

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.

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## 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,

and something of comfort or reward; so in the want of assurance there is somewhat of sin or unbelief, and somewhat of affliction too. Sin and affliction, affliction and sin, are both twisted together in the want of assurance.

The truth is, a man that wants the assurance of God's love, and of his interest in Christ, is neither fit to receive mercy from God, nor to make return of love and praise to God as he should. Not fit to receive mercy as he should, for though he would have Christ come in, yet by unbelief he shuts the door against him, and he makes an evil interpretation of mercies offered unto him. If a mercy or blessing be tendered unto him, he saith, This comes in judgment to me; it is a blessing indeed in itself, but I fear it is a judgment to me. Thus he makes an ill interpretation of blessings, and so is unfit to receive. And he is not fit to make returns of love to God again: assurance returns praise. And therefore saith the text here, O my soul, wait on God, hope in God, "for I shall yet praise him," why? "for he is my God." Praise grows upon assurance. And upon this account, I say, he is neither fit to receive mercy, nor to make return of praise as he should.

Yea further, he that wants assurance of God's love, converseth too much with Satan. As he that hath the assurance of God's love, doth converse with Christ, "the Spirit bearing witness to him that he is the child of God;" so he that doth want assurance, converseth with Satan, and Satan, though falsely, is still bearing witness to his spirit that he is not the child of God. And is it not a misery to be in these converses with Satan, to be under his hellish droppings? David felt one pang of unbelief, and he cried out, and said, "It is too painful for me." Oh, what a pain is it then, to lie bed-rid of an unbelieving heart. You know a chaste and a loving wife, counts it an affliction to her, to be followed with the solicitations of an unworthy person, to suspect and be jealous of her husband's love; for, saith she, he doth therefore follow me with these solicitations, making me to suspect my husband's love, that so he may attain his own filthy desires. So saith a gracious soul, the devil is always following and tempting me to suspect the love of Christ, and he doth therefore do it, that he may attain his mind upon me; for the devil knows well enough, that the more I sus-

pect Christ's love, the more I shall embrace Satan's love. The truth is, beloved, this want of assurance of God's love, or interest in Christ, is an inlet to many sins and miseries; for first a man doubts of his own salvation, and after he hath continued doubting, then he riseth up unto a full conclusion, saying, Now know I that Christ doth not love me, I did but doubt before, but now I know he doth not love me. And after he is risen to this conclusion, then shortly he riseth higher, and he goes further, thus: If Christ doth not love me now, he will never love me, and if I have not interest in Christ now, after all the preaching I have heard, and ordinances enjoyed, if I have not an interest in Christ now, I shall never have it; and so the longer I live, the more I aggravate my condemnation; therefore as good in hell at first as at the last, and therefore now I will even make away with myself. Oh, what a black chain is here, and the first link is the want of assurance. If you should see a child, a pretty child, lie in the open streets, and none own it, would it not make your bowels yearn within you? Come to the little one, and say, Child, where is thy father? I know not, saith the child. Where is thy mother, child? I know not. Who is thy father? what is thy father's name, child? I know not. Would it not make your heart ache to see such a little one in the streets? But for a poor soul to lie in the streets, as it were, and not know his father, whether God be his Father, or the devil be his father; for a soul to say, I do not know my father, whether God in Christ be my Father, yea or no; this is pitiful indeed. The word father is a sweet word, for it sweetens all our duties; take the word Father out of prayer, and how sour is it? Surely, therefore, it is a sad and sore affliction, to want the assurance of God's love in Christ. But now, although it be a great evil, and a sore affliction for to want this assurance, yet I say, the saints and people of God have no reason to be cast down or discouraged, although they do want the same.

How may that appear?

Thus: if the want of assurance be not the damning unbelief, then a man hath no reason to be quite discouraged, although he do want assurance. Now, though there may be much unbelief bound up in the want of assurance, yet I say, the bare want of assurance, is not that unbelief that shall

damn ones soul to all eternity, not that unbelief which Christ threatens with damnation. For if you look into John iii. 18, you shall find our Saviour speaking thus: "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." But now, lest any poor soul that would believe and cannot, should be afflicted and troubled at these words, therefore saith our Saviour Christ, in the following words, I will tell you wherein lies the damnableness of unbelief, verse 19, "This is the condemnation (he speaks in relation to the words before), and this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for every one that doeth evil hateth the light; neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved or discovered:" this light is Christ. Now therefore, doest thou hate the light, Christ? and therefore keepest from it, lest thy deeds should be discovered? Or rather on the contrary, doest thou not know there are evil deeds in thy life, and much evil in thy heart? and doest thou not therefore desire to come to Christ, who is the true light that thy deeds may be discovered, and thy sin amended? Then, thou canst not believe as thou wouldest, and though thou doest want assurance, and though thou hast much unbelief in thee, the Lord Jesus Christ hath spoken it, thou shalt never be condemned to all eternity for this want, but the Lord Christ will pardon this unto thee: and therefore certainly upon this account, God's people have no reason for their discouragement.

If there be such an overruling hand of grace, and mercy upon the want of the saint's assurance, as that it shall work to their and to others good; then they have no reason to be quite discouraged, although they do want assurance.

As for their own good: thereby they do gain experience; thereby they come to see the emptiness and nothingness of all their own righteousness. David saith, ye know the scripture, Psalm cxvi., "I said in my haste, all men are liars." The words in the Hebrew may be read, "I said in my shaking;"\* "I said in my shaking, all men are liars."

\* יָפַת—Hebrew. Festinavit, celeriter motus fuit, vel cum timore fugit.

Εκ τῆρας ἀσει.—Septuag.

David was shaken by men, and then he saw that men were liars. So, when a man is shaken in his own righteousness, then he sees the emptiness and the lying disposition of it; and, I pray, when is a man's own righteousness more shaken, than when he doth want assurance of God's love? Thereby also, a man comes to get more and stronger assurance of God's love; *Certissimum est, quod certum est post incertitudinem*; that is most certain that is certain after uncertainty: the shaken tree grows the strongest. It is observed of Thomas, that of all the apostles, he cried out, and said, "My Lord and my God." Two *My's*, not one *My*: My Lord, or My God: but two *My's*, "My Lord, and My God." Two *My's*, why? Because he had two *No's* before, "Unless I may put my finger into his side, I will not believe." So you read it; but in the original there were two *No's*, I will not, not believe; a double *Not*. And as there were two *No's* of unbelief, so there are two *My's* of faith. So far as a good man is sunk in unbelief, so far he will rise in faith; so much as a man is shaken by unbelief, and in the want of assurance, so much he will rise unto assurance and be confirmed and steeled in it.

And as for others: a man is never more fit to comfort, to relieve, to satisfy others in their fears, than when he hath been in fears, and doubting himself. It is a good speech that Maldonat hath out of Bernard: *Citius quidem ego qui infirmus sum*; I would rather believe poor doubting Thomas, than confident Peter: I would rather believe poor doubting

במערקי in fuga.—Chaldee Paraphrase.

In stupore meo.—Hierom.

Unde metuebatur suspicio firma sit certitudo.—Bernard.

Apud Gersonem memini me legisse narra junculam, &c. Refert ille se novisse hominem pium pulsatum et vexatum erebris dubitationibus etiam in fidei articulo qui enim ad extremum in tantam lucem veritatis et certitudinis introductus est ut nulla resideret vacillatio in ejus anima neque plus dubitaret de ea re quam de vita sua, quinetiam addit hanc certitudinem non ex nova alicujus ratione aut demonstratione ortum fuisse, sed ex captivatione intellectus atque admirabili quadam Dei illuminatione a montibus æternis.—Davenant. in Colos. cap. 3. p. 160.

ου μη ἔρενω nequaquam; duplex negatio fortius negat.

Fieri non potest ut bene de fide scribat aut recte scripta bene intelligat, qui non spiritum ejusdem urgentibus tribulationibus aliquando gustaverit.—Luther.

*Citius quidem ego qui infirmus sum crediderim Thomæ dubitanti et palpanti quam Petro audienti et credenti.*—Maldon. in Nov. Test. p. 34.

Thomas than Peter that never doubted. Thomas having once doubted, knew how to deal with a poor doubting soul. Thus, I say, God doth order the want of assurance of his servants unto their own, and others good: and therefore no reason, that they should be cast down, and quite discouraged, although they do want assurance for the present.

If a man, a gracious man, may have comfort; yea, and live comfortably, although he do want assurance, then he hath no reason to be quite discouraged, in case he want it. Now, though it may seem a paradox to you, yet you shall find a truth in it; I say a man that hath no assurance for the present, may have comfort; yea, he may live comfortably, if things be rightly ordered. For he that hath no assurance, may have hope, and hope is comfortable. He that hath no assurance, may yet rely upon Jesus Christ; and stay his soul upon Christ; and in all reliance there is some comfort. He that hath no assurance, may be justified, and being justified by faith, we have peace with God. He that hath no assurance, may submit unto God's commandments; and saith the Psalmist, "the entrance into thy commandments, giveth light:" and so comfort. "In keeping thy commandments, there is great reward:" and so comfort. "It is a comfortable thing, (saith Solomon) to behold the light:" and in all light there is some comfort. Now God is light, and the free grace and love of God is light, which a man may behold, that hath no assurance. You do sometimes take a great deal of contentment in the reading of a story: I do not mean a scripture story, but in other books, I say, a man sometimes takes a great deal of contentment in reading of a story, although it doth not concern him; for, saith he, although this story doth not concern me, yet I take complacency, and contentment in reading of it, because here I read of the valour of such a man; and of the faithfulness of such a man to his friend; and of the excellent carriages and virtues of men. Now, my beloved, is there no excellency in God himself to content the soul? Is there no faithfulness in God? Is there no love and mercy in God himself? Is not the Lord the God of all consolation, and God of mercy, without relation to my condition? Is there not an ocean of excellent love and grace in God himself? How many sweet stories of love and grace, may you read in this little book of the bible?

Besides, a man that hath no assurance, now, and then may have some promise thrown into his soul, to uphold him with. When Elijah was by the brook, and could not enjoy the ordinary meat of the land, a raven brought him meat: and whenever was any godly man in such a condition, but he had one raven or other to bring him comfort? Sometimes a temptation is a raven; God makes it so; sometimes a desertion is a raven; sometimes affliction; sometimes a particular word and promise is thrown into his soul; and is there no comfort there? I say, though a man do want assurance for the present, he may live comfortably. Surely therefore a godly man hath no reason for his discouragement, though for the present he doth want assurance?

But I do not only want this settled assurance of God's love, and so the ordinary food of the land; but I have no raven to bring me any comfort: I mean, I have no promise, no particular word to bring in comfort unto my soul, and to uphold me in my dark condition: though I do want a settled assurance, yet if I had a particular word and promise, to uphold my soul, until I had this assurance, I should not be discouraged: but I want this settled assurance, and I have no particular word or promise to uphold my soul with, until it come; and therefore I am thus discouraged: have I not reason now?

I answer, No. For, Christian, what particular word or promise wouldst thou have? Have ye not the whole gospel before you, a bag of golden promises? A father hath two children; and he comes unto one, and gives unto that child a piece of gold, there child, saith he, supply thy want with that; but unto the other child, he saith, here child, I know that thou art in want, and there are bags of silver and gold in my study; take the key of my study, and go in, and take what thou wilt: is not this latter in as good a condition as the former or rather better? Thus it is with the saints; the Lord is pleased to give now and then, a particular word to some of his children; but unto others, he saith rather, here take the key of faith, for faith is the key, and hath a power to unlock all the promises, I give thee faith, and by this faith, I give thee a power to go unto all my promises: is not this latter in as good a condition as the other? Thus it is, I say, with all the servants of God, "Having therefore these promises," saith the apostle, &c. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

If the promise of grace do belong to you, then you cannot say, I have no word, no promise to uphold me with: now, that the promise of grace doth belong to you, is cleared thus: 1. Your very resting on the promise, makes it to belong to you, and it becomes yours, by your resting on it; but you do or have rested on the promise. 2. If the command doth belong to you, then why not the promise? Doth not the word of commandment belong to you, namely, "Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery?" Doth this word of command belong to you? Yea, surely; for the commandment saith, Thou, and thou, and thou shalt not, &c.; and that word *Thou* doth include *Me*; the word of promise hath its *Thou* and *Thee* and *Thy* also. Psalm xxxvii., "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt *thou* dwell in the land, and verily *thou* shalt be fed," verse 3: "Delight *thyself* in the Lord, and he shall give *thee* the desire of *thy* heart," verse 5. And if you put yourself within the compass of the commandment's Thou, God will put you within the compass of the promise's Thou. 3. If you may, and it be your duty to rest on the promise, then it belongs to you: now, you may rest on the promise of grace and holiness for sanctification, and it is your duty so to do, else it were no sin not to rest on the promise: but unbelief, and not resting on the promise, sin; only ye must know, that there is a great difference between the promise of consolation and the promise of sanctification. To apply the promise of comfort, without endeavour after holiness, is presumption; but to apply the promise of sanctification, that I may be more holy, is no presumption, but my duty; and if it be your duty to apply and rest on this promise, then it belongs to you.

Oh, but yet, when I go unto the word, or the Scripture, I find, that God's promise still runs upon some condition, and I cannot perform that condition, I do not find that condition in myself; and therefore, I fear, that I may not go unto these promises, and that I have no right to them.

But what if a good and gracious man may apply a conditional promise, although he hath not performed the condition? Pray look into Nehemiah, chapter i. and there you will find, that the Jews being in captivity, Nehemiah goes unto God in prayer, and doth press the promise which

God made unto the Jews by his servant Moses, verse 8: "Remember, I beseech thee, thy word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter ye abroad among the nations; but if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them, though there were of you cast unto the uttermost parts of the earth, yet will I gather them from thence, and I will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power." The Jews in Babylon were scattered according to the word, but alas, they did not return unto the Lord, and leave their sins, according to the conditions of the promise; yet, notwithstanding, Nehemiah goes unto the Lord, and presseth this promise, and the Lord heard him, and he had acceptance, as ye find in the following chapter.

What if the condition of one promise, be the thing promised in another promise; will ye then fear, that the promise doth not belong to you, because you have not performed the condition of the promise? Now so it is, that the condition of one, is the thing promised in another promise. For example: in one promise, repentance is the condition of the promise, 2 Chron. vi. 37, 38; Joel ii. 15—19. But in another promise, repentance is the thing promised, Ezek. xxxvi. 26, "I will take away the heart of stone, and give you an heart of flesh." In one promise, faith and coming to Christ is the condition; "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matt. xi. 28. But in another promise it is the thing promised, John vi. 47, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me." In one promise, obedience is the condition of it, Isa. i. 19, "If ye consent and obey, ye shall eat the good of the land." In another promise, it is the thing promised, Ezek. 36. 27, "I will put my Spirit into you, and cause ye to walk in my ways." In one promise, perseverance is the condition, Matt. xxiv., "He that continueth to the end shall be saved." But in another promise, it is the thing promised. Psa. i. 3, "His leaf shall not wither;" Ezek. xxxvi., "I will put my fear into your hearts, and ye shall not depart from me." In one scripture of the Old Testament, the coming of the Deliverer is promised to the Jews, upon condition that they

turn from ungodliness; Isa. lix. 24, "The Redeemer shall come out of Zion, and unto them that turn from ungodliness in Jacob." But in another scripture in the New Testament, turning Jacob from ungodliness is the thing promised; Rom. ii. 26, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and turn ungodliness from Jacob." Now if the condition in one promise, be the thing promised in another promise, will ye fear that the promise doth not belong to you, because ye have not performed the condition?

And, again, what if the condition of the promise be performed for you, better than you could perform it? In the beginning the Lord made a covenant with man, a covenant of works, "Do this and live;" and Adam, the first man, stood as a common person for us all, to perform the condition of doing: and if Adam had performed the condition, we all had performed the condition. *Now* the Lord makes a new covenant of grace with man, and the Lord Jesus Christ is a second Adam, and he stands as a common person, and if he perform the condition, then all his seed do perform the condition. Now the Lord Jesus Christ hath performed the condition for all his seed: although the first Adam did not perform the condition for his seed, yet the second Adam hath performed the condition of the promise and of the covenant for his seed to the full. Now if all these three things be true, namely, that a man may go to the promise, the conditional promise with acceptance, although he hath not performed the condition; that the condition of one promise is the thing promised in another promise; that the Lord Jesus Christ hath performed the condition of the promise for you, better than you can perform it: have ye, then, any reason to be discouraged and to keep off from the promise, because you have not performed the condition? But so it is, that a child of God may go to a conditional promise with acceptance, although he hath not performed the condition; and the condition of one promise is the thing promised in another; and the Lord Jesus, our second Adam, hath performed the condition of all the promises for all his seed: surely, therefore, you have no reason to be discouraged in this respect.

But this is not my case, for I do not only want assurance of God's love, and have no particular promise; but, instead of the promise, I have a threateuing set upon my soul: oh,

the bitter words of the threatening have soaked into my heart. Time was, heretofore, indeed, that I had a promise; I could say, I had a promise, and I rejoiced in it: but now I have lost my promise, and instead of the promise a threatening is come. Oh, I feel the smart and the anger of the threatening, and have I not just cause and reason to be discouraged now?

No: for if you be drawn to Christ, is it material whether it be done with a cord of flax or a cord of silk? God hath two arms whereby he draws us unto himself; the arm of his love, and the arm of his anger and justice: the arm of his love is put forth in the promise, the arm of his anger and justice is put forth in the threatening; and with both these he doth lift up the fallen sinner. What if God lift you up with his left arm, so you be lifted up! Sometimes he lifts up with the arm of his threatening, that he may carry us in the arm of his promise; for as the law was a schoolmaster to bring to Christ, so the threatening is a schoolmaster to bring us unto the promise: is the threatening therefore come? then is the promise a coming; for the threatening is given forth in order to that.

And if this, which you complain of, may be the condition of the saints, then you have no reason to be discouraged. Now, for the loss of the promise, you know how it was with Joshua: the Lord gave Joshua a gracious promise; "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee: be strong, be not dismayed, be not afraid, be of good courage, for I will not leave thee, nor forsake thee," Josh. i. 6. But the children of Israel were a little discomfited by the men of Ai, and see how Joshua lost the sight of the promise; in Joshua vii. 6, 7, "Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face, before the ark of the Lord, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads, and said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? Would to God we had been content to dwell on the other side Jordan." Oh, what unbelief is here! what discouragement is here! how had he lost the promise! O Lord, saith he, what shall I say, when Israel turn their backs before their enemies: and oh, what shall *we* say, when Joshua turned his back upon the promise! But so it was with Joshua here,

he had lost the sight of the promise which once he had. And as for the threatening, you know how it was with David; having sinned greatly in the matter of Uriah, the Lord threatens him, "that the sword should never depart from his house;" and the threatening did take hold upon him, and David was under the stroke of the threatening. But was not Joshua godly; and was not David godly? So, then, a godly man may possibly lose the sight of the promise, and have a threatening set on his soul too.

But if a promise, given out by the Lord, shall never be reversed, and a threatening may be repealed; then you have no cause to fear in this respect. Now a threatening is therefore given, that it may not be fulfilled. Jonah knew this so well, that he professeth to the Lord, that therefore he fled to Tarshish, because, saith he, "O Lord, I knew that thou art a merciful God." As if he should say, I knew, O Lord, thou art so merciful a God, that though thou hast threatened Nineveh, yet thou wilt reverse thy threatening. But a promise once given unto a soul, shall never be reversed or repealed. It may rise up to an oath, as sometimes it doth, for when God gives a promise to a soul, and opposition ariseth, if then God gives out the same promise again, it amounts to an oath; "As I live (saith the Lord) I will never reverse this promise that I have made to thee." But a promise once given, shall never be reversed or repealed: Gal. iii. you have the case that is now before you. Saith Paul, at verse 15, "I speak after the manner of men; though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereunto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made." And therefore, saith the apostle, the promise shall not be disannulled, although the law came after the promise. But if the promise that the Lord gave to Abraham, was not disannulled by the law, that came four hundred and thirty years after; (verse 17) "wherefore then serves the law?" he tells you, verse 19; "It was added because of transgression." So now, say you, if that the promise that God hath given heretofore, be not disannulled, and made void, by the threatening that follows after, wherefore then was the law or the threatening given unto my soul? It was added because of transgression: God had some transgression of yours to discover unto you, that you did not think of, and therefore the threat-

ening and the law came after. But the promise is quite out of sight, and I have lost it. And did not the Jews also lose the sight of the promise which was given to Abraham? When the Lord gave the law, and they stood trembling and quaking before Mount Sinai, did not they then lose the sight of the promise that was given to Abraham? So, say I, although thou hast lost the sight of the promise that once thou hadst, and a threatening be come in the room of it, the promise that was once given thee, it may be four hundred and thirty days ago, or many years ago, shall never be disannulled or reversed. And the reason is this: Because God doth not repent in the matter of the gospel. Ye read in Scripture, that God is said sometimes to repent, "It repented the Lord that he made man;" sometimes it is said that the Lord doth not repent, "I am not a man that I should repent:" how are these two reconciled; God doth repent, and God doth not repent? Thus to our present purpose: God repents as to the matter of the threatening, but God never repents as to the matter of the promise: God repents as to the matter of the threatening, and therefore saith the Lord to Jeremiah, "I am weary of my repenting." I have threatened, and threatened, and I am weary of threatening. Here God repented as to the matter of the threatening; but God never repents as to the matter of the promise. And therefore saith the apostle, Rom. xi. 29, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." And the promise is a great gift. So then, as to the matter of the promise, God doth never repent. Wherefore, poor soul, hast thou a promise given thee, may be five years ago, may be ten years ago, may be twenty years ago, and hast thou lost the sight of the promise; and instead of the promise is there a threatening come upon thy soul, that makes thy heart quake and tremble? I here tell thee, from the Lord, the promise that was once given unto thee, though now thou hast lost the sight of it, shall never be repealed or recalled. Oh, what matter of encouragement is here! Is here matter of discouragement? nay, rather, here is matter of great encouragement.

Oh, but yet this is not my case: I do not only want assurance of God's love, but I have assurance of God's displeasure; I do not only want assurance of my salvation, but I have assurance of my damnation: I do not only want the testimony of the Spirit, bearing witness with my spirit that

I am the child of God; but I have another testimony within my soul, bearing witness to me that I am a reprobate. And have I not cause to be discouraged?

No, not yet; for it may be you look upon the back-side of God's dispensation. If we look upon the face of God's dispensation, we see his love and good pleasure; but if we look on the back-side thereof, we conclude nothing but anger and displeasure. It may be it is so with you in this case. But,

If you find no such testimony of reprobation as you speak of, in all the Scripture; then you have no reason to fear or to be discouraged in this respect. Now search the Scripture, and you shall not find in all the word, any ground for such a testimony of reprobation. We read, indeed, of Francis Spira, notorious for his despair; when his friends came to comfort him, having spake comfortable words unto him, that he said, Why go ye about to comfort me? comfort belongs not to me, for I am a reprobate. Oh, said one of his friends, do not say so, for none are able to say so. Yes, said he, as the elect of God have a Spirit within them, bearing witness that they are the children of God; so reprobates have another spirit, bearing witness with their spirits that they are not the children of God, but the children of Satan: and such a spirit of reprobation have I. But, my beloved, if there be such a spirit or a testimony of reprobation as this is, either it must be from the Spirit of God, or from the spirit of Satan: if from the spirit of Satan, then he is a liar, not to be believed; if it be from the Spirit of God, how doth it suit with the word? for the Spirit of God is called the Comforter; can such a spirit of reprobation come from the Comforter? And if you have such a testimony as this is, either you must have it from the word, or from the Spirit of God alone without the word: if from the word, then from the threatening; for it is not from the promise, nor from the command: if from the threatening, a threatening may be repealed, a threatening may be reversed, as you have heard. And if you have it from the Spirit of the Lord, how can it be that the Spirit should be called a Comforter? Surely therefore, if you have such a spirit of reprobation in your bosom, it is from Satan, and he is a liar. But, my beloved, I will in this appeal to you, whether do you not think that

there is many a soul now in heaven, that whilst he lived said, I am sure to go to hell? You know that ordinary story of the woman that took a glass in her hand, and throwing it on the ground, said, As sure as this glass breaks I shall be damned; and the glass broke not. Well then, thy condition is not alone, others of God's people may be and have been led in this way of temptation; and therefore no reason why thou shouldest be cast down or discouraged.

But yet this doth not reach my case or condition, for I do not only want the assurance of God's love, and of mine own salvation; but I have wanted assurance this two, this four, this six, this eight, this ten years: and I have continued so long doubting in unbelief, and my heart is so hardened with it, that I am afraid I shall never be healed or saved. Oh, I have sat under such and such precious gospel means, and if ever I should have had assurance of God's love, I should have had it before this. I have sat under many a comfortable sermon, and under the gospel preached many years, and yet have no assurance of my salvation; surely if the Lord would ever have bestowed assurance upon me, I should have had it ere this: but still unbelieving, and still do I want assurance, and my heart hardened under unbelief, and therefore I am thus discouraged. Have I not cause and reason now?

No, not yet, for our evidence for heaven is in God's keeping, our comforts as well as our graces; and our evidence for heaven, as well as our heaven and salvation; and he will bring it forth when we have most need, in a due time, though not in our time. And if you look into Isaiah xlvi, you shall see what a gracious promise the Lord makes unto hard-hearted sinners; an invitation and promise together: verses 12 and 13, "Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness, I bring near my righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation, it shall not tarry." Oh, but I have no righteousness to lay my assurance upon. Well, yet saith the Lord, Never speak of thy righteousness, man, "I will bring near my righteousness." Oh, but my heart is dead and hard and stout. "Then hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, saith God." Oh, but I am far off from righteousness. Be it so, "Yet hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness, I will bring near my

righteousness, it shall not be far off, and my salvation it shall not tarry."

But that you may have more full satisfaction in this, I shall desire you to consider three or four propositions.

1. Though it be possible for a man to attain to full assurance of God's love, yet he may have saving faith that hath no assurance. Faith and assurance differ; and therefore saith the apostle, "Draw near with full assurance of faith." Assurance of faith comforts, but the reliance of faith saves. It is possible that a man or woman may have such an assurance, as that they never doubted of God's love; but ordinarily, a man never had assurance of his salvation, that never doubted of his salvation. The first step to salvation, is to see that there is no salvation; we must go to heaven by hell gates; and he that is not troubled sometimes with Satan, is possessed by him. I say, ordinarily a man never had assurance of his salvation, that never doubted of his salvation. A man may have true saving faith, that yet hath no assurance of his salvation.\* This is the first.

2. As a man may have true saving faith, and yet no assurance, so a man may have strong faith and assurance, yet many doubts, fears, and mistrustings may be left in his soul. It is observed to my hand, that of all the churches, the church of the Thessalonians are most commended for their faith and their graces, "So that they were examples to all that believed," 1 Thess. i. 7. Yet in chap. iii, verse 10, the apostle saith, there was something lacking in their faith: "Night and day praying exceedingly, that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." Something was lacking in their faith, yet they were examples of faith unto all the churches.

3. As a man may have strong faith with assurance, and yet some doubts and fears may be left in the soul still; so a man may have strong faith and assurance, yet for a long time may be deprived of the feeling of it. And therefore whereas the spouse in the Canticles in one place saith, "I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine;" in another place she saith, "I sought him whom my soul loveth, and I found him

\* Prima pars salutis est nullam sperare salutem.

Ideo terret nos ira Dei ut ad fiduciam illius nos urgeat.—Luther.

not: I opened to my Beloved, and he was gone, and my heart failed; I called and he answered not."

4. As a man may have strong faith, and yet for a great time may be deprived of the feeling of it; so it is possible a man may be a godly, gracious man, yet may continue and go on doubting for a long time, yea possibly, he may die doubting also. The godly and the wicked are contrary. Now for the wicked, you shall find that a wicked man may think his condition good, yet it may be very naught; he may have hope and persuasion that he shall go to heaven, and he may die in these persuasions, yet he may go to hell. Rev. iii. ye read thus of the churches of Laodicea, at verse 16, "So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth: I would thou wert cold or hot," verse 15. These were very wicked; had these people any thoughts of mercy, or did they think their spiritual condition was good? Read verse 17, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked." So that I say, a wicked man may think his condition good, and yet it may be very naught. Yea, daily experience tells us, besides the parable of the foolish virgins, that he may die in these persuasions. So on the contrary, a man may think his condition naught, and go fearing and trembling a long while, yea, even die under these fears, yet his condition may be very good. Consider it rightly, I know indeed, ordinarily, God doth come in with some comfort or other unto a child of God before he dies; but I would be loth to say, and you will be loth to think, that certainly that man goes to hell that doubteth of his salvation, or that dies doubting of his salvation. No, possibly a man may doubt and fear, and doubt long, even die doubting, without a settled assurance of God's love, yet he may go to heaven and be saved for ever. What then, though thou hast stayed long, and hast long wanted assurance, yet God hath not led thee so far as he hath led some, and thy condition is no other than that which may befall the dear servants and children of God.

But, though for the present, you do want assurance of God's love, and of your own salvation: yet if you may conclude by scripture arguments, that you shall have it before

you die, then have you no reason to be discouraged: now, though this or that particular christian, in a case not ordinary, do die under a cloud, and with much fear and doubting about his everlasting condition: yet there are arguments in scripture, whereby a man may ordinarily know, and conclude, that he shall have peace and assurance before he dies. For example,

He that is content to stay, and go without a mercy, if God will have it so, shall not want it for ever: "For the patient abiding of the meek, shall not be forgotten for ever:" Psalm ix. As the way to have affliction continued, is to be discontented under it, so the way to have it removed, is to be contented with it. There is a faith of expectance, a faith of reliance, and the faith of assurance. The faith of expectance, will rise up into a faith of reliance, and the faith of reliance, to the faith of assurance, there is seldom a may-be faith, but hath a shall-be, and it is at the bottom, if God would make it float.

If the Lord hath wrought wonders for thy soul when thou wert in the wilderness, and in a desert; then certainly, he will bring thee into the land of rest. So he dealt by David, so he dealt by Israel, so he will deal by thee.

If thy heart be upright in the matter of thine assurance, God will certainly give assurance unto thee: for ye know what the Psalmist saith, "The Lord will give grace and glory: and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," Psalm lxiv. 21. If therefore, I say, thy heart hath been upright in the matter of thine assurance, the Lord will give thee assurance, though for the present thou wantest it. Now I pray, when is a man's heart upright in the matter of his assurance, but when he doth desire assurance of God's love, and of his own salvation rather than he may praise and serve God the more, than for his own comfort? For this look in Psalm ix. and see how David reasons to this purpose, verse 13, 14. "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: that I may shew forth all thy praises in the gates of the daughters of Zion: I will rejoice in thy salvation." Here are three things observable, first, he was in a very low condition, at the gates of death: from the gates of death, saith he, gates of death, that

is, the power of death : “ The gates of hell shall not prevail,” that is, the powers of hell shall not prevail ; so here, the gates of death, that is, the powers of death. David was under the power of death, at the gates of death, and now in this condition he prays unto the Lord for mercy, that the Lord would lift him up, but why doth he pray so ? mark his end. At verse 14. “ Have mercy upon me, O Lord, consider my trouble.” Why ? “ That I may shew forth thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion.” O Lord, bring me from the gates of death, that I may praise thee in the gates of the daughter of Zion, not for my own comfort, Lord, but that I may praise thee. Well, but what inference doth he make of this ? see what follows in the latter end of verse 14. “ I will, or shall rejoice in thy salvation ;” O Lord, my heart hath been upright in this petition, and now I know that thou wilt grant my prayer, I will, I shall rejoice in thy salvation.

When a man can praise God for what he hath, although his condition be very sad ; God will give him more, and give him a better condition. If God shew mercy, saith one, or give a blessing, and I praise God, I pay my debt ; but if my case be low and sad, and I praise God, then God is pleased to be called my debtor, and he will certainly pay his debt.

If the Lord be the health of your countenance, you shall have the assurance of your salvation in due time, though now you want it. Thus the Psalmist reasons in the text, “ Wait on God, or hope in God, for I shall yet praise him,” why ? “ for he is the health of my countenance.” But when is God said to be the health of our countenance ? when his smiles make us look cheerly, and his frowns make us look sadly ; if I look well when God smiles, though all relations frown ; and do look ill, when God frowns, though all my relations smile ; then is God the health of my countenance. Now I appeal to you, beloved, you that do want assurance, hath it not been thus with you ? Do ye not earnestly desire assurance, yet are content to stay, wait, and go without it, if God will have it so ? Hath not the Lord shewn wonders for thy soul, when thou hast been in a wildered condition, in preserving and keeping thee from doing evil to thyself ; and have not you been upright in the matter of your assurance, saying thus ; O Lord, give me assurance of thy

love, not that I may have comfort only, but that I may be more fit to serve thee: and have ye not praised the Lord, in your sad condition, for what you have: and hath not the Lord been the health of your countenance, so that when the Lord hath smiled upon you, then you have looked well; and when the Lord hath frowned upon you, then you have looked ill? surely you cannot but say, I must not deny these things; I cannot be faithful to mine own soul if I should deny them; yea, Lord, thou knowest, and my soul knows it, that thou hast done wonders for me, when I have been in a low, desert, and bewildered condition. And, O Lord, thou knowest I desire assurance of thy love, not for my own comfort only, but that I may be more fit to praise and serve thee. And, Lord, thou knowest I have praised thee, in some measure, for what I have. Yea, Lord, thou art the health of my countenance: when thou smilest upon me, then I look well; and when thou frownest upon me, then I look ill: I may say in truth, The Lord is the health of my countenance. Well, then, I say unto thee from the Lord, go in peace, and be of good comfort, though thou doest for the present want comfort and assurance of thy salvation, thou shalt have it in due time. And if all these things be true, oh, you that are the people of the Lord, have you any reason to be discouraged? certainly you have not: therefore why should you not check yourselves, as David here, and say, "Why art thou cast down, oh my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me?"

Only, by the way, let no man misapply this doctrine, saying, If we should not be discouraged, although we do want assurance, then I will neglect the getting of my assurance. Beloved, ye see into what times we are now fallen, times of war, and rumours of war; times of blood; these are dying times: and is this a time for any of you to want assurance of God's love? When your hay lies abroad in the summer, and you see a shower coming, you say, Cock up, cock up! and I would to God you might not see showers a coming, and yet your evidences for heaven lie at random; wherefore, in the name of the Lord, cock up, cock up: and you that have false assurance—for you have heard that a man may think his condition is good, when it is naught, yea, that he may die so too—look you well into your condition, and consider your condition duly; this is no time to have false assurance: la-

bour, then, to get true assurance; and you that have assurance, labour to grow up more and more into it, and the riches thereof.

But suppose, for the present, I do want assurance; I confess, indeed, I ought not to be discouraged, although I do want assurance, as I have heard; but it is an hard thing to bear up one's heart against all discouragements, in the want of the assurance of God's love: but suppose I do want it for the present, what shall I now do, that I may bear up against discouragements in this condition?

Some few things by way of direction here, and so I conclude this argument.

Doest thou want assurance of God's love and of thine own salvation? labour more and more for to put to sea, I mean to the sea and ocean of God's love, and the deeps of Christ's merit and satisfaction. When you are at sea in a storm, or stress of weather, you desire sea room, and if ye have sea room enough, ye think all is well: it may be there are some passengers in the vessel or ship, and they say, For the love of God set us ashore, we are not able to ride out this storm; oh, set us upon some land or other: but the skilful mariner saith, Nay, but still keep to sea; if ye come to the shore we are undone, we are all lost creatures. So in this case, the time of the want of your assurance is a storm time, it is a time of great stress upon your soul; and if ye skill not the methods of Christ, you will say, Oh, now set me upon some duty, upon the coast of mine own righteousness, or mine own holiness: but if you have a skill in the way of the gospel, you will rather cry out, and say, O Lord, keep my soul in the ocean of thy free love; sea room, sea room, and all is well enough. Now there is sea room enough in the ocean of God's free love, and of Christ's merits and satisfaction; but if you touch upon your own righteousness, you do but endanger your soul, and sink your own heart into more despairing doubts and fears; stand off, therefore, now, from your own shore, and keep to sea, even that great sea of God's love and Christ's merits.\*

\* *In sola Christi morte totam fiduciam tuam constitue, huic morti te totum committe, hac morte te totum contege eique te totum involve, si Dominus te voluerit judicare, dic Domine, mortem nostri Jesu Christi objicio inter me et te et judicium tuum aliter tecum non contendo ipsius meritum affero pro merito meo*

If you do want assurance, take heed that you do not hearken unto any thing out of an ordinance, contrary unto the comfort which the Lord speaks to you in the time of an ordinance. Ye come to an ordinance, and there the Lord begins to comfort you, so you go away, and ye are satisfied, and your souls are refreshed; but then afterwards, you sit down and parley with Satan, and with your own souls; and ye lose all again, and doubt again, turning God's wine into your own vinegar, and are unsatisfied again. But suppose that a father should give an estate of land unto his child, and make it over to him with the best conveyance that the law can provide; and then this son having laid down his conveyance some where negligently, a cunning lawyer, (that he may get money from him,) should come and write on the back-side of this conveyance, for such and such reasons, this conveyance is naught: should the son do well thereupon to say, my father hath done nothing for me, I have been deceived all this while, my father hath given me nothing; were this fair dealing with his father? and if he should run this course, should he ever have any assurance of his land firm in his own thoughts? Now, so it is with you that are the people of God; the Lord hath given to you a fair inheritance; heaven is your inheritance, the fairest and best inheritance: the Lord hath given it you under hand and seal, and sometimes you think your evidence is clear, and you lay it by, and Satan comes and scribbles on the back of it, and he saith, it is naught; and you believe it, and then you doubt again, and you are unsatisfied again: is this fair dealing with God? Surely no. Wherefore then dost thou want assurance? The way to get it, and the way not to be discouraged in the want of it, is this: take heed that ye never hearken to any thing, out of an ordinance, contrary to the comfort which you have received in an ordinance.

Take heed that you be not discontented with your condi-

*quod habere debuissem et heu non habeo. Anselmo in Meditat.*

*Cavendum est in lucta cum Deo ne fragili fundamento innitaris quod ille facit qui de meritis suis confidit, nam ut ille qui solis meritis suis innititur. Deo auxilio seipsum privat, sic qui de seipso totaliter diffidit et soli gratiæ innititur Dei adjutorium ad se trahit. Parisienis in Lib. de Rhetor. Div.*

*Propter incertitudinem propriæ justitiæ tutissimum fiduciam totam sola Dei misericordia reponere. Bellarm. Lib. 5. de Justif. cap. 7.*

tion: discontentment breeds discouragement: but dost thou want the assurance of God's love? Say thus with thine own soul; however it be, yet will I wait on God, when the Lord pleaseth he will give me assurance; I will only labour to be contented with my condition. But if ye be discontented, ye will certainly be discouraged.

If you do want assurance of God's love, and of your own salvation, take heed that you do not say, I shall never be assured; take heed you do not say, I shall never have a promise; take heed you do not say, I shall never be comforted; take heed you do not say, I shall never have the testimony of the Spirit, bearing witness with my spirit, that I am the child of God; do not say thus, I shall never be helped, I am in a sad condition, and I shall never be better; I am in an uncomfortable condition, and I shall never be comforted; I want assurance, and I shall never have assurance. Beloved, this ye cannot say, for who knows what God will do, whose ways are in the deep, and whose foot-steps are not known? You know how it is with a sick person; if the physician come, and tell him, there is hope of life, then his heart dies not; but if the physician saith to him, Sir, you are in a great and dangerous fever, and I would wish you to settle your estate, and look out for comfort for your soul, for the truth is, you will never be recovered; then his heart dies. So here, take a poor soul that wants assurance, if he saith, there is hope that I may be assured, he is not discouraged: but if he saith, I have no assurance, and I shall never have it, then he is quite discouraged; it is this word *never*, that doth discourage: oh, I shall never be encouraged, and I shall never have assurance, and I shall never have the testimony of God's Spirit. Take heed that you do not say, I shall never be assured, that is a temptation; take heed of the word *never*, in this case.

Carry this for a rule with you, and remember it much; that the less assurance you have, the more precious your obedience may be, and the more kindly God may take it at your hands. It is no great matter for a man to write, and to work by the day light, or candle light; but for a man to write, or to work in the dark, is hard. So here, it is no great matter comparatively, for a man to pray, and to work

spiritually, while he is in the light; but for a poor soul to pray, and to work towards God, and to be obedient, when he is in the dark, and hath no assurance of the love of God, is something: I confess indeed that the more assurance you have, the more full your obedience will be, but the less assurance you have, the more ingenuous may be your obedience; I say, the more full your assurance is, the more full and large your obedience will be; but the less assurance you have, the more ingenuous your obedience may be. Every child will serve his father for his portion, and for his inheritance; but when a child shall doubt of his father's love, yea, when a child shall conclude and say, I know that my father will disinherit me, I know that my father will bestow nothing upon me, yet I will serve him because he is my father; will not all men say, Here is ingenuousness indeed in this child? So between God and you; it is good for a christian to be obedient at all times, and the more assurance you have, the more you are bound to obey; but doth thy soul fear that God will disinherit thee? and yet dost thou say, However it be, I will obey God, for he is my Father; though I cannot see him, yet will I serve him; and though I have no comfort from God, yet will I be obedient to him, for it is my duty, he is my Father? The Lord will take this kindly at thine hands, and what thou wantest in the largeness, shall be made up in the ingenuousness of thine obedience. Wherefore, then, dost thou want assurance of the love of God? Comfort thyself with this, and say within thine own soul, Well, though I do want assurance, I hope, through grace, I am in some measure obedient, and the less assurance I have, the more kindly God takes my obedience at my hand: and therefore why should I be discouraged or cast down? Think, and think often of this rule; and it will help you to be obedient, and bear up your hearts also in the want of assurance.

And thus I have done with the fourth instance.