

more and more weaken; surely, therefore, it is an unreasonable thing for a man to be discouraged at the sight of his own weakness: wherefore, lift up your hands, oh ye saints, and be ye lift up, oh ye drooping souls. We are commanded, ye may read our commission, Isa. xxxv. 3, "to strengthen the weak hands, and to confirm the feeble knees, and to say to them that are of a fearful spirit, Be strong, fear not." And if it be our duty to say and speak thus, then it is your duty to encourage yourself in the Lord, and to say to yourself, Be strong, oh my soul, and fear not. Be thankful for your little, and in due time you shall have much: labour also for much, yet be content with little, even with little grace, if God will have it so.

And thus I have done with the second instance.

SERMON VI.

A LIFTING UP IN CASE OF MISCARRIAGE OF DUTIES.

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me, &c."—Psalm xlii. 11.

III. Sometimes the discouragements of the saints and people of God, are drawn from their duties, the failings and successlessness of their duties.

For they reason thus: through the Lord's grace and mercy, I have been kept from great and gross sins, yet if the Lord loved me indeed, he would draw my heart near unto himself; but when I come to prayer, or duty, I find so much deadness, dulness and awkness of heart and spirit, that I fear the Lord will never accept such an one as I am, nor such duties as mine are: when I go to prayer, either prayer is altogether absent from me, or I have no life therein; if I go to hear the word, I am not attentive, but filled with distractions; and whatever duty I perform, I want life and love in it. Oh, my heart is like a rock or stone, and therefore I fear the Lord will not accept my duty, and the rather, be-

cause I find, that I have been long at prayer, and I am never the better, the Lord hears me not, the Lord regards me not; and have I not just reason and cause to be discouraged now?

No: here is reason, indeed, why you should be afflicted, but no reason yet, why you should be discouraged. I confess, indeed, here is cause and reason of grief and of affliction; for take prayer, to instance only in that, and it is that act and work of the soul, whereby a man doth converse with God; God conversing with man, and man with God. And is it not a sore affliction, for a poor creature to be shut out of God's door, such a friend as God is? Oh, saith Chrysostom, it is more bitter than death, to be spoiled of prayer: and hereupon, as he observes, Daniel chose rather to run the hazard of his life, than to lose his prayer. Prayer is the soul's weapon, and is it not a grief to want a weapon in our spiritual warfare? Prayer is the soul's ornament, the excellent garment of a christian; and is it not an affliction, to be without this garment, and to be found naked? Prayer is the christian's element; and as the fish lives in the water as in its element, and dies when it is out, so a christian lives in prayer as in his element, and his heart dies when he is out of it. Prayer is the soul's provisioner, fetcheth in provision for the soul and for all its graces: the old bird, the dam, goes abroad and fetcheth in meat for the young ones, and they lie in the nest gaping, to receive the meat upon its return; and if the old one be killed abroad, the young ones will die presently at home. So here, prayer goes abroad, and fetcheth in provision for all our graces, and they all lie gaping, to receive this provision from the mouth of prayer; if this be killed, how can those other graces live? The truth is, the more sweetness a christian finds in any work, the greater is his affliction, if he want that work; now what abundance of sweetness, doth a gracious soul find in prayer? therefore when a man is narrowed, or shut up in prayer, it cannot but be a great affliction to him. But though it be a matter of great affliction, yet a good man hath no reason to be quite discouraged, yea, though he meet with many failings therein, and cannot pray as he would, nor perform duty as he should.

How may that appear?

Thus—

Every godly, gracious man, is in covenant with God by Jesus Christ; and that covenant is a covenant of grace, which is the great charter, the magna-charta of all his spiritual privileges and immunities. Now in this great charter, the Lord doth proclaim this, that sincerity shall go for perfection; that a little done for God, in the time of temptation, shall be counted much. In this great charter, the Lord doth proclaim unto all his people, that he doth rather regard the bent of the heart, than the enlargement of the heart; that he doth rather regard the will to do, than the doing. In this great charter, the covenant of free grace, the Lord proclaims unto all his people, that if they do fail in prayer, and other duties, for I speak not of prayer only, though I instance in that, he will not cast them off, but he will rather be moved to pity them; for the covenant that the Lord makes with his people, is as the covenant that a man makes with his wife, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever," Hosea 2, saith the Lord. Now a man will not put away his wife for every failing, neither will the Lord put away his people, nor cast them off, because he is betrothed to them, though they do fail in duties. Again: in this great charter and covenant of grace, the Lord doth proclaim unto all his children, that what they want in performance, he will make up in indulgence. He proclaims this unto them, that he will require no more than he gives; he will give what he requires, and he will accept what he gives. Now, therefore, am I in that covenant of grace? and are there many failings in all my duties? yet if this be true, that the Lord is more moved by my failings to pity me, than to cast me off, then I have no reason for to be discouraged. And thus it is with every child of God; he is in this covenant of grace, and so the privileges, and immunities of all this great charter, belong unto him.

Though there be many failings in a godly man's duty, yet so long as it is a duty, there is somewhat of Christ therein, there is somewhat of God therein. Now God will not cast away his own, because it is mixt with ours, but he will rather pardon ours, and accept ours, because it is mixt with his. The husbandman doth not cast away his wheat, because it is mixt with chaff; he brings it into his barn, and there is a time, when he will separate the chaff from the

wheat; but he doth not cast away the corn because it is mixt with chaff, yet this grain of wheat hath nothing of the image of the husbandman upon it: but there is never a duty of a godly man, but hath somewhat of the image of Christ upon it, and therefore, I say, he will not cast away his, because it is mixt with ours, but he will rather pardon and accept of ours, because it is mixt with his.*

If our acceptance of duty do not come in by the door of performance, but by another door, and that door is Christ, then a godly man hath no reason to be discouraged, though there be many failings in his performance. Now, all our acceptance of duty comes in by Christ, because our sacrifices are mingled with Christ's perfumes, Rev. viii. 4, "And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand." Our prayers go unto God the Father, through the hand of Christ; did our prayers go immediately out of our own hands into the Father's hand, we might have cause to fear, but it goes by the hand of Christ; Christ takes it, and hath it into the presence of God the Father. As it is with your soul, or your body when you die; though your body be crooked or deformed, and your soul defiled, yet when you die, Christ meets your soul, and invests it with glory, and so brings it into the presence of God the Father; so it is with your duty, your duty, it may be, deformed, defiled, or a crooked duty, but Christ meets your duty, and he clothes it with his glory, and so hath it into the presence of God the Father. And thus it is with all the saints and people of God; surely, then, though they have cause to be afflicted, by reason of their failing in duty, yet they have no reason at all why they should be discouraged.

But I have no parts or gifts in duties, therefore I am thus discouraged: some there are, that have great abilities in duty, they pray, and can pray with great abilities, they go

* *Quamvis odibilis, detestabilis, et execrabilis fit causa mea in ore meo, nihilominus in ore tuo benedicto, in ore tuo sacratissimo et in labiis tuis, quibus tanta gratia diffusa est, est favorabilis.* Parisiens. de Rhetor. Div. cap. lxi.

Est et alia firmitas et confirmatio meæ partis quod tu ipse advocatus est et propitiatio qui es et iudex meus et propter hoc non est possibile ut patiaris causam meam periclitari in manibus meis. Apud homines enim non est possibile ut advocatus fidelis et justus permittat periclitari causam cujus patrocinium suscepit. Ibid.

to a sermon, and can bring away every word, and have a great gift in conference; but as for me, I am a poor creature, who want all these gifts; I have no utterance in conference, I have no abilities in prayer, I have no memory for a sermon, my memory is even as a sieve, good things run out presently; I have no gifts at all, a poor seaman, or tradesman I am, that have no parts, no gifts in duty; and have not I just cause and reason now to be discouraged?

No: for whosoever you are that make this objection, do ye not know, that the glory of the second temple was greater than the first? Solomon, you know, built a great house, and it was a glorious building, much gold and silver in it: the second temple was not so full of gold and silver, and yet it is said of the second temple, that the glory of it was beyond the glory of the first: why? this reason is given, because "The desire of all nations should come into it." That is, Christ, who is indeed "the desire of all nations;" *de facto*, gold and silver is the desire of all nations; but, *de jure*, and by right, the Lord Jesus Christ is "the desire of all nations;" and because that Christ, "the desire of all nations," should come into the second temple, therefore the glory of it was beyond the glory of the first. Now thy soul is the temple of the Holy Ghost; it may be, thou hast not so much gold and silver, not such golden parts and golden gifts as another hath, but if "the desire of all nations," the Lord Jesus Christ, be come into thy soul, hast thou any reason to complain? Thus it is with every child of God, though he hath not those parts and gifts that another hath, yet the Lord Jesus, "the desire of all nations," is come into his temple, into his soul; and therefore, he hath no reason to be discouraged.

If the want of parts and gifts be better for you, then you have no reason to be discouraged for the want of them. Now, you know, that it is better for a man that hath but a little stock, to have a little farm, than to have a great farm and a little stock; a man that hath but a little stock, and a great farm, may for the present brave it out, and converse with company that are in estate beyond him, but at last he will decay and break: better that a man, who hath but a little stock, should have a little farm suitable to his stock. Now God our Father sees, that thou hast a little good, there are some good

things found in thee ; but these good things, this little stock, is not big enough for a great farm of parts and gifts, and because the Lord sees that thy stock of grace is not great enough for such a great farm of parts, therefore, in design of mercy, he hath thus ordered it, that thou shouldest have a less farm of gifts.

If our parts and gifts do not commend our services and duties unto God, then have you no reason to be discouraged for the want of them. Now, so it is, that they do not commend us, nor our services unto God. When you have good meat in a dish, possibly you will lay flowers upon it, cut oranges and lemons, and lay upon the side of the dish ; but a wise man knows, that the meat is never the better for those flowers, or for the sugar that lies on the side of the platter ; a wise man knows, that if those were wanting, the meat were never the worse. Beloved, God our Father is of infinite wisdom, these parts and gifts are flowers indeed, and they help to cook out a duty, and to make it more acceptable to men, but the Lord, who is wisdom, knows, that the duty is never the better ; and he knows, that when these flowers are wanting, the duty is never the worse. " All flesh is grass, and the flower thereof, and it fades away." Parts and gifts are but flesh, and our wise God knows the meat is never the worse, when these flowers are wanting. Yea, if I had all parts and all gifts, that I were able to preach and speak like an angel, and that I were able to cast out devils, yet notwithstanding, if I have not Christ and grace within, my parts and gifts will but sink me deeper into hell. Two men, suppose, do fall into the river, one man hath bags of gold about him, and the other none ; he that hath none, makes a shift to swim, and get away ; but he that hath the bags of gold about him, sinks by his gold, and he cries out as he sinks, Oh, take away these bags of gold, this gold undoeth me, this gold sinks me ! So these golden parts and golden gifts, if a man hath not grace withal, hath not Christ within, shall but sink him deeper into hell. These commend us not, I say, nor our service unto God, dor doth the want thereof discommend us unto him.

You say and complain, that you have no parts or gifts ; but I pray, hath not the Lord recompensed the want of them some other way unto you ? Philosophy saith of nature, *Ubi*

deficit in uno, abundat in altero ; Where nature is deficient in one thing, it is abundant in another thing. If a man wants his eyes, he hears the better : and the less he sees, the more he remembers : where nature is wanting in one thing, it is exceeding in another. And as nature, so the God of nature and the God of grace too : it may be you do want a head-memory, but hath not the Lord given you a heart-memory, to remember the sermon as you have occasion to use it ? Some have parts and gifts, and they want plainness and openness of heart for God ; some again have a plain heart, and they want gifts and parts. It is said of Jacob, that " he prevailed with God in prayer, and he was a plain man." Mark how the Holy Ghost doth put these two together, that that man should be the prevailing man with God in prayer who was the plain man : and that man that was the plain man, should be the prevailing man in prayer ; a plain man, but prevailing with God. Well, then, though thou art but a plain person, and hast no parts or gifts as others have, yet thou mayest prevail with God, and thy name may be called Israel, prevailing with the Lord. When God denies one, he gives another mercy. Thus it is with all the saints and people of God, and a godly, gracious man may say thus, Well, though I have not great parts and gifts, yet, blessed be the Lord, I have a plain and an open heart for God : and if the Lord hath done thus much for you, and recompensed you in another way, have you any reason then to be discouraged for want of parts and gifts in duties ? Certainly you have not.

Oh, but yet, this is not the matter of my discouragement, I am not discouraged for want of parts or gifts in duty, but I want the grace and the holiness of duty, I want the grace and the holiness of prayer : I go to prayer and duty, but the Lord knows, with a dull, dead and a straitened heart ; I think, verily, that there is not a more rocky, stony, flinty heart in the world than mine ; I offer myself to God sometimes in prayer, but when I come at it, I am not able to speak a word, my heart is so shut up and straitened ; and have I not cause and reason now to be discouraged ? Is not this matter of just discouragement ?

No : for pearls sometimes grow upon rocks ; and possibly

there may be some pearl of grace growing upon that rocky heart of thine. Yet further—

You say, that you are straitened in duty; but are you satisfied and contented with that condition? or if you had enlargement in duty, would you be satisfied therein? No, I am not satisfied with my straitened condition; and the truth is, though I had never so much enlargement, enlargement alone would never satisfy my soul; but if I had more affection, I would give it up to God, yea, if I had a sea of affection, I would pour it out before the Lord, and if I had prayers, and tears, and enlargements, like the sands upon the sea-shore, I would offer them all up to God. Well, and is not this to be enlarged towards God? A poor man that hath never a penny in his purse, sees another, or many others in want, but he hath nothing to relieve them with; yet, saith he, if I had wherewithal, I would relieve all these men, I would clothe them all, I would feed them all: is not this man's heart enlarged now towards the poor, though he hath not a penny to help them with? So in your case; for the present, thy affection is poor, and thou art straitened, but thou sayest, if I had a sea of affection, I would give it all to God; and if I had prayers like the sand upon the sea-shore, I would give them all to God; is not this to be enlarged towards God? God doth give by denying sometimes, and thus he hath dealt by you.

If your condition herein be no other than the conditions of the saints and people of God, then you have no just cause and reason to be discouraged in this respect. Now in Psalm lxxvii. 3, 4, the Psalmist saith there, "I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed: Lord, (saith he at the 4th verse,) thou holdest mine eyes watching, I am so troubled that I cannot speak." I cannot pray; I am so troubled that I cannot speak. A mother hears her child cry, and saith she, now doth this child cry for the breast, yet the child speaks not a word, but the mother knows the meaning of the child's crying, and the language of it: and doth a mother know the language of her child's crying, and doth not God our Father know the language of his child's cry, that cannot speak unto him? The beggar that follows you for an alms, is a beggar,

though he be dumb and cannot speak ; and you say, Send him away with some gift, for he follows us. So here, though your heart be shut up in duty, yet if you can follow God, he looks upon you as a beggar at the throne of grace, and in due time he will serve you, and send you away with comfort.

You would fain have enlargements, and workings of the heart in prayer : but what would you do with those enlargements ? Would you shew your enlargements, your excellencies, your graces to God, when you come to duty ? A beggar you know, if he have any excellent thing, as gold, or silver, he hides that, and he shews his wounds, he shews his sores : if you mean to give him a penny, and ask him if he have any money, I have twopence, or threepence Sir, saith he, or a penny ; but he hides his excellency, and he lays open his wounds ; and if he can but open his sores before you, he thinks he doth beg effectually. Beloved, we all go to God in prayer, *in forma pauperis*, every man sues in this court in the form of a beggar. If thy heart then be straitened, if thy heart be hard, and if thy spirit be dull in duty, you may go to God and open your sores, and wounds before him ; you may go and say, Lord, what an hard heart have I, and what a dull and straitened spirit have I ! This rather becomes a beggar, and you must come as a beggar, when you come before him ; yet you must know that neither your poverty, nor your riches ; neither your straitenings in duty, nor your enlargements, do make any alteration in the mind and will of God. Indeed, God seems to deal by us sometimes as a father doth by his little child ; he holds a piece of gold or silver in his hand, and saith the father, if you can get this out of my hand you shall have it ; so the child strives and pulls, and works, and then the father opens his hand by degrees, first one finger, then another, and then another, and at last his whole hand ; and the child thinks he hath got the money by his own strength and labour, whereas the father intended to give it him, but in that way. So here, God intends to give us a mercy in the way of prayer, and he sets us a praying for it, and we think we obtain it by the strength of our own prayer, as if we did move, and change the will of God by our duty ; but all the enlargements in the world, make no alteration in the will of God ; he is unmoveable, unchangea-

ble, and the same for ever ; but he will give out his blessings in a way of prayer, therefore it is our duty to pray, yet we must not be discouraged though we cannot pray as we would.*

It is usual with the Lord to restrain prayer, before he doth give enlargement, and to make a man speechless before he openeth his mouth : Luke i. we read so of Zacharias, a gracious and holy man, at the 67th verse, it is said of him, that “ he was filled with the Holy Ghost and he prophesied.” Yet if you look into the former part of the chapter, you shall find, that before he was thus filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, he was dumb, and stricken with dumbness, verse 20th, saith the angel to him, “ And behold thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak :” so he continued dumb, before he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied. It may be, here is a further mystery in this, for Zacharias was a levitical and a legal priest ; and our Lord and Saviour Christ being to come into the world immediately, who knows but that Zacharias was thus stricken with dumbness, to shew, that the Lord will silence all our legal performances, before he will enlarge us with the enlargements of Christ, and of the gospel ? This is God’s usual way with his people. It may be thou hast gone on in duty in a legal manner, and now thou art stricken with dumbness ; yet if God have a design to discover more of Christ to thy soul : and to enlarge thee with the enlargements of the Holy Ghost, have you any cause to complain ?*

As for the dulness of your heart in duty and prayer, though dulness be an ill sin, yet the sense thereof is a good sign : as the thistle is a good sign of a fat ground, though it be an ill weed : so the sense of your dulness is a good sign, though it be an ill weed : for it argues that you are used to private duties : for dulness in private, and pride in public duties is the temptation. Only here remember three things. 1. That

* *Etsi non sit possibile per ea moveri immobilem et per omniaque immutabilem Deum, potentia enim mihi videatur esse ad movendum ipsum recitantiem vel meditantem ipso ad movendum inquam et preparandum ad gratiam devotionis et gratitudinis et largitatis et beneficentiæ incogitabilis Dei.*—*Parisiens. cap. 22. de Rhetor. Div.*

* *Quando oramus, non ideo oramus ut per hoc divinam dispositionem immutemus, sed ut impetremus id quod Deus disposuit sanctorum oratio nobis impetrandum.*—*Tostat. Mat. 6.*

you do not measure or judge of your everlasting condition, by your present affection. 2. That you do not forbear duty, because of your dulness in it; because duty is a great remedy against it, and whither should a dead soul go, but to the living God? 3. That one great cause of your dulness, is your doubting, and discouragement; and therefore, no reason that you should be discouraged because of it, lest you augment the same.

What is prayer, and the nature of it? Prayer is the pouring out of the soul to God; not the pouring out of words, nor the pouring out of expressions; but the pouring out of the soul to God. Words, many times, and expressions, are a great way off from the soul; but sighs and groans are next the soul, and have more of the soul in them, than words and expressions many times have: now thou complainest, that thy heart is straitened and dead and dull; but when you are so straitened in prayer, do ye not at that time pour out sighs and groans after prayer, saying, Oh, what freedom once I had, O Lord, that I might have the like freedom again? And whereas you say now, that your heart is hardened in duty, consider whether there be not a great mistake about hardness and softness of heart; *Durum est quod tactui non cedit molle cedit*; A hard thing doth not yield to the touch, but a soft thing doth. Wax yields when it is touched, because it is soft; and wool yields when it is touched, because it is soft, but an hard thing yields not. And upon this account, it is said of Pharoah, that his heart was hard, why? because he did not yield to God, he had not a yielding disposition. Now there is many a poor soul complains that his heart is hard, and yet, notwithstanding, he hath a yielding disposition to every truth, a yielding disposition to every affliction and dispensation of God. Wherefore dost thou complain, and say, Oh, my heart is very hard? yet if at this time thou hast a yielding disposition to yield to every truth of God, and to yield to every touch of the Lord's hand, know from the Lord, that here is a soft heart; be not mistaken; but many are mistaken, and because they are mistaken herein, and it is but a mistake, therefore they have no reason for to be discouraged.

But I do not only want enlargement and softenings of heart in duty, but I am oppressed and filled with distractions,

my heart is not only dull and dead and straitened, but I feel many positive evils; as the leaves of a tree are eaten up with caterpillars, so I may say, my duties are eaten up with distractions, I never go to duty, but, the Lord knows, a world of distractions comes in upon me, and have I not just cause and reason to be discouraged now?

Surely this is a great evil, for as one saith well, *Tantum temporis oras quantum attendis*; so much time you pray, as you do attend in prayer; and upon this account, if the Lord should abstract all the outgoings of our souls in duty, and all our distractions from our prayers, oh, how little of prayer would be left many times. It were an incivility, you will say, when a petitioner hath gotten the king's ear, for the poor petitioner then to turn his back upon the king: and what an evil must it needs be, when a poor soul hath gotten the ear of God, then to turn the back by way of distractions upon the Lord, who comes down to hear his prayer. We used to say, When the candle burns, the mouse bites not, or the mouse nibbles not; when the candle doth not burn, then the mouse eats the candle; but when the candle burns, the mouse doth not bite the same. And so long as a man's heart is warm and inflamed in prayer, he is freed from distractions; but when a man's heart is cold in prayer, then come these ill distractions. So that certainly, there is a great deal of evil indeed in these distractions. Yet there is no reason for discouragement. For—

What rock is there so firm or fast, but hath some seams of dirt upon it? And what soul is there so firm and fast and immoveable in duty, but hath some seams of dirt or distractions growing upon it? Abraham, the father of the faithful, had birds coming down upon his sacrifice; and what child of Abraham is there, but hath these foul birds, unclean birds of distraction, one time or other coming down upon his sacrifice?

If that these distractions shall not hurt the servants of God, nor their sacrifices, neither them nor their duties, then they have no reason to be discouraged under them, though to be humbled for them. Now it is a true rule, *non nocet, quod non placet*; that which doth not please doth not hurt. These distractions in duty do not please the saints, they lie under them as a heavy burden, they do not please them,

therefore they shall not hurt them. You know what the Psalmist saith, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer," Psalm lxvi. 18. Distraction in prayer is a great iniquity; if I regard this iniquity in my prayer, the Lord will not hear my prayer. But when may a man be said to regard iniquity? You know, that if you regard a man that comes to your house, you run and meet him at the door, you bid him welcome, have him in, and set a stool for him, and you give him entertainment: but if you bid the man begone, saying, I will have nothing to do with you, you are my burden, I pray begone; then you do not regard this man. Thus it is with the saints and people of the Lord, distractions press in upon their prayer and duty; but dost thou fetch a stool, dost thou give entertainment, and dost thou bid welcome to these distractions? No; the Lord knows, I bid them begone; the Lord knows, they are my burden; then certainly, as that is true, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer;" so on the contrary, if I do not regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will hear my prayer. A man doth sometimes open a door for one of worth, and others press and crowd in with him, and if the master say to his servant, Why did you let all these men in? he answers, Sir, I did not open the door for these, but for another, and these did press and crowd in upon me, and I could not hinder; then is the master satisfied, and the servant excused. So in this case it is, and that often, with the people of God; Christ stands at their door and knocks, they run to meet with him in prayer, and by prayer they open the door of their heart to him; but then distractions press and crowd in upon them, yet they can say in truth, Lord, I never opened my door for these, but do desire that these, and all these, may be put out again. What, then, do you not think that God will be satisfied with this answer of uprightness? Surely he will, and therefore, though these distractions do crowd in upon you, here is matter of affliction, but not of discouragement.

If these distractions in duties do move the Lord to pity, then thou hast no reason to be quite discouraged, though humbled under these distractions. Ye know how it is with a loving father; a father hath a son, whom he loves dearly, this child of his is crazy-brained, but he hath his *Lucida*

intervalla, and he will speak very good reason sometimes; his father loves to hear this child speak, when he speaks reason; but all on a sudden the child is out; what then? doth his father hate him for that? No; but the bowels of the man yearns, Oh, now my child is out; then the father's heart doth ache over this child whom he takes pleasure in. Thus it is between God and a poor soul, God loves his children dearly, he loves to hear them pray; "Let me hear thy voice, and see thy face (saith Christ), for thy voice is sweet, and thy countenance is comely," Cant. ii. 14. God loves to hear his children pray, but every foot they are out; in, and then out again; out, and then in again. But what then? Is the Lord moved hereby to destroy his children? No; but now the heart of your Father aches, and now his bowels yearn: shall there be bowels in the heart of an earthly father this way? and shall there not be bowels in the heart of God our heavenly Father this way? Surely there is. Well, therefore, though in regard of thy distractions, thou hast cause for ever to be humbled, yet certainly thou hast no cause to be quite discouraged.

Oh, but this is not my case; for though I am troubled with many distractions, for which I have cause to be humbled, and though my heart be dead and dull and hard in duty, and though I have no parts and gifts in duty, yet this is not the matter of my discouragement especially; but that which discourageth me concerning duty is this: I pray, and pray, and am never the nearer; I have been praying thus long, thus many years, and am never the nearer: I have an undutiful, disobedient child, and I have been praying thus long, and he is never the better; I have been praying for the sense of God's love thus long, and am never the nearer; I have been praying for such and such a spiritual mercy, thus and thus long, and am never the holier: God regards me not, for he answers me not, and have I not just cause and reason for my discouragements now?

No: for—

Though God doth not answer you presently, yet he doth hear you presently: * he heard Moses when he prayed, though he did not grant his prayer; and it is a great mercy that

* Cito semper audit, tardus aliquando respondet.

God will receive my prayer, though I never do receive the thing that I pray for, and I may yet say, "Father, I thank thee, that thou hearest me always."

It is usual with God's own people and dearest children to say and think sometimes, that the Lord doth not answer their prayer, when the Lord doth. There is a two-fold return or answer of prayer; there is a visible return of prayer, and there is an invisible return of prayer. As it is with the vapours that are drawn upward by the heat of the sun; some there are, that do fall again in great rain and hail, and ye hear and see the returns of those vapours in the day; but sometimes the vapours fall in a dew in the night, and you do not see the return thereof, but you go abroad in the morning, and you find the dew upon the ground, although you did not see when the dew fell. So here, your prayers are drawn up by the heat of God's love in Christ; some return upon you again in the day, visibly; some return in the night invisibly, when you see them not: there is a visible, and there is an invisible return of prayer. What more usual with God's people, than to say, and think, that the Lord doth not hear their prayer, nor make return to them, when indeed he doth, and that visibly unto others also? Luke i. you read of Zacharias and Elizabeth, that they were very righteous; verse 6, "They were both righteous before God." And Zacharias and Elizabeth had no children; but Zacharias prayed for children, for at verse 13, the angel said unto him, "Fear not Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear a son, and thou shalt call his name John." The Lord heard his prayer, and sent an angel to tell him his prayer was heard, but Zacharias doubted thereof, verse 18, "Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years." Here he doubts, and it was his sin thus to doubt, as you may see by verse 20, "Behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words." Here plainly now, was a return of prayer, yea, here was a visible return of prayer; and yet Zacharias, though a godly and a holy man, doubted whether the Lord had heard his prayer or no. So that I say, this is no new thing with God's own people and dearest children, to say, and think sometimes,

that the Lord doth not answer their prayer, when the Lord indeed doth answer, and that visibly too. But—

If the Lord's not hearing, granting and answering your prayers presently, be sometimes matter of great encouragement, then it is not always a matter of discouragement. Now the Lord's not hearing and granting your prayer presently, is sometimes matter of great encouragement. You have divers children at your table, some younger and some elder, some babes and little ones, some grown; when you come to carve out your meat unto them, you carve first to the little ones, and you do not carve first to the greater, for say you, these little ones will cry, and they have no patience to stay, and therefore they shall be first served; but those greater have more wit and more patience, and they will stay. Beloved, thus now it is between God and us: the Lord hath two sorts of children that come to him in prayer, and he intends to serve them both; but he looks upon those that are weak, and serves them first; as for those that are stronger and have more faith and patience, saith the Lord, You are able to stay, I see your faith and patience, and therefore I will serve the little ones first, but as for you, I will serve you last. Thus it was with Abraham, after the Lord had made Abraham a promise of a seed, he made him stay a great while, why? because he saw he had faith to stay. So now, thou hast not presently a return or answer to thy prayer, why? because the Lord, it may be, sees thou hast strength, faith and patience to stay. And is not this rather matter of encouragement than discouragement?

Who ever stayed and waited long upon God, but he had more than he prayed for? Either God answers your prayers presently, or if he do not, he will not only pay you the principal, but he will pay you forbearance money, and you shall have good security, and a pledge for the principal too. The desire is a pledge of the thing desired; prayer is a pledge of the thing prayed for; a waiting heart is a pledge of the thing waited for: and the longer you stay, the more your hearts shall be weaned from the thing prayed for, and the more you shall be taught to wait upon God; and sometimes a waiting frame of heart is a greater mercy than the thing waited for. By this means also, you shall be weaned from your prayer, so as not to rest on it. A child may so

love the nurse, as to forget the mother ; and one may possibly so love duty, as to forget Christ ; but by God's delaying to answer, you are weaned from this nurse, and kept from resting on it. Or, it may be, you came to duty with too high esteem of your own performance, and too low esteem of the duty itself: hereby God teacheth you to come to the duty with high esteem of it, and with low esteem of your own doing it. Yea, the longer you stay, the more you shall be humbled, and your self-despising thoughts, because you cannot pray, may please God more than your best prayer. You see, that when a man angles, he throws his line into the water, and there is the hook and the bait, those are heavy ; then there is the cork, and that is light ; and when the fisher, or angler, sees that the light cork is drawn under water, now the fish bites, saith he, now there is hope, now there is something coming. So, you go to prayer, and there is somewhat heavy and weighty in your spirit ; but there is something that is of a corky and light nature in your spirit ; the longer you stay, the more your cork shall be drawn under water, that lightness of spirit shall be drawn under water, and so the more you shall be humble and humbled. Thereby you are taught to fan your prayers. There is much chaff amongst the good wheat of our duties, and God's delaying time is our fanning time: when the fish doth not bite, the fisher mends his bait ; it may be, saith he, my hook is not well baited. So should you do, when you take nothing by prayer, God's delay calls for your amending.

Yea, by this means you may remember how you delayed the Lord ; he spake often to you, and it was long ere you heard him, shall we think it long ere he hears us, when it was so long ere we heard him ? It may be you have forgotten your delays of God, but by this forbearance he doth graciously mind you thereof.

Yea, by God's forbearance to answer you, the Lord teacheth you to forbear ; God's forbearance doth teach us forbearance ; and is that nothing ? Let all this be considered, and you will say indeed, here is more matter of encouragement than discouragement.

If you would be discouraged, in case God should always answer your prayer presently, then you have no reason to

be discouraged, because he doth not answer you presently. But now, if the Lord should always answer thy duty and prayer presently, you would be discouraged; why? because you would say thus, I looked into the scripture, and there I find, that God doth not always answer his children presently; his children have prayed, and then they have waited, and this hath been the way that God hath taken with his children; now God doth not take this way with me, and therefore, I fear I am none of God's children, and so you would be discouraged. Now I say, if you would be discouraged, in case the Lord should always answer your prayer presently, then you have no reason to be discouraged, because he doth not hear you presently: but you would be discouraged in case the Lord should always hear you presently; you would say then, God doth go not the same way with me, that he goes and hath gone with his children. Surely, therefore, you that are the saints and people of God, have no reason for your discouragement in this respect.

Oh, but I fear that God doth not only delay his answer, but that he denies my prayer.

It may be so, for God doth sometimes deny his own people the thing they pray for, "Ye ask and have not (saith James), because ye ask amiss." Yet they were the people of God. Abulensis observes, that God doth sometimes grant a wicked man his petition, and deny a godly man his petition, that he may encourage wicked men to pray, and teach good men not to rest on their prayers.*

Yet if the thing you ask of God be pleasing to him, and he doth still bear up your heart in praying, and depending on him, it argues rather that he delays than denies; for, Psalm x. 17, the preparing of your heart, and the inclining of his ear, go together, and, 1 John iii. 22, the apostle saith, "And whatever we ask we receive of him, because (as a sign thereof) we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in his sight."

Oh, but there lies my grief, for I have not kept his commandments, and God, I fear, is displeased and angry with me.

* Quicquid placet tibi ut petatur a te procul-dubio placet et tibi ut et id largiaris petenti; presertim si ipsum largiri, tibi cedat ad gloriam, petenti vero expediat ad salutem.—Parisiens. 346.

Be it so, and did Jonah keep his commandments, when he ran to Tarshish? and was not God angry with him when he threw him into the sea? yet even then he prayed, and the Lord heard his prayer. And did not Christ seem to be displeased and angry with the poor Canaanitish woman, when he said unto her, "It is not meet, to take the children's bread and cast it before dogs?"

Oh, but she did believe; but I fear God will never hear my prayer at all, because there is so much unbelief in my prayer, as there was not in hers.

But was it not so with David? "I said in my haste, I am cast out of thy sight, nevertheless the Lord heard my prayer," Psalm xxxi. What unbelief was here. "I said in my haste, I am cast out of thy sight;" nevertheless, the Lord heard his prayer.

Oh, but I am afraid yet, that the Lord will never hear my prayer, or regard my duty, because I am so selfish in it; I come unto God in mine affliction, and my affliction makes me go to prayer, my affliction doth make me pray, I cry by reason of my affliction, and this is selfish.

And did not those seek themselves at first, who came unto Christ for cure? All true love begins in self-love. The sweetest flower grows on a dirty stalk. And I pray, what think you yet of Jonah? The Lord heard me, saith he, out of hell, and yet I cried, saith he, by reason of mine affliction.

Oh, but I fear the Lord will never hear my prayer, because I was no better prepared, yea, not at all prepared thereunto.

Do you not know how the Lord dealt by Hezekiah? Hezekiah prayed, "The Lord shew mercy to every one that is not prepared, according to the preparation of the sanctuary (and, saith the text), the Lord hearkened and healed the people," 2 Chron. xxx. 18—20. Yea, God can rain without clouds, without preparations.

Oh, but yet, I am afraid the Lord will not hear my prayer, or regard my duty, for I am a man or a woman of great distempers, many passions, and frowardnesses in my life and conversation.

* Omnis amor incipit a seipso.

But what think ye of Elijah? Elijah prayed that there might be no rain, and there was no rain for three years and a half; and he prayed for rain, and there was rain: and yet, saith the apostle, "He was a man of like passions as we are," James v. 17.

Oh, but I fear, I am afraid the Lord will not regard my prayer, or duty, for I am such a one, or such a one, or such a one.

What an one? what an one art thou? Art thou such a one as beginnest to look towards Christ but yet not fully come off? you know what was said concerning Cornelius, Acts x. 31, "Cornelius, thy prayer is come up before me." Yet he did not begin to look towards Christ. Art thou such a one as the publican was? the publican stood and smote himself upon the breast, and he said, "O Lord, be merciful unto me a sinner." And our Saviour saith, "He went away justified, rather than his fellow." Luke xviii. 13, 14. Or art thou such a one as the poor prodigal? he said to his father, "I am not worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thine hired servants?" and the father heard him and over-granted his petition. And if all these things be true, what is there that can justly discourage any poor drooping, doubting soul, in regard of duty; shall his want of parts and gifts, or his abundance of distractions? &c. No: for though a godly man have but weak parts or gifts; though his spirit and his heart be dull, dead and straitened; though he labour under many distractions in duty; though the Lord hide his face, and defer an answer to his prayer; though the Lord seem to be angry; though there be much unbelief in his duty; though there be a great deal of selfishness; though his heart be not prepared, according to the preparation of the sanctuary; though he be a man of many passions, and great distempers: yet notwithstanding all this he hath no just cause or warrant to be discouraged: cause there is to be humbled under all these things, but no just cause to be discouraged and cast down.

And if so, then by way of application. What mighty encouragement is here, to every poor drooping heart, to come unto God in duty! though dead, though dull, though straitened, yet to come unto God in duty.

And what a mighty difference is here between a godly, and

a wicked man! a wicked man goes to prayer, and "his prayer is an abomination to the Lord." And if you look into the viiith of Hosea you shall find at the 13th verse, that the Lord threatens wicked men thus, That when they do come to prayer and to offer a sacrifice to him, that then he will remember their iniquity. At verse 12, "I have written to you the great things of my law, but they are accounted as a strange thing, they sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of my offering, but the Lord accepteth them not; now will I remember their iniquity." Mark the word, Now, now, when? Now when they do come to prayer; now will I remember your iniquity, saith the Lord. I know, saith the Lord, all your carriage in such and such a place, I know your uncleanness, and your adulteries when you were in the dark, when the curtains were drawn about you, and the candle out: I know your carriage at such a tavern, and upon such an ale-bench, how you sat there, and scorned and reviled my children; I know your opposing, scoffing and jeering at those that are godly; I know all this, and now thou comest to prayer, now swearer, now adulterer, now drunkard, now thou comest to duty, now will I remember thine iniquity. Is it not a sad thing, that the Lord should remember a man's sin at the time when he comes to prayer? yet thus the Lord deals with the wicked. But as for the godly and gracious man it is not so with him; when he comes to prayer, though he have many failings in duty, yet the Lord remembers his mercy, then the Lord remembers his loving-kindness, then the Lord remembers his covenant, "for he is ever mindful of his covenant." Oh, what encouragement is here then for every man to become godly, to get into Christ! and what encouragement is here, for the saints and people of God to come to duty! Oh, you that have but a little faith, have you any reason to be discouraged? will you not at last say to your soul, Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou thus discouraged?

But, suppose that I have done foolishly, and have sinned in being discouraged upon all occasions; suppose I have many failings in duty, and the Lord doth not answer my prayer presently: what shall I do, that I may bear up my heart against this discouragement, either in regard of my own failing in duty, or in regard of God's not answering?

Take heed, that you do not lay the stress and weight of all your comfort upon duty: either the gift of duty, or the grace of duty, or the present answer of it. So much as ye lay the stress, and weight of your comfort upon duty, so much will you be discouraged in case you do either want duty, or an answer to it. When Paul was tempted and buffeted, he prayed thrice: "For this, (saith he,) I besought the Lord thrice," 2 Cor. xii. 8, that is often, and the Lord gave him no other answer than this, "Paul, my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength shall be made perfect in thy weakness." Whereupon Paul saith, "Now therefore will I glory in mine infirmities, that the power of the Lord may rest upon me." Hast thou therefore been at prayer? and hast thou prayed thrice or often? and hast thou no answer but this, "My grace is sufficient for thee?" know that thou hast a Paul's answer, and therefore rather glory in this, that the Lord should find thee faithful for to wait upon him, than be discouraged; knowing, that the Lord's strength shall be perfected in thy weakness.

Consider seriously and frequently of this rule—That difficulty doth commend duty: the more difficulties your duties do press through to God, the more acceptable they are to him. The less there is to sweeten your duty to you, the more sweet is your duty to God. It is in our performing of duty, as in the offering of the Jewish sacrifice, in the offering of their sacrifice there were two things, the sacrifice, and the obedience in offering the sacrifice; and the more difficult it was for any poor Jew, by reason of poverty, or the like, to offer this sacrifice, the more and greater was his obedience in offering it; the more difficult in offering, the greater the obedience offered. So also it is in our gospel sacrifices, and in all our duties, there are two things in them; there is the sacrifice, the duty, and there is the obedience in bringing the duty: and the more difficulty in performing the duty, the greater is the obedience to God in the performing of it. Now is it not an hard thing, and very difficult, for a man to pray, and continue praying, when his heart is hardened and his spirit straitened? especially if he be sensible thereof? then he is ready to despond, and say, I can pray no more: and is it not a very hard thing for a man to pray, and persevere in prayer, when he thinks that God doth not regard his

prayer? then he is apt to say, Why should I pray any longer, for God regards me not: yet, now, if you do pray and perform your duty, your obedience is the more obediential, and the more acceptable; and if you would but think of this rule—Difficulty doth commend duty, and the less you have to sweeten your action the more sweet it is to God; I say, if you would but remember this, it would both encourage you to duty, and keep you from discouragement in it.

And we must all learn to leave the event and success of our spiritual things unto God himself; so shall we never be discouraged in any duty. For the word of the Lord is sure, and God hath spoken it: “Cast thy gift upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee; he will not suffer the righteous to be moved for ever,” Psalm lv. You read it thus: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord:” but in the Hebrew, it is, *thy gift*; “Cast thy gift upon the Lord.”* That is, saith Schindler, *Quicquid tibi dari donative expelis*: Whatsoever thou dost desire that God should give thee, cast that upon the Lord: thou comest to prayer, and thou prayest for such a mercy, or such a gift, cast that on God, and leave it wholly to him. Oh, but the mercy I pray for is a necessary mercy! Be it so, yet it is to be cast on God. But it is a spiritual gift! I pray for pardon of sin, the sense of God’s love, growth in grace, consolation to my poor drooping soul. Be it so, yet thou must cast this on God. Many there are, that can leave the event and the success of their outward things unto God, but to leave the event and success of prayer, and their spiritual things unto God, this they cannot understand, and this they are utterly unacquainted with: but whatever thy gift be, cast it upon the Lord, leave the success and the event of all your spiritual things upon God: what then? “and he will sustain thee, and thou shalt not be moved for ever.” Thou art moved for the present, and thy heart is moved, and thou art much discouraged, yet do but try this way, leave the event to God. Go to prayer, go and perform thy duty leav-

* השלך על-יהוה יהבך.—Hebrew.

סיברך.—Chaldee Paraphrase.

Την μεριμναν.—Septuag.

Projice super Dominum charitatem tuam. = Hierom.

Rab. Salv. Jar.—Abbreviate dictus Rashi vel Rasi משאך (quod etiam pro do-
no usurpatur המלך משאת 2 Sam. ii. 8). Bibl. Bomb.

ing the event of that unto God, and the Lord that hath promised will certainly fulfil it, thou shalt be sustained, and though thou art moved for the present, thou shalt not be moved for ever. And thus I have done with the third instance.

SERMON VII.

A LIFTING UP IN THE WANT OF ASSURANCE.

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me, &c.”—Psalm xlii. 11.

IV. SOMETIMES the discouragements of God’s people are drawn from the want of their evidence for heaven.

And thus they reason or argue: I am a poor creature, who doth want assurance of the love of God, and of mine own salvation; therefore I am thus discouraged. Indeed, if I had any evidence of an interest in Christ, I should never be discouraged whatever my condition were: but, alas! I want the assurance of God’s love, and of eternal life. Should I now die, I do not know whether I should go to heaven or hell, and what would become of my soul to all eternity. Oh I want assurance of my salvation, and therefore I am thus discouraged. Have I not just cause and reason for my discouragements now?

No, no reason yet. It is indeed a great evil and a sore affliction, to want the assurance of God’s love and of one’s own salvation; yet, notwithstanding, the want of this assurance is no sufficient ground or bottom for your discouragement. I confess it is a great evil and a sore affliction for a man to want assurance; for sin and affliction are twisted together in the want of assurance. As of all blessings those are the greatest, where grace and comfort are joined together; so where sin and affliction are twisted together, of all afflictions they are the most afflictive. And thus it is in the want of assurance: for as in assurance there is something of grace,