy; so that we have not only God’s power, but his will, to give us mercy in all cases held out to us in the word, if so be we will take his way of faith and hope.—From this subject there is,

II. An use of exhortation, in several branches.

1. Fear the Lord; get and entertain a holy fear of God in your spirits. The profane and licentious lives of some, the carnal and loose hearts of others, proclaim a general want of this, Psalm xxxvi. 1, “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes.” But all fear of God is not a holy fear pleasing to God. There is a servile fear, and a filial fear. Not to the former, but to the latter, I exhort you.

Herewith some various difficulties and inquiries may arise, which we shall endeavour to answer, such as,

1. When is the fear of God only slavish? In answer to this take the following observations: The fear of God is only slavish,

(1.) When it ariseth only from the consideration of God’s wrath as a just judge. This fear of God is to be found in the unconverted; they have the spirit of bondage again to fear, Rom. viii. 15; yea, in the devils, they believe and tremble, Jam. ii. 19; and if the conscience once be awakened, though the heart be not sanctified, this fear cannot miss to take place. It is a natural passion flowing from self-love and a sight of danger, which is so much the more vehement, in proportion as the danger apprehended is greater or smaller: nearer or more distant. One under this fear, fears God as the slave fears his master, because of the whip, which he is afraid of being lashed; he abstains from sin, not out of hatred of it, but because of the wrath of God annexed to it. An apprehension of God’s heavy hand on him here, or of hell and damnation hereafter, is the predominant motive of his fear of God, whom he fears only as an incensed Judge, and his powerful enemy.

(2.) When it checks or kills the love of God. There is a fear opposite to the love of God, which by this very character is discovered to be base and servile: 1 Johu iv. 18, “There is no fear in

love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment." There is a necessary connection betwixt true fear and love, the one cannot be without the other; they are both links of the same chain of grace, which the Holy Spirit gives those whom he sanctifies; but slavish fear fills the heart with hard thoughts of God, and the more it prevails, the farther is the soul from the love of God.

(3.) When it drives the sinner away from God. Under its influence, Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God, and Cain went out from his presence. All the graces of the Spirit, as they come from the Lord, so they carry the sinner back to him; so no doubt it is an ungracious fear of God that frights the sinner away from him; for they that seek and return to him, will fear him and his righteousness. This fear hath this effect in different degrees, and the higher the worse:—It takes heart and hand from persons in their approaches to God, 1 John iv. 18, quoted already; it kills them before the Lord, knocks all confidence and hope in God on the head, so that their hearts at duty are like Nabal's—dying within them, and become as a stone; so when they should run for their life, it cuts the sinews of their endeavours; when they would wrestle for the blessing, it makes their knees feeble, and their hands hang down.—It makes them first averse to duty, and then give up with it; they deal with God as one with his avowed enemy, into whose presence he will not come, Gen. iii. 8. The people of God have sometimes had a touch of this, 2 Sam. vi. 9, "And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come unto me? Though it never prevails with them to extinguish love, yet sometimes a believer is like a faulty child, who, instead of humbling himself before his parents, hides himself in some corner, and is so frightened, that he dare not come in, and look the parent in the face; but this is a most dangerous case, especially if it lasts long.—In a word, it makes them run to physicians of no value. For what is more natural than that men who are frightened from God under apprehended danger, run to some other quarter, and that to their own ruin, Rev. vi. 16, "And said to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

2. What is to be thought of this slavish fear of God? To this I answer, there is something good in it, and something evil.

(1.) There is something good in it, namely, the fear of God's wrath for sin, which lies unpardoned on the guilty sinner or which the sinner may be inclined to commit: Jam. ii. 19, "Thou believest that there is one God, thou dost well." To cast off fear of the wrath of God, and the terrible punishments which he has annexed to sin, is a pitch of wickedness which but the very worst of

men arrive at. The fear of God's wrath against sin, and that duly influential too, is recommended to us by Christ himself, Luke xii. 5, "Fear him," says he, "which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell, yea, I say unto you, Fear him." It is also recommended by the example of the very best of saints, Job xxxi. 23, "For destruction from God was a terror unto me;" and says David, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments," Psalm cxix. 120. And the law of God is not fenced with terrors to be disregarded, but to awe men's spirits. But,

(2.) There is something evil in it, yea, much evil in it, if we consider,—The scrimpness and narrowness of its spring. Why should the fear of God be confined to spring up from his wrath against sin only or chiefly, since there are so many other perfections of God, which may give rise to the fear of him, which are disregarded by this means? It casts a veil of disrespect on his holiness, goodness, and hatred of sin, on his relations of Creator, Preserver, Father, Supreme Lord, and Governor of the world.—The horrible effects and tendency thereof, as it rises only from this spring, and overflows all the banks of godly fear. Fear of God, even of his wrath, is good, but the excess of it is very bad. Fire and water are both good and necessary, but very bad when the one burns man, and the other drowns him. Hence, since what is acceptable in the sight of God is perfect in parts, though not in degrees, is good in the manner as well as matter, this fear is not what he takes pleasure in, nay, it is displeasing to him, and is the sin of those who hear the gospel, whose fear ought to be extended according to the revelation made to them. And thus one may be displeasing to himself, to those about him, and to God also; and if they attain to no other fear of God, what they fear will probably come upon them. Nevertheless, this fear, kept within bounds, may, by the Spirit, be made the means to bring the sinner to the Lord in his covenant. For the fear of God's wrath is a good thing in itself, Rom. viii. 15; it serves to rouse the sinner out of his security, to make him sensible of his danger, and to seek for relief: Psalm ix. 20, "Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men." And therefore the law and its threatening, as a red flag, are displayed in the sight of secure sinners, that they may be roused to flee from the wrath to come.

To this there may be offered this objection, The fear of the Lord's wrath can make but an unsound closing with the Lord in his covenant. *ANSW.* That is very true, if there be nothing more. But fear of God's wrath not only may, but ordinarily, if not always does, begin the work which love crowns. Fear brings men to the gates of the city of refuge, and when they are there, love is kindled, and

makes them press forward. Fear brings the poor captive woman to confer with the conqueror about the match; but thereby love is kindled, and faith makes the match. It works, however, very differently at other times; for Satan and our corrupt hearts are ready to drive forward this fear of God's wrath to exceed all bounds; and no wonder, for when it has got over the boundaries, it makes fearful havoc in the soul's case, like a consuming fire, deadening all good motions towards God, and quickening evil ones, to the dishonour of God, and one's own torment; and no case out of hell is liker hell than this, both in respect of sin and misery. But when the Spirit of God has a saving work in view, he can easily make the spirit of bondage subservient to the spirit of adoption.

3. How should one manage in the case of a slavish fear of God's wrath? Here I answer, We had need to be well guided, for the losing or winning of the soul depends upon it. For your assistance I offer the following directions:—

(1.) Labour to clear the grounds of your fear of God's wrath, by a rational inquiry and discovery. There are, even of these fears, some that do really proceed from a bodily distemper vitiating the imagination, namely, from melancholy, and the like; and in this case, your trouble rises and falls according to the disposition of your bodies, but not according to the comfort or terror you receive from God's word, as it is in truly spiritual troubles. Thus it often comes on, and goes off, they know not how; shewing the first wound to be in their head, not in their conscience. Of this sort was the evil spirit Saul was troubled with, under which he got ease by music, not by his Bible. In this case, as well as others, it would be of use to consider the real grounds of fear from the Lord's word, and the consideration of one's own state or case, and so to turn it as much as may be into solid fears upon plain and evident reasons for it. This would be a step to the salvation of the soul. But, alas! it is sad to think of tormenting fear kept up on we know not what grounds, and which can produce no good; while in the meantime people will not be at pains to enquire into the real evidences of their soul's hazard, the sinfulness of their state, heart, and life. Ask, then, yourselves, what real ground there is from the Lord's word for this fear of yours.

(2.) Beware of casting off the fear, dread, and awe of the wrath of God against sin: Job xv. 4, "Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God." This is the issue of some people's fears, who, one way or other, get their necks from under the yoke, and grow more stupid, fearless, and profane, than even by the just judgment of God. It is true, that fear is not enough; but there is

something to be added, and yet not this fear cast away. If thou be brought into a state of sonship to God, the dread of God's wrath against sin will come along with you, though it will be no more slavish; as if a slave were made his master's son by adoption, he would still fear his anger, though not slavishly as before. But be one's state what it will, better be God's slave, fearing his wrath only, than the devil's freeman, casting off the fear of God altogether. There is less ill in the former than in the latter. Yea,

(3.) Cast not off the fear of that wrath, even its overtaking you, till such time as thy soul be brought away freely to Jesus Christ: Hos. v. 8, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence; in their affliction they will seek me early." Thou hast no warrant to cast it off sooner, for certainly wrath is pursuing thee, till thou be within the gates of the city of refuge; and to be without fear of that wrath that is still advancing on a person, is ruining. Indeed, as soon as thou hast sincerely come to Christ in his covenant, though the fear of wrath against sin is never to be laid by, yet then thou mayest and oughtest to cast off the fear of vindictive wrath overtaking thee: "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," Rom. viii 1.

(4.) Look not always on an absolute God, for surely that can produce no fear of God but a slavish one; but look on God in Christ as the trysting-place himself has set, for receiving the addresses of the guilty on a throne of grace: 2 Cor. v. 19, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." This is the way to repress and curb the horrible effects of slavish fear, to make love to God, faith, and hope, spring up in the soul, and so mould that fear of thine into filial fear and reverence. In a God out of Christ thou canst discern nothing but inflexible justice, and the utmost terror; and from his throne of unvailed majesty, hear nothing but terrible voices, thunders, and earthquakes. But in a God in Christ thou mayest behold bowels of mercy, and flowing compassions; and from the throne of grace hear the still small voice of mercy and peace, Isa. xxxv. 3, 4.

(5.) At what time soever you find the fear of God's wrath begin to choke the love of God in your hearts, or to drive you away from him in any way, check and curb that fear resolutely, let it not proceed, though you were in the time under the most atrocious sin: Psalm lxxv. 3, "Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou wilt purge them away." For then you are in the march between God's ground and the devil's; and there is a wind from hell, blowing up the fire of fear, that will consume you, if it be not quenched; for the separation of the soul from God, and its

going away from him, can in no case fail to be of a ruining nature : and the more that it increases with a person, his heart will be the more hardened, and he will be set the farther off from repentance.

(6.) Greedily embrace any gleam of hope from the Lord's own word, and hang by it. Ye should do like Benhadad's servants, and say, We have heard that the king of Israel is a merciful king, and we hope he will save us, 1 Kings xx. 31. The apostle calls hope the Christian's head-piece, 1 Thess. v. 8, not to be thrown away in a time of danger.

Lastly, Come away resolutely to the Lord Jesus, lay hold on him in the gospel-offer, and consent to the covenant : Heb. vii. 25, " He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Lay hold on the horns of this our altar, and you shall not die ; he will swallow up death in victory, Isa. xxv. 8. Flee into this city of refuge ; the avenger shall not overtake thee. Do as the lepers of Samaria did, reasoned with themselves, and went to the camp, where meat was to be found. Thou art like to sink in a sea of wrath, Jesus holds out his hand to draw thee ashore. Thou art afraid, perhaps, it is not to thee, it is vain to try ; but know that it is the hand that must take thee out, or thou art a gone man ; neglecting to take hold, thou art ruined ; otherwise, thou canst be but ruined.

4. When is the fear of the Lord holy, filial, and reverential, such as the Lord takes pleasure in ?—For your satisfaction in this inquiry, I would answer,

(1.) When the chief spring of it is not our own harm, but God's infinite excellence and perfection striking an awe upon the soul : Gen. xxviii. 17, " And Jacob was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place ! this is none other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven." On this account, God was called the fear of the holy patriarchs, while in the world, Gen. xxxi. 42. Thus ingenuous children fear their parents, not because of the ill they may do them, but because of that authority and superiority they have over them.—When the soul is awed into a profound reverence for God, by the consideration of his transcendent excellence in all things, this is a becoming or true filial fear.

(2.) When the offending of God is feared as the greatest evil. A graceless man may fear the punishment of swearing, but a righteous man feareth an oath, Eccl. ix. 2 ; the former may fear the threatening as the greatest evil, but the righteous feareth the commandment, and shall be rewarded, Prov. xiii. 13. What would the most of the world fear about sin, if they were secured against wrath ? Nothing. But the fearer of God, his great fear would remain notwithstanding, viz. the displeasing of his gracious Father.

(3.) When fear of his wrath is joined with a kindly affection and love to him, Psalm xc. 11—13. No man fears God who has not a dread of his anger, and the more grace, the more of this dread; so that a godly man will fear a frown of his face more than another a stroke of his hand. But withal this does not straiten the heart, but enlarge it in love to him; for these perfections of God that are the most proper objects of fear, are beautiful and lovely in the eyes of a saint; and therefore under the effects of his anger, they condemn themselves and justify God.

Lastly, When the fear of God draws the sinner to God, and makes him cling to him, Hos. iii. 5, "They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." As if he had said, They shall fear away to the Lord, like a good-natured child under fear of his parent running away to him, and catching hold of him; the language of which is, Any thing but separation from my holy Father. Holy fear also keeps the soul with the Lord, Jer. xxxii. 40, "I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me," and that upon the same principle.

5. How doth this fear work in the gracious soul? To this question I answer, Holy fear is an influential grace, diffusing its influence through the whole man, and therefore all religion is often comprehended under the name of the fear of God.

(1.) It makes God's verdict of things in his holy law the man's complete standard. In matters of faith, it causes him believe that God has said it; in matters of practice, to do or forbear, because God has bid or forbid it, though his own reason and all the world should contradict, Prov. iii. 7, "Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil." Holy fear awes the soul into implicit compliance with all that an incomprehensible God makes known in his word. So was Abraham brought to offer his son, and the fear of God carried him over all obstructions, Gen. xxii. 12.

(2.) It awes the soul into abstaining from such sins as there is no other awe-band against. There are some cases of temptation, wherein there is nothing from any creature to marr compliance with it, the way is quite clear on that part. But then the fear of God will be a sufficient restraint. Sometimes thou mayest have a fair occasion to wrong thy neighbour, and there is no fear of his knowing thou didst it; but if thou fearest God, thou darest not for thy soul do it, more than if all the world were looking on thee, Lev. xix. 14, "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but shalt fear thy God, I am the Lord." Sometimes occasions for sin occur, and men will bear thee out in the sin-

ful practice; but if thou fearest God, thou darest not do it, more than if all the world should conspire to hinder thee, Job xxxi. 21—23. Holy Providence lays such occasions before men for their trial.

(3.) It awes the soul into compliance with duties, even such as one has no other thing to drive him to, Eccl. xii. 13, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Holy fear reverenceth the authority of God, not only in abstaining from sin, but in complying with duties, Deut. vi. 13, "thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him." Those who have no inward principle to set them on their duty, have no fear of God before their eyes. But that principle will carry a man to duty, over the belly of opposition and contradiction, from Satan, an evil world, and the corrupt reasonings of one's own heart.

(4.) It makes one mainly fear the offence of God in the commission of sin, and omission of duties. The great care of a fearer of God is, lest he depart from God, Jer. xxxii. 40; holy fear and love are always joined, and therefore he that truly fears God, hates sin, and loathes it, because God hates it, Prov. viii. 13, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." He loves his duty because it is pleasing in the Lord's sight; whereas others hate sin for fear of wrath, and only love duty for the sake of the reward. It suffers not the soul to rest in any degree of holiness already attained, but spurs it on towards perfection: 2 Cor. vii. 1, "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." As Noah's fear made him not only begin the ark, but advance the work till it was perfected, so this holy fear still works against sin, till the soul be out of hazard; and that is not till death. Truce with sin, or indulging lusts, say either there is no fear of God in the heart, or that it is asleep; for in whatsoever measure one fears God, he will stand at a distance from sin, and seek the destruction of his corruptions.

Lastly, It carries the man to his duty, over the belly of the fear of man or any other creature, Matth. x. 28, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." If one be in hazard of being frightened from his duty, by the fear either of devils or of men, there is no antidote like the fear of God, 1 Pet. iii. 14, "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be ye troubled;" for as the light of the sun removes the light of a glow-worm, that shines only in the dark, so the fear of God banisheth other fear in the point of duty to the Lord.

I shall now add a few motives to influence the study of this filial fear; such as,

1. Infinite greatness and goodness meet together in him, and in him only, and therefore it is his due, Jer. x. 7, "Who would not fear thee, O king of nations, for to thee doth it appertain." His glorious and unspeakable perfections entitle him to it, and it cannot be denied him without the highest sacrilege. Nay, men must needs be strangers to him who do not fear him; for no sooner does the creature know him, but it must fear him; the sight of his greatness without his goodness, will produce a terror: but the sight of both, a holy reverence.

2. The relations requiring reverence of us meet together in him; and the truth is, we owe no reverence to any, but as they do in some sort, by the eminence they stand in, represent God whom we are to fear above all, and to fear in them. A reverential fear is due to our superiors, but God is the Supreme Being. We owe it to those who are superior to us in office and dignity, Rom. xiii. 7, "Render therefore unto all their due, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour." God is the supreme Governor of the world. Is the servant to reverence his master, the child his parents, the wife her husband? surely then God, who is the ancient of days, who stands to his people in such endearing relations, is to be feared by them, Psalm xlv. 11, "He is thy Lord, and worship thou him."

3. It is our wisdom to fear God, Psalm cxi. 10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." O sinner! wouldst thou be wise indeed? then fear God; it is the beginning of wisdom. A man never begins to be wise till the fear of God enters his heart. He goes on in folly and madness till he get this ballast to his soul; he is frisking about the pit's mouth, in hazard every moment of falling down, till the awe of God strikes his soul.—It is the chief point of wisdom; all the wisdom of the world is but folly in comparison of this. Wisdom teaches men to fear dangers, losses, and the like, but what avails it all, if men fear not the offending of God, and the loss of the soul.

4. It is in some sort the whole of religion, Job iv. 6, "Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope, and the uprightness of thy ways?" for it is the sum and substance of religious duties, which therefore are comprehended under that name in many parts of the Bible, and it has an universal influence over the whole of religion, drawing it all after it in the special parts thereof: for when it once gets place, it will bring in every known duty, and set the soul at a distance from all known sin.

5. It would free you of other fears that are tormenting, in whatever degree it gets place in your hearts. Fear of men and devils

is so entertained by many, that it becomes a tormenting passion, frightening them out of the way of duty to God. This is the first expedient to get rid of these. Allow the great God his own room in the heart, and let him be thy fear and thy dread, and so the creature will prove contemptible in comparison of him.

6. Consider the precious promises made to, and the benefits bestowed on those that fear the Lord. If thou be a fearer of God, go matters as they will, with thee it shall be well; Eccl. viii. 12, 13, "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him; but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he feareth not before God," It prolongs men's days, in so far as it keeps them in the way of holiness, Prov. x. 27; see a cluster of promises, Psalm xxv. 12—14; compare Prov. xix. 23, and Psalm xxxiv. 9, which you may read at your leisure.

Lastly, The want of the fear of God is an infallible sign of a wicked, graceless heart; it looses the reins to wickedness of heart and life, and so betrays men into ruin, Psalm xxxvi. 1—4, "These that fear not God now, will be made to fear him hereafter, when there shall be no escaping out of the hand of their terrible Judge.

Some may say, O! how shall I attain to this holy fear of God? With a view to promote this attainment, I would offer the following directions:—

1. Labour to know God, who and what he is, 1 Kings viii. 43, "That all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel." It is a benefit of the second covenant, to know the Lord, Hos. ii. 20, "I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord." God, to the most of the world, is like a prince in disguise amongst his subjects, they treat him rudely because they do not know him; an unknown God will not be feared. While ignorance of God reigns in the heart, there is no place for holy fear; for that will make men count darts as stubble, and laugh at the shaking of the spear.

2. Stir up in your hearts a desire to fear him; it is a token for good, when one is willing to entertain the fear of God, Neh. i. 11, "Thy servants who desire to fear thee." This desire hath the promise, and it will be accompanied with suitable endeavours after it. Many fight against the fear of God, that they may live at ease, and may be able to give themselves loose reins to their sinful practices; no wonder their hearts be hardened from it. And hence, if at any time they be taken with the fear of God, they do what they can to be freed of it, as they would pluck out arrows out of their flesh.

3. Take God for your God in Christ, and devote yourselves to him. The God we choose for our God, we will fear; Mic. iv. 5, "For all people will walk every one in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." And so, when men set up their idols of jealousy in the Lord's room, these get the fear that is due to God. So the worldling fears his clay god, his life is in its smiles, and its frowns are his death. But take the Lord for your God, I say, in Christ; for no otherwise he offers himself to us in the covenant, 2 Cor. v. 19. This is the way to holy fear: For, (1.) It is a promised benefit of the covenant, Jer. xxxii. 40, "I will put my fear in their hearts." Whoever comes into God's covenant of grace, the fear of God is, by the holy Spirit, stamped upon their hearts, whereby it may be known that they belong to God as children; and they devote themselves, on the other hand, to his fear, Psalm cxix. 38. They are his servants, devoted to his fear. They give themselves to it, and make it their great study. (2.) This covenant is a covenant of peace and friendship betwixt God and the guilty creature, through a Mediator, Heb. xii. 22—24, so that thy state is changed, the moment that thou comest into the covenant, from enmity to peace with God, Eph. ii. 19, they become fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of the household of God. This happily joins love and dread of God together, producing holy fear and reverence of God; whereas while God is apprehended certainly as an enemy to us, fear him we may with slavish fear, but not with holy fear, since we cannot love him.

4. Be much in the exercise of repentance. Sorrowing after a godly sort for sin, as it dishonours God, is offensive to his majesty, separates the sinner from God, and exposes the soul to his anger, is the ready way to produce holy fear for the time to come, 2 Cor. vii. 11. Yea, what fear, says Paul, namely as the effect of sorrow after a godly sort; they that are burnt dread the fire; and they that feel the bitterness of sin, will fear God, and stand at a distance from it. The looking into our frightful acts of sin, will awe our hearts with a dread of the offended Majesty, and make us fall down, saying, "Forgive us our debts."

5. Pray for it earnestly as a promised benefit of the covenant, and join thereto a faith of particular confidence: Matth. xxi. 22, "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask, believing ye shall receive them." Beg of God that he would manifest himself to you, so as ye may be filled with holy fear of him. Ye may read and hear much of God, and little impressions be made on your spirits by it at all; but when the Lord discovers himself to the sinner, his own glorious light will so represent him as the soul cannot choose but

both love and fear him : Job xlii. 5, 6, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee : Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Lastly, Draw together the scattered affections and faculties of the soul, and set them on the Lord : Psalm lxxxvi. 11, "Unite my heart to fear thy name." As the scattered rays of the sun will not burn, till they be collected by a burning glass ; so the heart, walking at random, will not be filled with holy fear. Withdraw your hearts from pursuing vanities, and gadding after idols, and labour to see the Lord in those glasses where we may perceive how he is to be feared.

I would urge you to look to him particularly, (1.) In the glass of his word. See how he is there represented as one worthy to be feared : Psalm lxxxix. 7, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him." O with what awful solemnity may we hear him there speaking of himself, his saints speaking of him and to him ! and the angels also, with their veiled faces, crying, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Had we eyes to discern his voice in his word, every page would fill our hearts with profoundest reverence. See him, (1.) In the shining holiness of his commandments, perfectly pure from all earthly dross ; and when thus seen, how can the sinful creature not fear him ! Exod. xv. 11, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods ? who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders ?" He appears there to be all light, and that in him there is no darkness at all. The holy, spiritual, and extensive law, may fill our hearts with the dread of the Lawgiver, of whose nature it is a transcript. See him, (2.) In the amazing sovereignty of his threatenings. This filled good Josiah with fear, 2 Kings xxii. 19 ; and Hab. iii. 16. Behold thence flames of wrath flashing out on the faces of impenitent sinners. All the threats of men own death to be their utmost ; and, O ! how will a threat of death fright mortals ! But the Lord's threatenings go beyond death, and carry the matter to an endless eternity. See him, (3.) In the unspeakable riches of his gospel-promises displayed in the word. His terrors are no more severe on the one hand, than his promised encouragements are great on the other. If hell be in the one scale, heaven is in the other. Who would not, therefore, fear him ?—Look to him,

2. In Christ, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person. See God in Christ, and there see an object of fear and love in one. If ye would be stirred up to fear God, look to Mount Calvary, and there behold Christ groaning, and dying on a

cross for the sins of an elect world, and you will see three awful sights. (1.) The severity of God's justice against sin, not sparing his own Son, Rom. viii. 32. Many terrible instances have there been of this, in the deluge, and the like. But what is the tumbling down of sinful angels into the pit, the deluging of a world, the burning of Sodom,—to the Son of God dying on a cross, and bearing his Father's wrath? O! if this was done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? (2.) The channel of mercy and grace, in which they flow to guilty sinners. It is by the Mediator's stripes we must be healed; the sinner's life comes in the way of Christ's death; no mercy, no grace, but through the wounds of a Redeemer. There was love from eternity in the breast of God towards an elect world, but Justice stood in the way of Mercy's getting through to the criminals; a way was then made by the blood of the Son of God. (3.) The price of pardon, 1 Pet. i. 19, the precious blood of Christ; no pardon, but what is the price of blood, and that blood of infinite value; that is the ransom which had to be given for the captives, or they could never have been set free. O! who can see these, and not fear this awful and tremendous majesty thus appearing!—Look at him,

3. In the glass of his adorable perfections. How small a portion do we know of him! but there is nothing which we have manifested to us concerning him, but may contribute to this holy fear. On the one hand, consider his infinite power, whereby he can do all, and his universal dominion, whereby he may do what he will: Job xxxvii. 23, 24, and xxv. 2; his justice, holiness, omniscience, omnipresence, infinite varacity and truth, whereby all he has said shall be made good to a tittle. Who, then, can but fear him?—Consider, on the other hand, his mercy, his love, grace, and goodness, which are so unbounded and unspeakable! Who, then, can but fear him?—Look at him,

Lastly, In the glass of his works. Look to his works of creation, Psalm xix. 1. Does not the earth and heaven, with all their glorious furniture, cry aloud to us to fear this God. Look to his works of providence: Jer. v. 22, "Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass?" His managing of the world challenges our fearing of him. (1.) His mercies with which we are loaded, call us to reverence him as our great benefactor, Jer. v. 24. (2.) His judgments; his judgments, in particular, against ourselves, Luke xxiii. 40; and against others, which we may every where discern: Psalm cxix. 118.—120, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments."

Every stroke laid on in this world is fitted to create a fear of him in our hearts. His general judgment, that is to come, the serious view of which must needs strike sinners with fear: 1 Pet. i. 17, "And if ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." See also Eccl. xii. 13, 14.

II. I would now earnestly exhort you to "hope in the Lord for his mercy." Entertain a holy hope in God in all cases. For clearing of this, we must know, that hope in general is an inclination to, and expectation of good possible to be had, but not without some difficulty. As hope is conversant about divine things, or the mercy of God, it is of two sorts, holy hope, and presumptuous hope; the one well-grounded, the other ill-grounded. Here, therefore, also, some inquiries may be proposed, which we shall endeavour to answer; such as,

I. What is the true hope for mercy, which the Lord takes pleasure in? ANSW. It is a certain expectation of attaining the mercy, which faith believes, grounded on God's grace and faithfulness.

(1.) For the kind of it; it is an expectation of mercy to be attained. Hope looks always on its object as future: Rom. viii. 24, "For we are saved by hope. But hope that is seen is not hope. for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" This is a main difference between faith and hope, faith looking always on its object as present in the promise, for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." And hope is a certain expectation of it, not so much in itself, (for true hope may be attended with much doubting, Lam. iii. 18), as in the event, for it will never fail the party that has it, nor put him to shame by disappointment, for it hangs on faith: Rom. v. 5, "And hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost given unto us.

(2.) For the object of this hope; it is mercy which is hoped for. Now, there is a threefold mercy hope looks for. (1.) The mercy of eternal life itself: Jude 21, "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." This is the chief thing the believer is to hope for, and he may, with the utmost certainty and confidence, expect it, 2 Tim. i. 12. This hope, even the hope of salvation, the apostle will have the Christian to put on as an helmet, 1 Thess. v. 8, and even to stretch forth his hope over death and the grave. (2.) The mercy necessary to bring us to eternal life; as perseverance therein to the end, notwithstanding all the difficulties that are in the way: Rom. viii. 38, "And we know, that all things work together for good to them that

love God, and are the called according to his purpose." Though the grace of God in him be like a spark of fire in an ocean, he ought firmly to hope, that the same heavenly breath that kindled it will keep it in to the end. (3.) The mercy of all other good things, so far as God shall see the bestowing them on us for his own glory, and our good. There are many particular things good in themselves, which we know not whether they will be so to us or not; for example, deliverance from such a trouble; therefore it is not to be absolutely hoped for, but under this qualification, that God sees it to be good for us.

(3.) For the antecedent of this hope: that is faith, which is the evidence of things hoped for, Heb. xi. 1. There can be no true hope without faith; where faith does not open the door, hope cannot enter. Faith embraces the mercy in the promise of God, and hope waits for the accomplishment of the promise; so that one cannot truly hope for that which God has not promised, neither can one hope for the accomplishment of that promise which faith does not believe.

Lastly, The ground of this hope is God's free grace in Christ and his faithfulness: 1 Pet. i. 13, "Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, and hope to the end, for the grace which is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The mercy promised is quite above the sinner's deserving; but he considers the fulness and freedom of God's grace, and withal how unalterable he is to his word, and therefore hopes upon having that word made good to him.

A *second* question is, How may the hope of mercy be known to be presumptuous? *ANSW.* Presumption is the soul-ruining plague, whereby a person assumes to himself what God has, by no testimony of his word, declared to be his, and which alters the beautiful order of mercy established by God, joining together what God has separated, and separated what he has joined.—Upon this I observe,

(1.) That hope is presumptuous, which is not founded on the Lord's word. Such hope is brisk in the dark, but loses all its lustre by the light of God's word brought in upon it: John iii. 20, 21, "For every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd; but he that doth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." God's word is a friend unto his grace, but an enemy to delusion; it is the touch-stone that discovers the true metal and also the counterfeit. You hope for salvation, in what word of God is your hope founded? Does the Lord's word, searchingly applied, strengthen or weaken your hope? Say you, The general invitations are the ground of my hope? These may be grounds of hope that ye may get eternal life, if you will take God's

way : but do you not hope that you shall get it, without a due consideration of this ? Now, these can never be the grounds of a solid hope, for all that hear the gospel are comprehended in these, as well as you.

(2.) That hope is presumptuous, which overlooks and neglects the means appointed by God for the attaining of his mercy unto eternal life : 1 Pet. i. 3, “ We are begotten by God to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” The way thou art to be happy for ever is, that thou be united to Christ by a true faith, that thou be a new creature, that thou lead a holy life. Dost thou neglect these, and yet hope all will be well ? Thy hope is presumption, and will ruin thee, Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

Lastly, That hope is presumptuous, which is built without erasing the old foundation, Luke xxxiv. 48. Many have hopes of heaven which grow up with themselves, they were never shaken out of themselves, nor had the naughtiness of their hopes discovered, and so never were led to Jesus Christ, to build on him by uniting with him.

A *third* enquiry may be, How may the hope of mercy be known to be true hope, which God will take pleasure in ? In answer to this, it may be noticed,

1. True hope is founded on the free grace of God in Christ, 1 Pet. i. 13, quoted already. The scriptures are written for our learning that we, through patience and comfort of them, might have hope, Rom. xv. 4. Hope is not built upon our good dispositions, good works, external and common benefits which we enjoy, for these are but a sandy foundation, unable to bear this weight ; but the anchor of hope is cast so as to fix upon the immoveable ground aforesaid, Heb. vi. 19. It is true holiness discerned by us in ourselves, as an evidence, that doth help us to a firm hope ; but the stress of hope lies not upon it as a ground-work.

2. True hope is a lively principle of sanctification, 1 John iii. 3, “ And every man that hath this hope purifieth himself, even as he (God) is pure ;” and therefore it is called a lively hope, 1 Pet. i. 3. As a spring by degrees does work out the mud that is in a well, so hope of mercy does work out corruption ; as the prospect of the marriage-day makes the parties to be taken up in preparing for the marriage, so the true hope of eternal life puts one to be preparing for it, Rev. xix. 7. That hope which suffers sin to lie untouched in heart and life, that does not put on a person to mortify sin, is a dead hope ; and true hope carries to universal holiness, even as he is pure.

Lastly, It makes one diligent in the use of means appointed by

God, Heb. x. 23—25; but withal not to rest on the means, but on the Lord. To hope, without using the means appointed and required, is presumption; to rest on the means is a spice of atheism. But that is true hope, which makes the soul delight in all duties and ordinances, to leave no appointed means unessayed, in order to attaining the blessed end; and then, when all is done, to place all confidence of success on the Lord.

With a view to press this holy, lively hope, I would mention the following motives.

1. It is not only our comfortable attainment, but a duty required of all that believe, 1 Pet. i. 13, "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end." And therefore the apostle Paul presseth diligence in seeking after it in full measure, Heb. vi. 11, "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end;" and he prays for it, Rom. xv. 13, "Now, the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost." It is a duty that is in a special manner comfortable.

2. It is most necessary; hope is as necessary to a Christian, as a head-piece to a soldier in a battle, 1 Thess. v. 8; as necessary as an anchor to a ship, Heb. vi. 19; yea, so necessary, that we are said to be saved by it, Rom. viii. 24.

Lastly, It is a great friend to holiness, and perseverance in the ways of God, 1 Cor. xv. 58.—As it honours God's grace and goodness, so it strengthens the soul, and animates it to all duties, to fight against corruption and temptation, and to pursue holiness.

III. Let all be exhorted to entertain a holy fear of God, together with a holy hope for his mercy. Mix these, and balance your souls with them, whatever your case be. While you are going through the world, keep your course in the middle between the two rocks of presumption and despair.—For this purpose,

1. Beware of desponding or despairing of the mercy of God in Christ. There is an allowable despair, which all ought to entertain, in order to their getting their hope fixed on God, viz. a quitting of all hope in our own sufficiency, or ability to make ourselves happy by ourselves, or that ever we shall be well, while we continue in a state of black nature. But what we call despair is a giving over all hope in God, which is a horrible sin. There is a threefold despair you should beware of, as ye would not ruin your own souls.

(1.) A sensual despair, which ariseth from an excessive love of the profits and pleasures of this world, with a secure contempt of spiritual and external good in another world, 1 Cor. xv. 32, "Let

us," say they, "eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Alas! how many are there plagued with this? their souls are festered with the desire of present good, which is their all, and, having no hope of better after this life, they give the swing to their lusts after these.

(2.) A sluggish despair, Prov. xxii. 13, "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." Their sloth musters up difficulties to them, forming some that are groundless, imaginary ones, and aggravating real ones, so that they conclude beforehand that they will not be better, their endeavours will not succeed, and therefore they lie still, and will do nothing for their own help; this ruins many.

(3.) A sorrowful despair, which ariseth from strong fears, which raise such a mist in the soul, that grounds of hope in its case, are hid out of sight, and they are in their soul's case as in Acts xxvii. 20, neither sun nor stars for many days appear, no small tempest lies on them, and all hope that they shall be saved is then taken away. There are different degrees of this; sometimes it is silent and sullen, making little noise, but is smothered in one's breast like a burning fire. In such a case, one would do well to give it a vent before God, his servants, or godly experienced Christians, lest it ruin them. This is the way David took when in such a case, Psalm xxxix. 2.—4, "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace even from good, and my sorrow was stirred; my heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned, then spake I with my tongue, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am." Sometimes it is raging as in Judas, who, under horror laid upon his sin, did miserably end his life.

Beware of all these, and resist the beginnings of despair, and if it has fastened on any soul, let them strive to quench it, as they would do a fire. The former makes way for the latter, and altogether makes way for remediless despair in hell. I shall only say two things of it.—(1.) It is defiling, and makes the soul most loathsome before God; for it conceives most basely and abominably of God and Christ, directly opposing itself to the grand design of the gospel; it blasphemes the power of God, and the efficacy of his Son's blood and Spirit. (2.) It is ruining, for it makes the sinner flee from God, and cast away the means of recovery, and so ensures their destruction; besides that it often drives the sinner to put an end to his torment here, by leaping into endless torments before the time, as in the case of Judas. And while we see how Satan is ready to take advantage, we had need to take heed.

2. Beware of presumption. Take heed that ye do not flee from

the one rock to dash on the other. Indeed, despair is tormenting, while presumption is easy. Nevertheless, though none of them is good, yet a person presuming is ordinarily in greater hazard than one despairing; for the presumptuous sees not his case as the other does: the one is well pleased with his damnable condition, the other is weary of his, and wishes to have it changed; so that many more perish by the one than by the other.

To conclude: Remember, on the one hand, God is a holy jealous God, who cannot away with sin, or a state of sin, but the fire of his jealousy burns against it. On the other hand, remember that the blood of Christ takes away all guilt, his Spirit overcomes the most hopeless case, and his mercy reaches wide for every condition. Fear him, ye that hope in him; hope in his mercy, ye that fear him; for "the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." Amen.

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JESUS VICTORIOUS OVER DEATH.\*

SERMON IX.

ISAIAH XXV. 8,

*He will swallow up death in victory.*

SUCH as are desirous duly to manage this solemn communion occasion, will have in their view the other world. We are all on a journey towards it, and, if suitably exercised, will improve this occasion to lay down our measures for eternity. Betwixt us and that other world, lies the great gulf of death; through it are two passages; one deep and devouring, where the sinner passes alone; there the waters flow with all that force and strength which they acquired by the breach of the covenant of works. By this passage, sinners are thrown out into the land of utter darkness and misery. The text shews us the other passage, which is shallow and safe, where the sinner passes on at the Mediator's back, the waters being dried up by the soles of his feet, whose passeth this way, enters into Immanuel's land, the land of life; for "he will swallow up death in victory."

In these words, we have a prophecy of the happy success of a battle fought by the Mediator on account of elect sinners. The suc-

\* Delivered Saturday, October 4, 1718.