

SERMON V.

Ps. CXIX. 92.

“ Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction.”

NOW I come to the third and last particular. He that would make the promises as spiritual bladders to keep him from drowning in the deep waters of affliction, must not only make a catalogue of them, and meditate upon them, but he must make application of them to his own soul, as belonging to him in particular ; he must, as it is said of the godly patriarchs, (Heb. xi. 13,) be persuaded of them, and embrace them ; he must hug and kiss them as his rich portion and glorious inheritance. And

this is the chief of all : for no man can receive any comfort from a promise, who is not able to make out his interest in that promise. As the life of a sermon is in the application of it unto ourselves ; so the life of a promise is in the appropriation of it. What am I the better, saith Origen, that Christ took upon Him the flesh of a virgin, if He took not my flesh ? What was the great prince the better for the miraculous plenty in Samaria, when the prophet told him that he should see it with his eyes, but not eat of it ? As the man, who, when he was ready to be drowned, saw a rainbow, (which was a sign that the world should never be again drowned,) said, What am I the better for the rainbow if I perish ; so may I say, What is a man the better for the rich mine of treasure contained in the promises, if he hath no share in it ?

There are three sorts of professors of religion :—

1. Some lay claim to the promises

when they have no right to them ; such are your presumptuous sinners who take it for granted that the promises belong to them, who presume themselves into hell by a false hope in the promises ; who make a featherbed of the promises, upon which they sleep securely in sin. As Thrasilaus, a mad Athenian, laid claim to every ship that came to Athens, though he had right to none ; so a presumptuous sinner lays a claim to every promise, though he hath right to none ; he enlargeth them beyond their bounds, and maketh the conditional promises to be absolute ; and such as belong only to those that are in Christ, to belong to him, though he be not in Christ : he sucks the poison of sin and security out of the sweet flowers of the promises.

2. Some have an interest in the promises, and know their interest ; these live in heaven while they are upon earth ; these rejoice in tribulation, and are more than conquerors over the greatest afflic-

tions ; these are secure from perishing in the day of distress. That man who, taking the Bible into his hand, can say upon right grounds, All the promises in this book are my portion, and I have a right and title to them, this man is happy above expression.

3. Some have an interest in the promises, but do not know their interest, and therefore dare not, in the hour of trouble, apply them for their support and consolation. Such are your broken-hearted, wounded, distressed, and deserted Christians : such can receive no comfort from the promises in the day of affliction. When they begin to apply them for their support, the devil suggesteth to them, and their own doubting hearts tell them, that they misapply them, and that they belong not to them. When a godly minister, whose office is to speak a word in season to those that are weary, (Isa. l. 4,) endeavours by the application of the promises to comfort them, their souls refuse to be comforted,

they exclude themselves from having a right to Christ and His promises, though Christ would not have them excluded. They groundlessly fear that their names are written in the black book of reprobation, and that all the curses of the law are their portion; hence it is that they live so uncomfortably and disconsolately in the time of affliction. Now then for the help of such persons, who have a true title to the promises, but know it not, who walk in darkness, and see no light, who believe they are hypocrites, when they are not, and that they are not in Christ, when they are; that I may be God's instrument to enable such to make application of the precious promises unto their own souls in particular, in the hour of trouble, for their everlasting support and consolation, I shall lay down these ensuing rules and directions:—

Rule 1. Whosoever in a gospel sense doth obey the commanding word of God, hath a real interest in the promising word of God. Though thou canst

The first rule for the right application of the promises.

not perfectly obey the will of God, yet if thou dost truly desire and industriously endeavour to obey it in all things; if God hath written His law in thy heart, and given thee a gospel frame, inclining thee to the obedience of all His commandments sincerely, though not perfectly, this is an infallible evidence that thou hast a right and portion in all the promises. This is that which God saith, "If ye will obey my voice indeed, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure," &c. (Exod. xix. 5;)—if ye will obey my voice indeed, not only in word and in show, but in deed and in truth. Thus Jer. vii. 5, 7, "If ye thoroughly amend your ways, if ye thoroughly execute judgment, &c., then will I cause you to dwell in this place," &c.;—if ye thoroughly amend, &c., not only in some things, but in all things; not only outwardly, but inwardly also. This rule is expressly delivered by the apostle, (1 Tim. iv. 8,) "Godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, and that

which is to come." If thou beest a godly man in a gospel sense,—that is, one who truly and sincerely endeavoureth to be godly; if thou makest God's will thy rule to live by, and not thy own, God's glory thy end, and not thine own carnal interest, God's love thy principle; if thy rules, aims, and principles be godly, all the promises of this life, and of the life to come, belong to thee. It is worth the observing, that all the promises of life and salvation are conditional: happiness is entailed upon holiness, glory upon grace. You shall read in Scripture of the blessings of the covenant, and of the bond of the covenant; of the blessings of the promise, and of the condition of the promises. If ever you would assure yourselves of your interest in the blessings of the covenant, you must try yourselves by your sincere performance of the condition. Thus Christ is promised to none but such as believe; pardon of sin to none but such as repent; and heaven to none but such as

Ezek. xx. 37.

persevere in well doing. Tell me, then, canst thou say, as in God's presence, that thou hast respect to all God's commandments ; though thou failest in all, yet thou hast a respect to all ; that thou obeyest God in deed and in truth, and that thou sincerely labourest to be godly ? This is a certain sign that all the promises are thy portion ; but you that are ungodly, and do not thoroughly amend your ways, you that slight, undervalue, and despise the commanding word, you have no part, no portion in the promising word.

But it may be a distressed Christian, though without just cause, will say that he is afraid that he doth not sincerely obey the commanding word, and therefore dares not apply to himself the promising word ; wherefore I add—

Rule 2. The more thou art afraid lest thou shouldst have no right to the promises, the more right thou hast, in all probability, to them. This I speak only to the distressed Christian, not that I

The second rule for the right application of the promises.

commend his fear. But this I say, this fear which thou art possessed withal, is a probable sign that thou hast an interest in the promises. For a presumptuous sinner never doubts of his right to them, but takes it as a maxim not to be denied that they belong to him. It is a comfortable saying of Mr Greenham's, when thou hearest the promises, and art in a cold sweat, and hast a fear and a trembling seizing upon thee lest they should not belong to thee, doubt not but that they do belong to thee; for Christ hath said, "Come unto me, all ye that Matt. xi. 28. are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And the prophet Isaiah Isa. xxxv. 4. calls upon those who are of a fearful heart to be strong, and fear not; and tells us, for our comfort, that God will look with an eye of favour upon him Isa. lxvi. 2. that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at his word.

Rule 3. The more sensible thou art of thine own unworthiness to lay hold upon the promises, the more thou art fitted The third rule for the right application of the promises.

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and qualified to lay hold upon them. For the promises are, as I have showed, the fruit of free grace. Nothing moved God to enter into covenant with His people, and thereby to become their debtor, but His free love. Free grace brought Christ down from heaven, and it is free grace must carry us up to heaven. Christ himself is called the gift of God in John iv. 10. Moses tells the Israelites, (Deut. vii. 7, 8,) "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people," &c. "But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you," &c. God doth not love us because we are worthy of His love; but because He loves us, therefore He makes us worthy. We must not bring worthiness to Christ, but fetch worthiness from Christ. And therefore if thou beest sensible of thine own nothingness,

emptiness, and unworthiness, lay hold upon that excellent promise, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Blessed are those Matt. v. 3. who are sensible of their spiritual want, for to them belongs the kingdom of heaven, as certainly as if they were already in it.

Rule 4. Study thy interest in the main and fundamental promise, and that will help thee to make out thy interest in all the others. The fourth rule for the right application of the promises. 2 Cor. i. 20. The main and fundamental promise is the promise of Christ; for all promises, whether spiritual or temporal, are made to us in and through Him. God hath promised never to leave us nor forsake us, and that all things shall work together for our good; that is, if we be in Christ. God hath said, "All things are ours, whether Paul, or Apollos, whether life or death, whether things present, or things to come," (1 Cor. iii. 21, 22;) but it is with this proviso, if we be Christ's. Whosoever takes any comfort from any

temporal promise, and is not in Christ, doth but delude and cheat himself. This then is thy work, O Christian : study thy interest in Christ, make out that, and make out all. If no interest in Christ, no interest in the promises ; if an interest in Christ, an interest in the promises. Let this then be thy daily business to make it out to thy soul, that Christ is thine.

Three things to be studied in order to the making out of our interest in Christ

Quest. How shall I be able to do this ?

Ans. For this purpose you must diligently study three things—

1. The universality of the promise of Christ.
2. The freeness of it.
3. The condition upon which He is tendered.

First, the universality of the promise of Christ. Mark xvi. 15, 16.

1. The universality of the promise of Christ. Christ Jesus, with all His benefits, is promised to every one who is willing to lay hold on Him, as He is tendered in the gospel. The apostles are commanded to go into all the world,

and to preach the gospel to every creature, "He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved," &c. If thou hast a heart to believe, be thy sins never so great, it is for the honour of Jesus Christ to pardon them. As the sea covers great rocks as well as small, so the mercy of God in Christ will pardon great sins, as well as little. It will cost Christ as little to wash away the guilt of great sins as of small. Christ is a great physician. And David prayeth, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is great," (Ps. xxv. 11.) Though thy sins be never so bloodily circumstantiated, though never so often reiterated, though thou beest never so loathsome, yet if thou canst believe, there is a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness; and therefore let no man exclude himself from a right to Christ, who is willing to take Christ upon Christ's terms. He that excludes himself, offers the greatest injury imaginable.

First, unto Jesus Christ, for he makes Him a liar. Christ hath said, "If any man come to me, I will in no wise cast him out;" and he saith, Christ will cast me out, although I do come to Him.

John vi. 37.

Secondly, unto his own soul, for he necessitates himself unto damnation; for Christ hath said expressly, "He that believeth not shall be damned."

Object. But I am afraid that I am a reprobate, and that God hath excluded me from having an interest in Christ.

Ans. Who told thee so? It is one great sign thou art not, because the devil would persuade thee that thou art. But, however, secret things belong to God; but those things which are revealed, to us and our children. God hath kept the black book of reprobation secret. He openeth the whole book of election to some of His children, but He keeps His black book unrevealed. It is a sin for any man to think himself a reprobate, (unless he can prove that he

hath sinned the sin against the Holy Ghost,) for this thought would hinder him from the use of means for his salvation, and cause him to despair, which is a sin of the first magnitude; and therefore take heed of complimenting thyself into hell by a sinful modesty, in refusing to believe in Christ. Take heed of dallying or delaying in the great work of laying hold on Christ upon Christ's terms. Remember God excludes none from Christ, but such as exclude themselves by unbelief. And remember, "Whosoever believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

2. You must study the freeness of the promise of Christ. God promiseth Jesus Christ freely—"Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat, yea, come buy wine and milk without money, and without price," &c. Christ is offered in the gospel, without price, without merit, and without any

Study the freeness of the promise of Christ.

Rev. xxii.
17; Isa. lv. 1.

motive inducing on our parts. Therefore the Holy Ghost saith, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Let not then thy undeservedness hinder thee from laying hold upon Christ as thy portion. Say not, I am not worthy that Christ should own me. Christ will own thee, not because thou art worthy, but because He delights in mercy, (Mic. vii. 18.) Say not, I am not humbled enough, and therefore I dare not lay hold upon Christ. For humiliation is not required to make us precious to Christ, but to make Christ precious to us; and if thou beest so far humbled, as to be willing to take Christ upon Christ's terms, thou art humbled enough, unto divine acceptation, though not unto divine satisfaction. Every stung Israelite, who was enabled to look up to the brazen serpent, was healed, though he was not stung to that proportion that another Israelite was.

Study the condition upon which Christ is promised.

3. You must study the condition upon which Christ is promised. It is cer-

tain Christ is not tendered absolutely, without any condition. Christ is not offered to a proud sinner, resolving so to continue, or to a drunkard, resolving to persevere in his drunkenness. Those texts which declare the freeness of the offer of Christ, do also mention a condition to be performed by those that will have Him, (Rev. xxii. 17 ; Isa. lv. 1.) In both places the condition of thirsting is expressed : “ Let him that is athirst come ; ” “ Ho every one that thirsteth.”

Quest. Doth not the mentioning of a condition take away the freeness of the tender of Christ ?

Ans. By no means. The reason is, because this very condition is the free gift of God. The apostle saith, (Rom. iv. 16,) “ Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.” The condition of faith doth not make the offer of Christ not to be of grace : but therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace ; for as Christ, so also faith is the gift of God.

We do not preach conditions unto justification in a Popish sense, as if they merited out of congruity the pardon of sin ; or in an Arminian sense, as if we could do any thing by our free-will, without grace, to dispose ourselves unto justification ; but in a Scripture sense we say, that all those on whom God intends to bestow Christ freely, He freely openeth their eyes to see their undone condition out of Christ, He humbles them under the sense of their sad condition, and out of His free mercy enables them by faith to lay hold upon Christ, and to accept of Him upon His own terms. Faith is not the cause for which, but the cause without which, God will not give us Christ.

Quest. But what is the condition upon which Christ is promised ?

Ans. There is, if I may so speak, the condition required to the preparing and disposing us for an interest in Christ, and the condition applying Christ to us, and bringing Him into our possession.

1. The condition required to the disposing, preparing, and fitting us for an interest in Christ. And this is the sight of our sins, the sense of them, and a real willingness to part with them. There is no man qualified, according to the gospel, to rest upon Christ for pardon of his sins, who is not really willing to part with them. And no man will be willing to part with his sins, which he naturally loves as himself, unless he see the sinfulness and cursedness of them, and feels in some measure the smart of them. The woman who had the bloody issue never thought of coming to Christ, till all her money was spent in vain among other physicians. The prodigal child would never have returned to his father, had he not seen himself utterly undone by wandering from him.

2. The condition applying Christ to us, and bringing Him into our possession. This is faith, which therefore is the proper condition of the gospel, upon which Christ is tendered. Now this faith is not a

bare receiving and taking of Christ; for there are many who take Him, and mistake Him. There is no man but is willing when he is dying to take Christ, as the men of the old world were willing to go into the ark when the flood came. But this taking and receiving of Christ, if it be right, hath six properties:—

Right receiving of Christ hath six properties.

(1.) It is a receiving of Christ with all His appurtenances: Christ and disgrace, and reproach and poverty, Christ and His cross. There are many would be glad of Christ, but they will not take up His cross. They would take Christ down from the cross, as Joseph of Arimathea did, and leave the cross behind them. But he that takes Christ aright will be as willing to wear a crown of thorns for His sake as a crown of gold.

(2.) It is a receiving of Christ in all His offices, as our King, Priest, and Prophet. A true believer is as willing to receive Christ into his soul, as he is that Christ should receive him into

heaven ; he is as willing to have Christ reign over him, as he is to reign with Christ in heaven. He desires not only to be saved, but to be healed by Christ.

(3.) It is a receiving of Christ into every room of the soul ; for Christ will come into every room, or into never a room. A true believer opens every door unto Christ ; he gives Him the lock and key of the whole man, and desires that He would come and reside in every room.

(4.) It is a receiving of Christ, and Him only. For Christ must rule alone, or not at all. A hypocrite would compound with Christ, and, like the false mother, divide the child ; but a true believer saith with the prophet, “ O Lord our God, other lords besides thee have had dominion over us ; but now by thee only will we make mention of thy name.” And with the true mother he will give the whole to God.

(5.) It is a receiving of Christ in health as well as in sickness ; in prosperity as

well as in adversity; in youth as well as in old age; in life as well as in death. Most people make use of Christ, merely as a shelter against a storm, for their own ends, (as the Athenians did of Themistocles,) and when the storm is over, forsake Him. Most people fly to Christ in their distress, as Joab did to the horns of the altar; and when they can serve the devil no longer, then they begin to think of serving of God. But a true believer will give his best days to God as well as his worst; he desires not only to die in Christ, but to live for Christ; he receives Christ in health, &c.

(6.) It is a receiving of Christ, not only for an hour, or a day, or a year, but for ever. True faith marries the soul to Christ never to part. Once a member of Christ, for ever a member.

Now, there is no child of God, of what size soever, (though he be but as a toe in Christ's body,) who cannot truly say that he is willing to receive

Jesus Christ with all these properties, to receive all Christ, with all His appurtenances, and to receive Him only, in every room, in health, and for ever. And therefore let not the devil, or thy misgiving heart, or thy melancholy fancy, keep thee off from believing that Christ Jesus is thy portion, and that thou hast an interest in the main and fundamental promise, and by that in all the others. Do to Christ as the Shunammitish woman did to the prophet, lay fast hold on Him, and suffer not the devil to cause thee to let go thy hold. Oh that there might be this day a blessed and happy marriage between Jesus Christ and every distressed Christian.

Object. But suppose I am willing to take Christ upon Christ's terms, can I rest assured that Christ will receive me?

Ans. Yes, doubtless. For He hath said He will, and He is truth itself, and cannot lie. Indeed, a poor wounded sinner will sometimes confess that he is

2 Kings iv. 30.

John vi. 37.

Isa. lv. 1; Rev. xxii. 3.

willing with all his heart to receive Christ upon His own terms; but he is afraid lest Christ should refuse to receive him.

John i. 12.

But this is a needless fear, for Christ will in no wise refuse those that come to Him. To as many as receive Him, to all those He will give power to become the sons of God, even to them that

John v. 24.

believe on His name. He that believeth hath everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life. So much for the fourth rule.

If these rules and directions already named will not enable thee to apply the promises, so as to keep thee from perishing in the day of distress, let me add—

The fifth rule
for the right
application
of the pro-
mises.

Rule 5. If thou canst not lay hold upon the promises made to those who are in the highest form in Christ's school, lay hold upon the promises made to those who are in the lower forms. In Christ's school there are divers sorts of scholars; some are in the high form,

some in the middle, some in the lowest; some are babes in Christ's school, some are grown Christians; some are as tall cedars, some are as low shrubs. Now you must know that it is our duty to labour to be of the highest form. He that saith he hath grace enough, hath grace little enough. He that stints himself in his endeavours after grace, never had true grace. We must labour to be perfect as God is perfect. But yet you must also know, that he that is a real scholar in Christ's school is in a happy condition, though he be not the best scholar; and that it is our duty so to eye the eminent graces which are in others as to be thereby incited to a further progress in grace, but not so as to be thereby disheartened and discouraged. There are many distressed Christians like to those who gaze so long upon the brightness of the sun, that when they come into their houses they cannot see at all—they pore so much upon the transcendent excellences which are in

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their brethren, that they are stark blind in their own concernments, and cannot see any grace in themselves, and hereupon are apt to conclude that they are out of God's favour. But this is a *non sequitur*. The foot must not say that it is no part of the body, because it is not so eminent a part as the head or heart. We must rather say with the martyr, "Blessed be God that I am a member in Christ's body, though but the weakest and lowest." We must not rest satisfied with being low Christians; but yet we must not therefore say, we are no Christians. And when we are under great tribulations and temptations, if we cannot apply to ourselves for our comfort those promises which are made to eminent saints of the highest form, let us apply those which are made unto true saints, though to such as are the lowest of the lowest form; and hereby we shall, through God's blessing, find our souls marvellously supported and comforted. As, for ex-

ample, Christ hath said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And, therefore, though Matt. v. 3. thou art not rich in grace, yet if poor in spirit, thou art blessed. Christ saith, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Though thou Matt. v. 4. canst not live without sin, yet if a mourner for thine own and other men's sins, thou art blessed.

Christ saith, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." Though thou findest an exceeding great want of righteousness in thee, yet if thou hungerest and thirstest after it, thou art blessed. Matt. v. 6.

Christ saith, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This text is an Matt. xi. 28. alabaster-box full of precious consolation. If thy sins be a burden to thee, Christ will give thee rest; if thou carriest them about thee, not as a golden chain about thy neck, but as an iron chain about thy feet; if thou beest

heavy laden with them, Christ will take them off thy shoulders, and put them upon His.

Christ saith that He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, till He send forth judgment unto victory. If thou hast grace but as a smoking flax, Christ will not quench it, but assist it, till it come to a great flame.

Matt. x. 20.

Christ saith that the whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick, and that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. If thou art a sin-sick sinner, thy name is in Christ's commission—He came to save thee.

Matt. ix. 12,
13.

Christ saith, "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost." If thou apprehendest thyself to be in a lost condition, thou art amongst the number of those whom Christ came to save.

Matt. xviii.
11.

The apostle saith, "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ,

who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Though thou hast much Rom. viii. 1. flesh in thee, and art sometimes overtaken with sin, yet if thou dost not walk after the flesh, as a servant after his master, if thou walkest after the Spirit, there is no condemnation to thee.

The apostle saith, “If we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” If we confess our sins, out 1 John i. 9. of a detestation of sin, with bleeding hearts, and a sincere purpose of forsaking them, God is bound by virtue of His promise to forgive us, else He were unfaithful.

The apostle saith, that He that hath begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. And Phil. i. 6. therefore if thou hast truth of grace, though but as a grain of mustard-seed, do not doubt but that God, in the diligent use of means, will enable thee to persevere.

The sixth
rule for the
right appli-
cation of the
promises.

Rule 6. If thou canst not apply to thyself for thy comfort in affliction the conditional promises, lay hold on the absolute promises. I have formerly told you that there are some promises conditional, others absolute; some to grace, others of grace; some to those that are godly, others to make us godly. God hath not only promised to pardon those that repent, but to give repentance; not only to justify those that believe, but to give us to believe; not only to give heaven to those that love Him, but to give us grace to love Him; not only to save those that persevere, but to enable us to persevere; and, therefore, if thou canst not lay hold upon the promises to those that are godly, apply those which are made to make us godly. If not those which are made to those that repent, believe, and persevere, apply those wherein God promiseth to give us to repent, believe, and persevere. If not the conditional, lay hold upon the absolute.

Acts v. 21 ;
Phil. i. 29 ;
Deut. xxx. 6 ;
Jer. xxxii.
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There are these differences and agreements between conditional and absolute promises—

1. For conditional promises.

(1.) All promises of life and salvation are conditional.

(2.) Conditional promises are the fruit of free grace, as well as absolute. It is free grace which enableth us to perform the conditional, and free grace which moved God to promise such great mercies upon such conditions.

(3.) They are the fruit of rich grace and rare mercy, as well as absolute promises.

(4.) They are of great use to quicken a lazy Christian, and to encourage him to diligence; for no man can obtain the blessing promised, but he that performs the conditions enjoined.

(5.) They are rare touchstones to try our interest in the promises; for he that neglects to perform the condition cannot challenge an interest in the blessing promised upon the performing of it.

2. For absolute promises.

(1.) Though promises to grace be conditional, yet promises of grace are absolute, and are made by God unto Christ in the behalf of His elect children, according to that of David, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

(2.) There are no promises so absolute as to exclude all endeavours on our part. God will do the things promised for us, but by us. We work, but it is God who worketh all our works in us and for us.

(3.) Absolute promises are foundations of industry, as well as conditional. The truth of this I made out in the former sermon.

(4.) Absolute promises are demonstrative arguments of special election, and of the perseverance of the saints. There are some peculiar ones to whom God hath promised, in the use of means, absolutely to write His law in their

hearts, to cause them to walk in His ways, to give them infallibly and infustrably repentance, faith, and perseverance. The promise of the first grace, and of the crowning grace, is absolute. And therefore the doctrine of special election, and of perseverance, must needs be true.

(5.) Absolute promises are mighty helps to wounded consciences, and rare cordials for fainting and despairing Christians. When thou art in the dark, and seest no light, fly from the conditional promises to the absolute; say, Lord, Thou hast not only promised to give pardon to those who repent, but Thou hast exalted Christ for to give repentance; Thou hast not only promised to justify those who believe, but to give grace to believe. Lord fulfil Thine own promise unto Thy servant, &c.

Object. All my fear is that these absolute promises do not belong to me.

Ans. Take heed of making desperate conclusions against thyself. Say as the

King of Nineveh, "Who knoweth but God may turn and have mercy?" Exclude not thyself. Neither man nor angel can say thou art excluded. No man ought to believe himself to be a reprobate (as I have showed;) these promises belong to all that can lay hold on them as they are tendered. As the brazen serpent belonged to all those who were able to look upon it, so do these promises to all that can by faith look up, that they may be healed. Say as the four lepers in another case, If I go on in unbelief, I am certainly damned, and therefore I will venture upon Christ, I will fly to this ark, and if I perish, I perish believing.

2 Kings vii.

If these directions will not suffice to comfort thee in the day of adversity, let me add—

The seventh rule for the right application of the promises.

Rule 7. All promises made in Scripture to the saints in general are applicable to every saint in particular. God promised to Solomon, (1 Kings viii. 37, 40,) and Jehoshaphat applied this to his

own particular condition, (2 Chron. xx. 9.) God promiseth to the saints in general that He will give them grace and glory; that He will withhold no good thing from them; that they shall want nothing that is good; and that all outward blessings shall be added to them. Now, there is no saint but he may as justly lay hold upon those promises as if his name were named in them; and the reason is, because all the promises do meet in Christ, as all lines in a centre. And every saint hath all Christ. And therefore promises made to those that are in Christ belong to all that are in Christ.

Rule 8. All promises made to particular saints are applicable to all saints in the same condition. God promiseth by Joshua, that He would never leave him nor forsake him. This is applied by the apostle for the comfort of every saint. Christ tells Peter, (Luke xxii. 32,) "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." This is applicable to every saint. Christ prayeth for thee and

Ps. xlviii. 10;

Ps. xliii. 10;

Matt. vi. 33.

The eighth
rule for the
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promises.
Josh. v.
Heb. xiii. 5.

me, and therefore he adds, "When thou are converted strengthen thy brethren." Therefore the apostle Paul saith that God comforted him in his tribulation that he might be able to comfort those who are in trouble by the comfort wherewith he was comforted. And

2 Cor. i. 4.

Jas. v. 20, 11.

the apostle James propounds the example of the prophets in general, and of Job in particular, to persuade unto patience in affliction. And therefore when thou art in any strait, consider what God hath promised unto others in thy condition, and what God hath done to them He will do to thee, for He is unchangeable. And say not, if I were a Paul, a Peter, or a Job, God would do to me as He did to them; but I am a poor, weak, unworthy creature, not worthy to be named in the day which these are named. But consider, if thou beest a member of Christ's body, (though but as the toe,) Christ will have a care of thee. If a child of God, (though but weak and sickly,)

thy heavenly Father will provide for thee. A father is tender of every child, and a man of every member of his body; so will God be of all those who belong to Him, though but babes in Christ.

Rule 9. The promises of the gospel are all concatenated. If thou hast a true right to any one promise to which heaven is annexed, thou hast a right to all the others. As the commandments of God are chained together, he that breaks one breaks all, and he that sincerely labours to keep one will labour to keep all, according to that rule, Whatsoever is done for God is done equally. And as the graces of God are linked together, (and therefore heaven is sometimes promised to our grace, because he that hath one saving grace hath all,) so also are the promises joined together—he that hath a right to one hath a right to all. For they are all but one and the same for substance. They are all the fruit of the same free love in God. They are all the branches of the same

The ninth rule for the right application of the promises.

covenant of grace, (and therefore if thou hast a right to the covenant, thou hast a right to all the promises;) they all carry us to Christ and meet in Christ, and are in Him·Yea, and in Him Amen. And therefore if thou hast a right to Christ, thou hast a right to all.

This is a point of singular comfort in the worst of days and dangers; for sometimes a child of God under great afflictions can lay hold upon one promise and not upon another, and some can apply those which others cannot, and others those which they cannot. Let all such know for their great comfort, that he that hath right to one branch of the covenant hath right to all. He that hath let fall a chain of gold, consisting of divers links, into the water, if he can catch hold upon any one of the links, he will easily get out the whole chain. The promises are like to a golden chain with divers links; lay hold upon one aright, and this will assure thee of thy interest in all the rest.

I have known many, yea, very many, who have died with a great deal of comfort from the application of that one text unto their own condition, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren," (John iii. 14.) When all other evidences failed them, and all other texts of Scripture afforded them no comfort, here they anchored, here they found rest for their souls. They blessed God that they could say, that they loved the brethren, and loved them not for any outward respect, but because of the image of God in them, and they loved them when poor, as well as when rich; and the more they had of God, the more they loved them; and they loved them even when they were reprov'd by them of their faults. And upon this one plank they swam safely and comfortably unto the haven of eternal happiness.

Rule 10. If thy condition be so sad, thy melancholy so excessive, that thou canst not lay hold upon any promise, yet notwithstanding look towards it;

The tenth rule for the right application of the promises.

say, as Jonah when he was in the whale's belly, "Then I said I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again towards thy holy temple," (Jonah ii. 4.) The temple was a type of Christ. Though thou canst not apply Christ to thy soul for thy comfort, yet look towards Him; and if thou canst not come to Him, He will come to thee: if thou canst not apprehend Him, He will apprehend thee. As the loadstone will draw the iron, though the iron cannot draw the loadstone; so will Christ (thy heavenly loadstone) draw thee to the promise, though thou canst not draw thyself to it. "No man can come to me," saith Christ, "except the Father draw him;" pray therefore with the Church, (Cant. i. 4,) "Draw me, and we will run after thee."

Ps. iii. 12.

John vi. 44.

The eleventh rule for the right application of the promises.

Rule II. Pray unto God to give thee spiritual eyes to behold thy interest in the promises. For as it is God who makes them, so it is only He who can irradiate them, and open thy eyes to see

thy right in them. It is with promises, as I have said, as with chapters and sermons; a man may read a chapter, and hear a sermon, and taste no sweetness in them at one time, and at another time taste much sweetness in them, as God is pleased to co-operate with the reading of the one, and hearing of the other. So it is with the promises, and therefore pray unto God to lighten thine eyes, that thou sleep not the sleep of death. Ps. xii. 3.

Pray unto Christ to anoint thine eyes with His spiritual eye-salve; and to Rev. iii. 18 cause thee to hope in His word of promise; according to that excellent prayer of David, "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." It is God must cause us to Ps. cxix. 49. hope and trust in His promises, or else we shall never be able. God hath given thee eyes to see thy misery; oh pray for eyes to see His mercy. The church of Laodicea wanted eyes to see her misery; she was miserable, and naked, and knew Rev. iii. 16. it not. Thou hast eyes to see thy undone

condition out of Christ ; pray for eyes to behold the riches of mercy that are in Christ, and His willingness to receive all that come unto Him.

The twelfth rule for the right application of the promises.

Rule 12. Pray unto God, not only to give thee spiritual eyes, to see thy interest in the promises, but a spiritual hand, to enable thee to apply them to thine own soul in particular. By this spiritual hand, I mean, a Christ-appropriating faith. Justifying faith is, as it were, the hand of the soul, by which we appropriate Christ, and all the promises, as belonging to us in particular. Now faith is the gift of God. Pray for the spirit of faith. And for your encouragement, consider, that the Spirit is called the promise of the Father, and that Holy Spirit of promise: And God hath promised to give the Spirit to those who ask for it:—"If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children ; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him ?" The office of the

Eph. ii. 8.

Acts i. 4.

Eph. i. 13.

Luke xi. 13.

Holy Spirit is first to seal grace, and then to seal to grace: first, the Spirit sanctifieth us; then it witnesseth to our spirits that we are sanctified. Pray Eph. i. 14. therefore unto God that He would not only work grace in you, but witness unto the grace which He hath wrought. Pray for the sanctifying and sealing work of the Spirit, that He would not only fit you to have an interest in the promises, but assure you of your interest in them.

Rule 13. Study thy interest in the promises in the time of health and outward prosperity, for I find by experience that a child of God, under outward affliction, or divine desertion, or extreme melancholy, is many times like a man in the dark. A man in the dark cannot, though never so learned, read in a book of the clearest print or fairest characters; he cannot, though never so active, undertake anything of weight. No more can a child of God in the hour of distress read his evidences for heaven,

The thirteenth rule for the right application of the promises.

much less study to find out evidences ; he looks upon all the promises with a black pair of spectacles, and wants light to see his interest in them. When Zion was in distress she said, " God had forsaken her, and her Lord had forgotten her." When David was persecuted by Saul, he said in his haste, " All men were liars," even Samuel himself, who had told him that God would bestow the kingdom on him. He said in his haste he was cut off from before God's eyes. Thus did Haman. Christ himself cried out, when He was upon the cross, with a loud voice, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" As men in agues and fevers are not fit judges of meats and drinks, whether they be good or bad, because their palates are out of taste ; so a distressed Christian, when under extreme melancholy, divine desertion, or some great affliction, is no fit judge at such a time of his interest in the promises. And therefore my advice is, make out thy in-

Isa. xlix. 1.

Ps. cxvi. 1.

Ps. xxxi. 22,
lxxxviii. 13-
18.

terest in time of prosperity, and lean upon it in time of adversity. Make and read over thy evidences for heaven in time of health, and learn them by heart, that when thou comest into a dark condition, thou mayest neither have them to make or to read. Do as Tamar did, (Gen. xxxviii. 18-25.) When Judah, her father-in-law, lay with her, she took as a pledge his signet, bracelets, and staff; and afterwards, when she was in great distress, and ready to be burnt as a harlot, she then brought her staff, and signet, and bracelets, and said, "By the man whose these are am I with child;" and thereby she saved her life. So must you do. In time of health, study thy interest in the promises, and in time of sickness live upon what thou hast studied, then bring forth thy staff and bracelets, &c. Then produce thy evidences, and make use of them, as spiritual buttresses to keep thee from falling into despair.

I knew a very godly woman, not un-

known to many here, who in her life-time had taken a great deal of pains to compose and write down her evidences for heaven, and who also kept a diary of her life, and wrote down how she spent every day. When she lay upon her deathbed, it pleased God to withdraw Himself from her for a while, and to let the devil loose, who tempted her to despair, told her she was a hypocrite, a formalist, and that she had no true grace in her. She sent for me, made her bitter complaint to me, and sadly bewailed her condition. Then she told me, which before I knew not, how she had spent her life, how careful she had been in searching her ways, in observing how she spent every day, and how exact in collecting evidences for heaven. The book was sent for, I read a great part of it to her, and took much delight and content in what I read. And it pleased God to come to her with comfort in the reading of it. She showed her staff and

her bracelets, and thereby quenched the fiery darts of the devil.

Thus I have in three sermons taught you how to make use of Scripture promises, as conduits of soul-support and soul-consolation in the day of distress. When you hereafter read the Bible, remember the promising word, as well as the commanding and threatening word ; make a catalogue of the promises, meditate upon the preciousness, freeness, usefulness, latitude, richness, and immutability of them. They are as certain as God himself ; they have the strength of God, the comforts of God, and assistance of God in them ; above all, labour to make application of them to your own soul. For this purpose, study these thirteen rules and directions. Pray unto God to give thee spiritual eyes to see thy interest in them, and spiritual hands to reach out after them. Pray to God to give thee spiritual ability, to act faith upon the promises, to draw virtue from

them, as the woman who had the bloody issue did from Christ; to suck out all the sweetness that is in them, to hang upon them, as the woman did upon the prophet, and as the bee doth upon a flower; and by application of them to thy soul to live in God and on God here, till thou comest to enjoy the blessings promised with God for ever in heaven.

There is one objection behind, which, when I have answered, I have done. For a distressed Christian will object, and say—

Object. Though the promises are rare cordials, and shall all of them be certainly fulfilled, yet God is oftentimes long before He fulfils them; and while God is fulfilling of His promises, I may in the meantime perish in my afflictions.

Ans. It cannot be denied but that God is oftentimes very long in fulfilling His promises. He promised that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head; but it was four thousand years before that promise was actually

Gen. iii. 15.
Luke xviii.
7, 8.

accomplished. He promiseth to avenge His elect of all their enemies; to do it speedily; and the souls under the altar cry, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Rev. vi. 10. But this is not yet fulfilled.

Nay, I must add, that God is not only a long time performing His promises, but sometimes, instead of performing them, He seems to the eye of flesh and blood to walk contrary to them. Sometimes the providences of God run cross to His promises. God promised to make David king: instead of this, he is persecuted by Saul as a partridge upon the mountains; he is driven to that extremity, that he begins to doubt of God's promise, and to say that one day he should die by the hand of Saul. God promised to Joseph that the sun, moon, and stars should worship him, and that 1 Sam. xxvii. his sheaf should be lifted up above the sheaves of his brethren. But he finds the quite contrary: his brethren seek to slay

him, sell him into Egypt, and there he is put in prison as one quite forsaken of God. But yet notwithstanding all this, you must know that though the way of God in performing His promises be very mysterious and secret, yet He will at last perform every iota and tittle of them. Thus David was at last made king of Israel, and Joseph lord of Egypt, and his brethren came all to worship him.

Quest. How must we carry and behave ourselves at such times, when providences seem to run cross unto God's promises?

Ans. At such times there are three things required of us:—

Three duties to be practised when providences run cross to promises.

I. It is our duty to wait patiently and believingly till providences and promises meet together. He that believeth, maketh not haste. The prophet there speaks of a glorious promise, and adds, that a true saint will wait God's time, which is the fittest and best time; he will patiently expect till God fulfil His promise; he will do as the martyr did,

Isa. xxviii. 1,
2.

who might have escaped privately out of prison, and was tempted to it by his friends, but answered, he would not go out of prison when his enemies would have him, for they would make him tarry longer than he should, nor yet when his friends would have him, for they would make him tarry a lesser time than he should; but he would come out when God would have him. God's time is the best, and they are soon enough delivered, who are delivered in God's way, and at God's time. This then is thy great duty, O Christian,—to wait patiently, and believingly, and not to seek by unlawful ways to be rid of thy miseries, as David did by going to the Philistines; and as many in Queen ¹ Sam. xxvii. Mary's days did, by yielding to the ¹ Popish superstitions. To help you to wait God's leisure, holding faith and a good conscience, you have—

(1.) Many rare and precious promises made to those that wait upon Him; which I have formerly named.

(2.) You have four attributes in God to support you—His faithfulness, almightiness, infinite goodness, and wisdom. He is faithful, and not one tittle of His Word shall fall to the ground : He is almighty, and able to do whatsoever he hath promised ; He is infinitely wise, to know the best time and season ; and infinitely good and loving to His children, and doth not willingly afflict them, but will make haste to help them.

Lam. iii. 35.

2. It is our duty to live upon promises, while providences seem to run cross to promises. This is the meaning of Hab. ii. 4, "The just shall live by faith." They shall live by faith ; when they have nothing else to live on, when sense and reason tell them they are undone, then shall they live by faith in the promises, and not only live patiently, but comfortably, and joyfully ; as the same prophet saith, (Hab. iii. 17-19,) "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine, and the field shall yield no meat," &c.,

“yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will joy in the God of my salvation.”

This life did Paul live, when the ship in which he was, was ready to be drowned, when there was neither sunlight, nor starlight, yet he was exceedingly cheerful, because God had promised to preserve him, and those with him. By living this life, God is much honoured, and our souls much quieted and refreshed.

Acts xxvii
20, 23, 24.

3. It is our duty to continue praying till providences and promises meet together. For it is prayer, and prayer only, which will at last reconcile God's promises, and God's dispensations, and cause them to meet and to kiss one another; for as the promises are the ground and rule of our prayers, so our prayers are the divine ways and means for the obtaining of the promises. I say as the promises are—

(1.) The ground of our prayers. For we cannot pray in faith, unless we have some promise to bottom our prayers up-

on; therefore David often chargeth God in his prayers ~~with~~ His promise.

Ps. cxix. 28,
38. 41, 65, 76,
107, 142, 149.

He harps eight times upon the same string in one psalm, to teach us, that the greatest rhetoric and oratory we can use in our prayers, is to urge God with His promise.

(2.) They are not only the ground, but the rule of our prayers. As we must pray for nothing but what God hath promised, so we must regulate our prayers according to God's promises. Those things which He hath absolutely promised, we must pray for absolutely; and where God hath put conditions and exceptions, there our prayers must be conditional.

Now as the promises are the ground and rule of our prayers, so our prayers are divine means and helps for the obtaining of the promises. Though God hath made many glorious and precious promises to His children, yet He will perform none of them, but to those who

by prayer seek them at His hands. When Nathan told David what great things God had promised to him, he went into God's house to pray for them, (2 Sam. vii.) The prophet Isaiah mentioneth a glorious promise, (Isa. xliii. 25;) but he adds, "Put me in remembrance," (verse 20.) Thus (Ezek. xxxvi. 37,) "I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel;" and therefore when you read the promises of the Bible, remember whatsoever God makes a promise, you must make a prayer, and that prayer will hasten the fulfilling of the promises. You must continue to pray, and faint not: for the vision is but for an appointed time; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry. This did Daniel, when he understood the time approached, &c. He prayed, (Dan. ix. 2, 3.) Thus did David, (Ps. lvi. 9, 10, lvii. 1, 2.) Thus must you do. These are the three great duties which the Lord requires of us at

all times, but more especially in these our days, wherein the providences of God seem to run quite cross unto His promises. The Lord give us grace to practise them. So much for this text.

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