

## FAITH IN PRAYER.

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*But let him ask in faith.*—JAMES I. 6.

THE apostle, in the former verses, after the preface, directs the Jews how they should bear afflictions, viz., with joy, ver. 2, 3; patience, ver. 4; wisdom, ver. 5.

‘Servant.’ 1, By universal subjection, and in respect of their state; not, 2, by particular employment in respect of their use, as Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus.

‘All joy.’ Not in respect of the afflictions themselves, for they are grievous, and we are not required to be Stoics; but in respect of the issue, to prevent sin, purge corruption, increase holiness, glorify God, and try grace, ver. 8.

‘Perfect work.’ *Extensivè*, to all its objects, occasions. *Intensivè*, in all its acts.

‘Lack wisdom.’ To demean himself under afflictions so as to attain the former ends.

‘It shall be given.’ There is a promise, the object of faith, with an encouragement to act faith from God’s gracious disposition. He gives, gives to many, to all men; gives much, liberally and freely too, he upbraids none; how much soever he gives, he never thinks much.

But the promise is conditional, and the condition is expressed: ver. 6, ‘Let him ask in faith;’ otherwise he asks in vain, ver. 7.

*Obs.* He that would have God to give what he asks, must ask in faith: Mark xi. 24, ‘Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them;’ Mat. xxi. 22, ‘Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.’ A great privilege, but limited.

*Quest.* What is it to ask in faith?

*Ans.* To this some things are requisite as necessary conditions, though more remotely; some things as essential ingredients.

I. The necessary conditions respect the petitioner, asker, the thing asked, the manner of asking.

1. The asker must be in the faith, or rather faith in him; the petitioner must be a believer. How can he ask in faith, who has no faith? John xvi. 23; how can he ask in Christ’s name who believes not in it? There

is no audience, no answer, for him that is not a believer: John ix. 31, 'God heareth not sinners.' Those that live in sin, live not by faith; or if you live not in it as to visible practice, yet if it live in you, have entertainment, love, approbation in the heart. When there is no faith there will be no audience: Ps. lvi. 18, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' God will not hear that which displeases so as to answer it. But prayer without faith does not please him, it is impossible it should, for Heb. xi. 6, 'without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' God will not accept the service till the person be accepted, Heb. xi. 4; Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, and then God testified of his gifts. He obtained both by faith.

2. The thing asked for must be an object of faith; such things as you may upon good grounds believe that God will grant. There must be a belief, a persuasion, that the things desired are lawful according to his will: 1 John v. 14, 'And this is the assurance that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.' No assurance he will hear, without assurance that what we ask is according to his will; now that is according to his will for which we have command or promise; for these, though not properly his will, yet are ordinarily so called, they are that will to which our practice must be conformable. His decreeing or secret will belongs not to us, it is not the rule of our practice in praying, hearing, &c., but that which is revealed by command or promise. Example, too, may direct and encourage this act of faith; but it must be the example of the godly, approved and ordinary. Extraordinary examples are no rule for us, as that of David, Ps. cix., praying against particular enemies; it is extraordinary, since he had (as it is supposed) extraordinary assistance to discern that his particular enemies were incorrigible; otherwise, though it may be lawful to pray against the public enemies of God, his ways, and people, or against the cause and practices of particular enemies, yet not against their persons. If there be no persuasion, or none upon these grounds, the prayer is not of faith, and so it is sin; for whatever is not of faith is sin, and sin can expect no comfortable return from God. He that cannot behold it will not hear it, or hear it so as to reward it but with punishment. A fervent prayer for a thing unlawful is a crying sin.

8. The manner of asking must be faithful. As it must be *in fide* as to the person, and *de fide* as to the object, so *fideliſſe* as to the manner. As he must be *bonus* that asks, and *bonum* that is asked, so must he ask this *bene*, in three particulars.

(1.) With fervency. He does not ask in faith that asks not fervently: James v. 16, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' And what prayer that is, see ver. 15, 'the prayer of faith.' It must be *δύναμις ἐνέργουμένη*, it must be an wrought prayer, proceeding from the powerful working of the Spirit in the heart. Now what the workings of the Spirit are in the heart as to prayer the apostle tells, Rom. viii. 26, 'sighs that cannot be uttered.' Such prayers as shew the parties to be *ἐντροπυμένοι* in a good sense, *i. e.*, possessed with the Holy Spirit, and acted by it. Prayers must be strivings: Rom. v. 30, 'Strive together with me in your prayers.' He that will prevail must wrestle, as Jacob; give the Lord no rest, as Isaiah lxii. 7. Cold, heartless prayers argue want of faith, and will want success; teach God to deny. If there be only lip labour, draw near with the lips only, God will withdraw. If we pray as if we prayed not, God will hear as though he heard not, take little notice

except to correct. Strong cries only reach and pierce heaven ; such were Christ's.

(2.) With submission. We must not limit God. To limit the Holy One of Israel is to tempt him, and that is a notorious effect of unbelief, Heb. iii. 9, 12, and xi. 18. We must not limit God as to time, place, persons, things, degrees.

*Time.* Be willing to stay God's time. He that believes, makes not haste. It was an unbelieving prince that said, 'Why should I wait on the Lord any longer?' And Hab. ii. 8, 4, 'The vision is for an appointed time ; though it tarry, wait for it,' &c.

*Place.* Jacob would not have prayed in faith for provision, if he would not have had it in Egypt.

*Persons.* Noah would not in faith have asked blessings for Ham, if he had limited God as to the person. We must leave the Lord to his own way of free dispensation.

*Things.* Lawful things are temporal or spiritual ; and these necessary for being, as grace, and the means of grace ; or well-being, as joy, assurance, enlargements.

Temporal blessings must be desired with such conditions as they are promised, and besides, with reference to God's good pleasure, and caution of their expediency for us ; if it seem good to thee, if they be good for us. Spiritual blessings for well-being, though they may be desired with more importunity, as being of more worth, and more expressly promised, yet with the like references. But spirituals necessary to salvation may be desired absolutely, without reserves, conditions, exceptions, because they are so promised, and we are so commanded.

*Degrees.* We must not limit God to degrees of grace, or plenty or plausibleness of the means, but refer it to infinite wisdom to bestow what degrees he knows will make us most serviceable, and what kind of means soever he will please to make effectual for attaining those degrees.

(8.) With right intentions. It is not *bene*, except *ad bonum*: James iv. 8, 'Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.' We must pray to glorify God, make us serviceable to him, capable of communion with him. We must not desire grace to excel others, or, as Simon Magus, the Spirit, to be admired, praised. We must not desire gifts, to advance our credit, get applause ; riches, to satisfy lusts, to live at ease, &c. This is to ask amiss ; and he that asks amiss, must miss of an answer.

These are the necessary conditions of this duty. I call them but conditions, because, though we cannot pray in faith without them, yet we may have these, and yet not pray in faith.

II. The essential ingredients of this duty are the actings of faith in prayer, which are one or other of these four. He whose faith puts forth any one of these acts prays in faith.

1. Particular application. Believing the promise whereby God has engaged himself to give what he asks ; so to ask in faith is to pray with confidence the Lord will grant the petition, because he has promised ; to pray with David, 'Do good to thy servant,' &c., and to rest assured he will do it, because it is his word, his promise, 1 Kings viii. 24-26.

2. Fiducial recumbence. Casting himself upon God, without the mediation of a promise, and relying, depending on him for the grant of what he asks, when faith in prayer supports itself upon God immediately ; which act of faith has place either when there is no particular promise of the

thing asked, or faith is so weak as it cannot make use of it by way of application. There are other supports of faith besides a promise, and other acts of faith besides applying a promise, which the soul putting forth in prayer may be said to ask in faith, and this act of dependence is one in special. Faith can read an answer of prayer in the name of God, and stay itself there, when a promise appears not, or, through faith's weakness, cannot support it, Isaiah l. 10, 11.

3. A general persuasion that the prayer shall be heard. I call it general, to distinguish it from that particular persuasion that the thing asked shall be presently granted, or granted at all, which is not simply necessary to this duty. The prayer may be heard, though the thing desired be not presently bestowed, or not bestowed at all. And so a man may pray in faith, though he be not confident that what he prays for shall be given him, much more that it shall not be presently given. Zachariah prayed in faith, and it is like he prayed when he was young, yet a child, though that which he asked, was not given him till he was old, Luke i. 18. Noah prayed that God would persuade Japhet to dwell in the tents of Shem, and he prayed in faith; yet this was not granted till many hundred years after. Christ prayed in faith that the cup might pass from him, the bitterness of death; yet he had not a particular persuasion that this should be granted; for this persuasion had been false, for it was not granted; yet was his prayer heard, Heb. v. 7. Paul prayed in faith that he might be free from that messenger of Satan; that mercy was not granted; yet was his prayer heard and graciously answered: 2 Cor. xii. 9, 'My grace is sufficient.' A prayer may be heard, though the mercy desired be not granted; therefore it is not necessary to this duty that a man should have a special persuasion to receive what he asks. He prays in faith, who is persuaded in general that his prayer shall be heard, referring the answer to the wisdom and goodness of God, to be returned when and in what kind he pleases. He that believes God will hear his prayer, though he be not confident that he will grant this particular desired, yet prays in faith.

4. A special confidence that the very same thing which is asked shall be given. This is the highest and rarest act of faith; and if the mercy desired be temporal, it is extraordinary, not raised in the heart but by special instinct; yet may it now and then be vouchsafed to some who are admitted to sweeter familiarity and nearer communion with God, Ps. xxvii.

*Use.* Take notice of the misery of unbelievers. They that cannot pray in faith must not expect to have their prayers heard. All men have not faith, though most presume. They cannot give an account how or when it was wrought, cannot shew their faith by their works. Such, though they make many prayers, God will not hear. If this be your case, what will ye do for support in distress, for supply of wants, for removal of fears and dangers? It is the great, the sweet privilege of believers, whatever they ask in Christ's name it shall be given. It is the misery of unbelievers, whatever they ask it shall be denied, or given in wrath. 'Call upon me,' says the Lord to believers, 'in the day of trouble, and I will hear you.' Unbelievers must read the contrary: 'Though ye call, I will not hear,' &c. To believers Christ says, 'Ask, and it shall be given; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:' but to them, Though ye ask, I will not give, &c. Christ says to them, as to the Jews, 'Ye shall seek me, but shall not find me, and whither I go ye shall not come;' and if they must not come to Christ, whither then? Christ will neither hear them in life, nor at death, nor after death. Those that live in unbelief may

read their doom, ver. 7; those that die in it, Christ will send them to the gods they have served. He will say, Ye would not come to me, believe in me, that ye might have life; therefore ye shall die in your sins, die now, die for ever. And after death, if you come with the foolish virgins, and knock at the bridegroom's chamber, Christ will profess, 'I know you not,' and command a sad and everlasting departure.

*Obj.* The Ninevites prayed, and were heard, Jonah iii. 7, 8, 10. Ahab prays, and is heard, 1 Kings xxi. 27, 29; yet both unbelievers, Ahab notoriously, ver. 25, 26.

*Ans.* 1. As a prayer may be heard, yet the thing prayed for not granted, so the thing desired may be granted, and yet the prayer not heard: so it is with unbelievers; for, to speak strictly and properly, a prayer is not heard, but when both person and prayer is accepted. None are accepted but in Christ, and none are in Christ but by faith; therefore unbelievers, both person and prayer, are not accepted, and consequently their prayer not heard; though what they pray for be granted, it is not out of respect to the prayer.

*Ans.* 2. The Lord gives nothing but temporal things upon the prayers of unbelievers. The Ninevites obtained but a temporal deliverance, no more does Ahab; not a removal of the judgment threatened, but a delay of the execution; not forgiveness, but forbearance. In the next generation, as some observe, Nineveh was quite destroyed; and the evil threatened to Ahab's family surprised it in his son's days, and the severest part of it is executed upon himself, chap. xxii. 24. Unbelievers do not unfeignedly desire spiritual mercies, grace, regeneration, holiness; none desire these but those that in some degree have them, 'found of them that seek him not.' And will the Lord hear a prayer not accompanied with unfeigned desires?

*Ans.* 3. He gives not temporals in mercy, when unbelievers pray for them. Israel desires a king, he gives them one in wrath: they desire flesh, he sends quails, but sends his wrath upon them; that pleasant meat had bitter sauce, Ps. cvi. 15, Num. vi. 11, 33, Ps. lxxviii. 29-31. He gives them outward blessings, but curses them. Unbelievers, as such, have nothing in mercy, because neither rise nor issue merciful; not the rise, they proceed not from love; nor the issue, they make them not better. That is cursed which brings not a soul-blessing with it. Then only prayer is heard properly when mercy is the return of it.

*Obj.* If the Lord will not hear, why should we pray?

*Ans.* 1. We are obliged to obedience, though we be not assured of any reward. Subjection to God is necessary, being founded in our natures, as his creatures, and such creatures. Reward is arbitrary, as being grounded merely on his will, which moves freely. Though God do not hear, we are bound to pray, for he has commanded.

*Ans.* 2. Though unbelievers sin in praying, and therefore God will not hear them, yet they sin worse in not praying at all. It is a more heinous sin not to pray, than not to pray in faith. A total omission is a greater abomination than an undue performance. It is much worse to fail in the substance than in the manner only.

*Ans.* 3. It is more dangerous not to pray at all, than to pray amiss. The danger is proportionable to the heinousness of the sin. He may deny mercy to those that pray amiss, but he will pour wrath on those that pray not at all, Jer. x. 25.

*Use.* Exhortation to practise this duty. Whatever ye do, ask; whenever ye ask, ask in faith. Nothing more necessary than prayer; no qualifica-

tion of prayer more necessary than faith. Of all duties and privileges, none more advantageous and comfortable than prayer; but it is faithful prayer: for without faith there is neither advantage by it, nor comfort in it. To pray, and not in faith, is to profane the ordinance, to take God's name in vain, and to pray in vain. Pray as much, as often as you will, if not in faith, you lose your labour. The apostle is peremptory: ver. 7, 'Let not that man think he shall receive any thing of the Lord.'

Now to prevent this wavering, this doubting, so dishonourable and offensive to God; so prejudicial, dangerous, uncomfortable to you: let me prescribe some directions, the observance of which will establish the heart, and encourage faith, in your approaches to God.

*Direct.* 1. Get assurance of your interest in the covenant; that Christ has loved you, and washed you from your sins in his blood; that he has given you his Spirit; that you are reconciled and in favour. If you be sure you are his favourites, you may be sure to have his ear. As acceptance of persons goes before acceptance of services, so assurance of that is the ground of confidence in this: 1 John v. 13-15, 'These things have I written, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.' First, assurance that ye have eternal life, and then confidence that he will hear. If ye know that ye have right to eternal life by faith, the first fruits of it, then ye may be sure he will hear and grant; not hear in vain, but make sweet returns to the petitions he hears, ver. 15.: John xv. 7, 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' First assure your union, and then doubt not of your audience. Union goes before audience, so assurance of one goes before assurance of the other.

Faith in its infancy may put forth some weaker acts of recumbency and dependence upon God for answer of prayer; but till it be grown up to assurance, it cannot be confident that he will hear or answer.

*Direct.* 2. Consider, the Lord is engaged to hear prayer. If the Lord be engaged, strong engagements lie upon him to hear. Faith may conclude he will hear, for he will not, he cannot, be false to his engagement; but he is engaged strongly, by his titles, attributes, &c.

(1.) His titles: Ps. lxxv. 2, 'O thou that hearest prayer!' This is one of his titles of honour, he is a God that hears prayer; and it is as truly ascribed to him as mercy or justice. He hears all prayer, 'therefore unto thee shall all flesh come.' He never rejects any that deserves the name of a prayer, how weak, how unworthy soever the petitioner be. All flesh! and will he (may faith say) reject mine only? Rom. x. 12, 'He is rich unto all that call upon him;' Ps. lxxxvi. 5, 'Thou art plenteous in mercy to all that call upon thee;' Heb. xi. 6, 'A rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' This must be believed as certainly as we believe that God is. As sure as God is the true God, so sure is it that none who sought him diligently departed from him without a reward. He rewards all seekers, for *indefinita in materia necessaria equipollet universali*. And if all, why not me? You may as well doubt that he is God as doubt that he will not reward, not hear prayer; so James i. 5, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.'

(2.) His attributes. To instance in his power and goodness; from hence faith may infer that he is both willing and able to hear, and from hence confidently conclude that he shall be heard. These are strong supports of faith, like the pillars of Solomon's temple: *Boaz*, 'In him is strength,' i. e., he is able; and *Jachim*, 'He will establish,' i. e., he is willing, 2 Chron. iii. 17. When you pray, consider he is,

[1.] Able to hear and give what you ask. It is gross atheism to doubt of this, to question omnipotency. If able to do all things, then sure what you pray for. Omnipotency has no bounds, no *nil ultra* to it, no limit to this but his will: Ps. cxxxv. 6, 'Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and earth.' Consider he can do,

*First*, Abundantly, Eph. iii. 20. He can do more than we ask. We can think more than we have any reason or necessity to ask; he can do more than we can think, abundantly more, exceeding abundantly. He has done more at the requests of his people than we can ask, and he can do more than he has done: create more worlds; Heb. vii. 25, 'Save to the uttermost.'

*Secondly*, Easily. He can do the greatest thing you ask more easily than you can do the least thing you think. That which all the united strength of men and angels, the whole creation, cannot do at all, or not without great labour and travail, he can do as easily as you can move a finger or turn an eye; he can do that with a word, with a look, which all the creatures in heaven and earth cannot do with their whole strength; Mat. viii. 8, he can work a miracle with a word, how easily then can he do all that you need ask! And if it be so easy for him to grant, why should faith doubt?

*Thirdly*, Safely. Without any loss or damage to himself, without any diminution of that infinite store that is in himself. Whatever he gives he has never the less, for he bestows favours as the sun communicates light; the sun loseth nothing by shining, the more it shines the more illustrious; the more he bestows, the more glorious. All that you can desire is not so much to God as a drop is to the whole ocean. The sea would lose something, though an inconsiderable loss, by the subtraction of a drop; but God, whatever he gives, loses nothing, because what he bestows are things without him.

[2.] He is willing. Faith seldom questions God's power; that which hinders its actings is doubts whether he is willing. But there is more reason to question this, for he is as willing as he is able. His goodness is infinite, and so nothing less than his greatness. Nay, he is as willing (if not more willing) to hear as you are to pray, as willing to grant as you to petition, as willing you should have what you desire as you are to have it; nay, more; which appears from,

*First*, His secret will. He was willing, resolved, determined to hear, before you were willing to ask. He decreed it from eternity; he was willing before you had a will, a being. Nay, he was not only willing before, but he was the cause why you are willing. You must not think that your prayers move God to be willing; his will is the same for ever, not subject to the least motion or alteration. Prayers are rather a sign than a cause that God is willing. He is not made willing because we pray, but because he is willing he stirs up our hearts to pray: Ps. x. 17, 'Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.' He is first desirous to do us good, and then makes us desire it, and pray for it, that we may have them in his own way,—

a clear evidence he is more desirous than we, because he makes us, so our desires spring from this.

*Secondly*, His revealed will. He that prescribes the only course whereby prayer may get audience without fail, and commands us to follow that course, is more willing prayer shall be heard than those that are negligent in observing that only fallible way. But so it is, the Lord has commanded and prescribed such a course, which punctually followed, prayer can never return without the answer desired. But the best of men are more or less negligent in observing this prescript; therefore he is more willing our prayers should be heard than we ourselves.

Now, since the Lord is willing, and so willing, to hear, why should we not believe that he will hear? What strong encouragement is here to pray in faith! There is as much reason to believe that God will hear as there is to believe that you are willing to be heard. You may as well doubt that you are unwilling to be heard, as that God is unwilling to hear.

*Thirdly*, Christ's intercession. A great encouragement to faith, and so it is propounded by the apostle: Heb. iv. 14, 16, 'Seeing that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession;' 'Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy,' &c.; *μετὰ παρρησίας*, a confident freedom to speak all your mind and heart. And speak it with assurance of prevailing: Heb. x. 19, 22, 'Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith:' *ἐν πληροφροσύνῃ πιστεύουσας*. Why? Having a high priest whose office is to intercede. In him, as such, we may have access with boldness and confidence, Eph. iii. 12; *τὴν παρρησίαν*, &c., *ἐν προσώπῳ*. This affords many things to embolden faith, and make it confident in its access by prayer.

First, He appears for us, Heb. ix. 24; he entered into heaven for this purpose; and for this end he sits on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, Heb. viii. 1. How confident might you present a petition, if assured that one who not only has the greatest power, but all power, in the court where you prefer it, would appear for you! Christ has all power in heaven and earth; in that court where your petition is to be presented, he appears for you who thinks it no robbery to be equal with God, he who can do whatever he will in the whole world. And can you doubt but that your petitions will prevail, when Christ owns you and stands up in your behalf?

*Secondly*, He presents us, our persons, unto God; presents us as acquitted from guilt, adorned with his righteousness, united to himself; in so near relations, as if we be rejected he must be rejected. He presents us as free from whatsoever might exasperate justice, provoke wrath, or render us in our addresses in the leastwise unacceptable, Zech. iii. 4. No filthy garments, nothing in our persons, so presented, can prejudice our petitions. This was typified by the high priest carrying the names of all the tribes on his breast into the holy of holies. He presents us to his Father as the travail of his soul; as though he should say, 'Behold I, and the children whom thou hast given me.' He presents us as those that are as dear to him as his spouse, does as it were take us by the hand and lead us to his Father and our Father, Eph. iii. 12; *προσάγειν* seems to intimate such a similar posture. And Paul's expression, as some think, does imply as much: Philip. iii. 12, 'I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.' He presents us as



those that are as near to him as his own members. And in reference to that intimate union we are said, Eph. ii. 6, to 'sit with him in heavenly places.' He presents us in such a lovely, endearing posture, as we need not doubt of acceptance, though himself should not pray for us: John xvi. 27, the Father himself loveth you, because he hath loved me. And when we are thus presented, what reason to doubt but that the Lord will hold forth the golden sceptre?

Thirdly, He offers our prayers. This was the high priest's office, Heb. v. 1, and viii. 8. And he was a type of Christ therein. The Lord receives our petitions from his hand, Rev. viii. 4. He, as it were, takes us in one hand, and our petitions in the other, and in this engaging posture delivers them; and can you fear the Lord will reject a petition delivered by the hand of Christ?

Fourthly, He sanctifies our prayers, and separates whatever is offensive from them. The Levitical priests were his type in this, who were to bear the iniquity of the holy things, Exod. xxviii. 36, 38. When the Lord looks upon Christ he takes notice of nothing but holiness in the prayers presented by him; he reads nothing in them as offered by Christ, but holiness to the Lord, Christ expunges the rest. Christ is always ready at hand to present them: 'He ever lives,' &c. He intercedes as Paul for Onesimus: 'I beseech thee for my sons,' Philem. 9. And if there be anything blame-worthy, put that on mine account, ver. 18, 19. He stands up as our advocate, to prevent the prejudice that sin might bring to our prayers, 1 John ii. 1. He not only petitions, but pleads. It is just and equal that the Lord should not take notice of sin in our prayers, so as to reject them, because he has fully satisfied even for every failing. If anything should make faith doubt of the success of prayer, it is their sinfulness; but Christ prevents that, for he has so fully satisfied for that, as the Lord will not, cannot take notice of it, so as to be angry with prayers. It is through the virtue of Christ's intercession that our prayers are not dead works, that they are freed from that guilt that would make them deadly. For this end he entered into the holy place with blood, Heb. ix. 12, sprinkling unclean prayers, that they may be sanctified and pure, 18, 14. And when they are thus purged, they are services acceptable to God, 1 Peter ii. 5. It is Christ's work to purge, and this his end, Mal. iii. 8, 4. He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, &c. Now, is there any room for faith to doubt here? Will not the Lord accept of that which is rendered acceptable by Christ? Can he be displeased with that which through Christ is pleasant to him? Will he reject a peace-offering? Mal. i. 11. Christ's intercession leaves no exception. Will he deny a prayer against which he has no exception? Faith must either be confident here, or entertain blasphemous thoughts of God.

Fifthly, He answers all accusations that can be framed against our prayers. And indeed he having undertaken to remove all just ground of accusation, whatever is that way suggested reflects upon the sufficiency of his undertaking; and therefore it nearly concerns him to vindicate them, since if any exceptions can be taken to our prayers, for the utter rejecting of them, his own merit and satisfaction is equally liable thereto. Hence it is that he takes up Satan with such indignation for accusing Joshua: Zech. iii. 1, 2, 'The Lord rebuke thee, Satan,' &c. And hence it is that Paul's confidence rises up into a triumph: Rom. viii. 38, 'Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' &c. And if our prayers can be charged with nothing to hinder the Lord from answering, why should we

doubt but he will answer them? Will the Lord reject that against which there is no exception? Can we imagine the Lord will be of such a disposition, as none but the perversest of men are guilty of, to except against that which is freed from exception? Or will the Lord hearken to Satan rather than his own Son? Such reason is there for confidence here, that we must either believe, or entertain most horrid thoughts of God.

Sixthly, He mingles his own prayers and intercession with our requests. He joins with us, and as it were petitions that our petitions may be received. He adds the virtue of his merits to our prayers, and this, as incense, does sweeten and make them acceptable; so that these and all other services are like those contributions of the saints which Paul mentions, Philip. iv. 18, an odour of a sweet smell, or like Noah's offering, Gen. viii. 21, from which the Lord smelled a sweet savour.

This was typified by the legal service. While the people under the law were praying without, the priest offered incense within, Luke i. 8-10; answerably, while we are praying, Christ offers incense to sweeten them, and make them ascend as a delightful odour before God, Rev. viii. 8, 4.

Seventhly, That Christ does not only present us and our petitions unto the Father, but does as it were prefer a petition himself to the Lord, that he would answer our prayers, so that if the Lord deny us he must deny him too; and can we doubt Christ will be denied? We are as sure to be heard as Christ himself, and the Father always hears him, John xi. 42, xii. 28. No surer ground of confidence in the world than Christ's prayer for us.

It is true indeed, the Scripture, in describing Christ's intercession, uses some expressions which must not be taken properly; for if so understood, according to the letter, they import something inconsistent with Christ's glorious state, and his equality with the Father. But yet we have ground enough to say and believe that Christ prays for us, for Christ himself professes it, John xvii. He did pray, and he promises he will pray, John xvi. 26, John xiv. 16. And the Father expects and requires it, Ps. ii. 8, even after his exaltation.

There are four acts of Christ which amount to as much as prayers for us, are more than equivalent thereto, and afford more encouragement to faith than if he should now pray for us after the manner of men. I do the more willingly insist on this particular, because Christ's praying for us, and the success of our prayers, is such a confirmation of faith as leaves no room for doubting.

(1.) His requests on earth, which are properly and formally a prayer, and such a prayer as, though made on earth, is no less effectual than if it were now made in heaven, for he is always heard, then as well as now, John xi. 42. This prayer is delivered to us, John xvii. Wherein observe for whom, ver. 20, not only for his disciples, but for all that shall believe to the end of the world. For what? For all things that we stand in need of while we are on earth, nay, to all eternity. It is so comprehensive as there is nothing we can desire of God but may be reduced to some of his petitions; so that whatever we need desire was granted to Christ praying for us, before we actually pray for it. Therefore in respect our petitions are as good as granted before they be performed,\* Christ has prevented us in desiring all things of his Father for us that we can desire for ourselves. Therefore when we go to pray, faith may be encouraged to

\* Qu. 'preferred'?—Ed.

consider that Christ prayed for us, and was heard as to those very particulars which we are to pray for.

(2.) The cry of his blood ; that is metaphorically, yet really a prayer. It is a pleading, a speaking blood : ' It speaks better things,' &c., Heb. xii. 24. It is as effectual to procure the bestowing of those things which are purchased by it as innocent blood is to procure vengeance for those that spill it. Christ's blood is an importunate, a prevailing advocate, it is never non-suited ; its plea is justice ; it is just the Lord should hear our prayers, since this was one end for which the blood of Christ was shed ; it is just our request should be granted, since his blood was the price of this privilege ; the Lord should be unjust, and undervalue the blood of his Son, if he should not give that which he shed his blood to purchase. You must either believe upon this consideration, or blaspheme. It is the blood of the covenant, Heb. x. 29, by which the blessings of the covenant were purchased and are confirmed. Now that is one article of the covenant, that whatever we ask in Christ's name shall be given ; and his blood cries for the performance of this, and justice itself hears it. It is but a righteous, a just thing in reference to Christ, though pure mercy to us, that all our prayers should be heard.

(3.) The will of his divine nature ; this is transcendently a prayer. A prayer I call it, because his prayer on earth runs in the same tenor : John xvii. 24, ' Father, I will,' &c. It is the will of Christ, as he is God, that all our prayers should be heard, else he would not so often promise it. A prayer transcendently, because though it differ from ours in form, yet it far, yea infinitely, transcends them in efficacy. His bare will, as he is God, is more effectual for the comfortable returns of our petitions than if as man, and as he was upon earth, he should prostrate himself, and with strong cries and tears importune the Lord to answer us ; for his divine will is all one with his Father's will, they differ not ; therefore if the Father should deny him, he should deny himself. Here is encouragement indeed ; we may as well imagine he will deny himself as doubt he will deny us.

(4.) The desires of his human nature. This is effectually a prayer, it has all that is essential to a prayer. The voice and outward posture are but accidents. It is a mental, though not a vocal prayer ; has as much of a prayer in it as any angel or soul can make, 1 Sam. i. 18. This was his desire on earth, and this is his desire in heaven, that all our prayers may be answered. His affection to us was not impaired by his removal, but rather improved, and he that was heard in that which he feared will be heard in that which he desires. Now let faith put all these together, and it will be easy to read the necessity of an answer. Let it observe the premises, and it may well conclude the Lord will answer. If the Lord will hear his Son, if he will not deny himself, if he cannot be unrighteous, if he cannot be changeable, then he will hear us.

4. The Spirit's office. He is a Spirit of supplication, Zech. xii. 10. It is his function to intercede for us, to pray in us, *i. e.*, to make our prayers. He, as it were, writes our petitions in the heart, we offer them ; he indites a good matter, we express it. That prayer which we are to believe will be accepted, is the work of the Holy Ghost ; it is his voice, motion, operation, and so his prayer. Therefore when we pray he is said to pray, and our groans are called his, and our design and intent in prayer his meaning, *ῥεῖσημα τοῦ πνεύματος*, Rom. viii. 26, 27, *συναντιλαμβάνεται* ; he joins with us in prayer, and supports us under infirmities with his own

strength, *ἡμεῖς ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ὑμῶν*. That prayer is the work of the Spirit, appears in many particulars.

(1.) He stirs us up to pray. He prepares and disposes, incites and inclines the heart to make requests; removes that backwardness, averseness, indisposedness, that is in us naturally unto this spiritual service: Ps. x. 17, 'Thou wilt prepare their heart.' He prepares it by his Spirit. *Interpellat*, says Augustine, *quia interpellare nos facit*. He intercedes for us, because he makes us to intercede. He stirs us up to do it, *nos ad preces instigat*, excites us, provokes us to pray. *Nemo sponte pręmeditari vel unam syllabam potest*, no man of his own accord can premeditate one syllable, says Calvin, *nisi arcano spiritus sui instinctu nos Deus pulsat*, but that God by the secret instinct of his Spirit does knock up the heart to it; he puts the heart into a praying frame, and sometimes excites us so powerfully, as we cannot withhold from pouring out our souls before him. As it was with the prophet in another case,—Jer. xx. 9, 'His word was in mine heart as a burning fire,' &c.,—so, as to prayer, the workings of the Spirit are sometimes so powerful in the heart, so fill the soul, that it cannot contain, but must vent itself, and pour out its requests. Thus with David: Ps. xxxix. 2, 8, 'I was dumb with silence; I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue.' Those that have the spirit of prayer, do find this by experience, especially when the Lord intends, and is about to shew them some special favour, or do some great thing for them, he stirs them up answerably to seek it; so that often, if they observe it, they may discover the return of their prayers in the temper and workings of their hearts to it. The Spirit's preparing the heart to pray, signifies the Lord will cause his ear to hear.

(2.) He presents matter, teaches what we shall pray for. This is plain in the apostle's expression, Rom. viii. We know not what is proper and expedient for us, what is seasonable, what is best for us, or when it will be so. We of ourselves would be ready to ask that which is impertinent, or unseasonable, or hurtful to us; we would have ease, and liberty, and plenty, and deliverance out of troubles, or freedom from sufferings; we would have joy and assurance, yea, triumphs and raptures; we would have these or the like presently, and in full measure, at such a time, or in such a degree as might be prejudicial to our souls; and so we would seek them if we were left to ourselves, if the Spirit did not better direct us, and lead us to what is most necessary, and proper, and advantageous. And this *κατὰ Θεὸν ἐν πνεύματι*, he helps us to pray according to the will of God, for such things as are according to his will. *Ut bene possit mens orare*, says Ambrose,\* *pręcedit Spiritus, et deducit eam in viam rectam*; that the soul may pray well, the Spirit goes before it, and guides it into the right way, that we may not seek what is carnal, nor things that are either too small or too great for us. A good physician knows what diet is most proper, and when it will be most for the advantage of health. The opportuneness of meat sometimes restores the health, which, if it be taken unseasonably, endangers the patient; therefore, says he, because we know not what to pray for, and how we ought to seek it, *postulat pro nobis Spiritus*, the Spirit intercedes for us, viz., by directing us what to ask.

(8.) He helps his people to expressions; and therefore that manner of praying seems best, which gives most liberty to the Spirit in its workings, and leaves us under his influence and assistance, not only as to the inward,

\* Ambr. l. iv., Epist. 28.

but also as to the outward manner of praying, letting the Spirit clothe his own matter in his own dress, and taking words from him as well as things, when he is pleased to afford them. I do not say that all the expressions used by his people in prayer are from the Spirit, nor that he always helps them to expressions immediately. Whether they have them by the use of such means as he has appointed and concurs with, or whether they have them by immediate suggestion, either way they are from the assistance of the Spirit; and that he is ready to assist them some way, even as to words, seems signified by the apostle's expression, Rom viii. which I have opened before, and shall now further insist on. The word is *ὑπερεντυγχάνει; ἐντυγχάνειν κατὰ τινά*, is to act as an accuser, a *κατήγορος*; *ὑπερεντυγχάνειν ὑπὲρ τίνος*, is to act as an advocate, a *συνήγορος*. And so the Holy Ghost is frequently in the New Testament called an Advocate. *Παρακλήτης*, as the Spirit is called by our Lord Jesus, is an Advocate, one called in for the assistance of a client. And very fitly may *παρακλήτης* be rendered an advocate, this comprehending the other notions, whereby it is expressed, particularly that of a comforter, by which it is translated. For an advocate is the comfort and encouragement of his client, advises him, pleads for him, moves for him, draws up his petitions or motions, dictating the form or words. And so *παρακλήσεις* in other authors is sometimes used for a prayer or petition, and *παρακαλῶ* is to petition or invoke. Now the Holy Ghost is an advocate for his people, both with men and with God. And by observing how he performs this office for them with men, we may probably collect how he performs it for them with God. He acts as an advocate for them with men, by telling them what they shall say when they are brought before men's tribunal, Mat. x. 20, Mark xiii. 11, Luke xii. 11, 12, and xxi. 14, 15; answerably he acts as their advocate with God by dictating or suggesting to them what they shall say in prayer, when they come to the throne of grace. And so the best interpreters that I meet with explain the expression. *Veluti verba et suspiria nobis intus dictat,\** he doth as it were inwardly dictate to us words and sighs; he assists us by his holy inspiration both with powerful and effectual words and sighs; he telleth us as it were within what we shall say, prompteth as it were our lesson to us.†

(4.) He stirs up affections in prayer suitable to the subject thereof, joy or sorrow, and love and delight, with earnest desires, called *συναγμίδι*; fills the heart with affections and motions, as manifest themselves by sighs and groans, and cannot otherwise be expressed, therefore called *ἀλαλητί*; so full of affectionate workings as it cannot find vent by words.

A pretender to the Spirit has more in his expressions than is in his heart; but one effectually assisted by the Spirit, has more in his heart than he can express; the words of those over-reach, but the expressions of these fall short of what they feel within. The Spirit helps his people to the sense of their spiritual state, makes them sensible of their spiritual wants, their inward distempers, their soul-grievances; makes them apprehensive of the importance, the necessity, the excellency of what they are to seek, and hence spring love to them, desires after them, zeal and fervour in seeking them. Hence those affectionate workings in their hearts, which are too big to be let out by words, which are signified by sighs and groans, such as cannot otherwise be uttered.

(5.) He acts graces in prayer; helps the weakness and infirmity of spiritual habits and principles, and draws them out into vigorous exercise. He helps the soul to approach with confidence, and yet with reverence;

\* Beza.

† Eng. Annot.

with filial fear, and yet with an emboldened faith ; with zeal and importunity, and yet with humble submission ; with lively hope, and yet with self-denial. As it is the Spirit of supplication, so it is the Spirit of grace, not only works grace in the heart, but sets it a-work, and brings it into exercise, as in other acts and duties, so especially in that of supplication.

(6.) He removes, or helps the soul against distempers which are ready to seize on the soul in prayer, distractions, straitness of heart, indifferency, formality, lukewarmness, hypocrisy, weariness, pride, self-confidence. Now since thus much of prayer is to be ascribed to the Spirit, since he gives both matter and form, expression and affection, the act and motion to the act, since he teaches both when, and what, and how we should pray, affords assistance answerable, well may believers' prayers be counted the work, &c., of the Spirit. And this consideration affords great encouragement to faith. If prayer were our own work only, we might fear it would be rejected, for all our righteousness is as filthy rags ; but the work of the Spirit must needs be acceptable, yea, accepted. If we ourselves only spoke, the Lord might shut his ear and refuse to hear sinners. But prayer is the voice of the Spirit : he speaks in us and by us, Mat. x. 20 ; and the Lord will certainly listen to that voice. Prayer is the motion of the Spirit, and whatever motion he makes in the court of heaven, it can never be rejected. If we prayed of ourselves only, the Lord might refuse to send any comfortable returns ; but since the Spirit intercedes for us, the Lord cannot deny him, else he should deny himself. *Nobis gemendi et interpellandi imponit affectum.\** The Spirit intercedes as effectually, though not in the same manner, as Christ. Christ intercedes by office, the Spirit by operation. Christ appears in person for us, and pleads our cause himself ; the Spirit inspires and assists us to plead for ourselves. Not only through Christ, but by the Spirit we have access, Eph. ii. 18. And will the Lord exclude those who have access by the Spirit ? The Spirit 'strengthens us with might in the inner man,' Eph. iii. 16, and the strength of the Spirit will prevail, as Jacob. Come armed with this strength, and you may come boldly, Heb. x. 15, 19.

5. Consider his providence. That affords many encouragements to faith.

(1.) He hears those that cannot pray, answers that which cannot be called a prayer. He hears irrational creatures, brutes, listens to their cries, though they want both matter and form of praying. He rewards their very looks, answers their expectations, fulfils their desires, though they do not, nor cannot be properly said, either to look up to him, or wait on him, or desire of him. Ps. civ. 21, 'The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat of God ;' ver. 27, 'These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season : thou openest thine hand ;' ver. 28, 'They are filled with good ;' Ps. cxlvii. 9, 'He giveth to the beast his food, to the young ravens that cry ;' Ps. cxlv. 15, 16, 'The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them meat in due season : thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' They do but open their eyes, and God opens his hand. They do but intimate a natural desire by crying and looking, and God satisfies.

Now may faith say, as 1 Cor. ix. 9, 'Doth God take care for oxen ? or saith he it altogether for our sakes ? For our sakes no doubt, that he that prayeth should pray in faith,' &c. Will the Lord hear lions and ravens, and will he not hear me ? Will he satisfy their natural, and not my spiritual desires ? Will he regard when their eyes are lift up, and not the lifting

\* August.

up of my heart? Am not I much better than they? It is Christ's own argument to strengthen faith, Mat. vi. 26. Shall he not much more hear me? ver. 30. He that will doubt here, deserves the brand of *ὀλιγπίστος*, may well pass for one that has little faith. It is very weak, if this will not support it.

(2.) He grants some things to men that they pray not for; much more will he grant when they pray: Isa. lxxv. 1, 'I am found of them that sought me not;' ver. 24, 'Before they call, I will answer.' Some things, nay, the greatest, are granted to those that pray not. No prayer had any influence in election, and our prayers did contribute nothing to the glorious work of redemption. These fountains of all our mercies were digged without the help of any; the greatest, the sweetest streams of love that issue hence run freely, before our prayers can draw them out. Regeneration, justification, pardon, adoption, reconciliation, are bestowed on those who cannot, who will not pray for them. For we cannot unfeignedly desire these, before they are given; and will we pray for that which we do not desire? And how many other mercies, which we thought not of before we enjoyed them! Much precious fruit falls into our laps, before we by prayer shake the tree. It may be they were the issue of some other's prayers, but not of ours. Now if the water of life do flow in such streams upon us when we pray not, how pleasantly will they flow when they are drawn by the attractive power of prayer! If the Lord is found when we seek not, open when we knock not, answer when we call not, how much more will he open and answer when we knock and call! If the greatest be vouchsafed before we have hearts to pray, how confident may we be that prayer will obtain the less!

(3.) He makes some kind of returns to the prayers of unbelievers. He heard the voice of Ishmael, Gen. xxi. 17, 18, &c., a persecutor; of Ahab, the most abominable of all the twenty kings of Israel. Now if they be heard in any sense, who hate God and are hated of him, they whose prayers are as the howlings of dogs, an abomination, to whom God is no way engaged, who have none to intercede, none to help their infirmities, no promise, how much more those who are his servants, and have interest in the intercession of Christ?

6. Consider the nature and dignity of prayer, which affords divers arguments to confirm faith.

(1.) It is God's ordinance, instituted and enjoined for this end. He commands us to pray, that we may be heard; and therefore ordinarily, where you meet with a command, you find a promise: 'Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer;' 'Ask, and ye shall have,' Mat. viii. 7, 8. When he commands prayer, he promises audience. It was his intention in this institution. Therefore if the Lord should not hear, his ordinance would be in vain, the Lord should lose his end. And is it not more easy to believe the Lord will hear it, than to believe he will come short of his end?

(2.) He in Scripture adorns it with, and ascribes to it, many transcendent privileges, such as, considered, may fortify the most languishing faith. There is a strength in prayer which has power with God: Hos. xii. 3, 4, 'By his strength he had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him.' That strength was weeping and supplication. With this he wrestled, Gen. xxxii. 24. He had power, i. e., was a prince, a princely deportment. Poor dust and ashes, in a praying posture, are in the state of princes, honourable and

powerful, in such a state as the Lord will not resist ; therefore it must prevail. The Lord may seem to wrestle, as though he would give a repulse to the assaults of prayer, but this is but to exercise the strength of this princely champion ; he honours it so much, as in the issue he always suffers it to prevail. No wonder if it be powerful, for it lays hold on God's strength. So some apply that, Isa. xxvii. 5, 'Let him lay hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace.' The Lord, for our encouragement, condescends to express the power of grace in such terms, as though it laid some restraint upon his infinite self : Exod. xxxii. 10, 'Let me alone.' He seems so unwilling to deny prayer, as though he were unable to act anything against it. That is a transcendent expression, Isa. xlv. 11, 'Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons ; and the work of my hands, command ye me.' A wonderful indulgence ! An astonishing condescension ! As though asking were commanding. It is blasphemy to imagine that the creature should command the sovereign Majesty of heaven ; yet thus much we may safely infer, prayer shall as surely prevail, as though it could command ; it shall prevail as much with God, though infinitely above us, as we can do with those who are under our command.

(8.) Prayer is the Lord's delight, the most pleasing service we can ordinarily tender ; therefore he does not only most frequently command it, but importunately sue for it. Let me hear thy voice, says Christ to his spouse, Cant. ii. 14, for thy voice is sweet. It is sweet as incense, Ps. cxli. 2 ; Prov. xv. 8, his delight ; ascends as the odour of a sweet smell ; no sacrifice more acceptable. One sincere prayer pleases him better than hundreds of rams, or thousands of rivers of oil. Therefore, after he had declared how little he needs or regards sacrifices and burnt-offerings, he tells what would better please him : Ps. l. 14, 15, 'Offer unto God thanksgiving ; and pay thy vows to the Most High : and call upon him in the day of trouble ; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' The reason is, it most glorifies him ; it acknowledges and gives a clear testimony to most of his glorious perfections, power, wisdom, bounty, goodness, immensity, all-sufficiency, providence. Now that which most glorifies him does most please, for his glory is the end of all his administrations. Now, will the Lord reject that which pleases him ? will he not listen to that wherein his soul delights ? will he not make gracious returns to that which is the most acceptable service ?

(4.) He threatens men for not answering prayer : Prov. xxi. 13, 'Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.' Now, will he do that himself for which he threatens us ? Mat. xviii. 28. He will deal severely with those who will not hearken to the importunity of such as seek to them in their want and distress.

7. The things prayed for may afford arguments for faith. Either they are of great consequence or of small consequence. If small, then faith may argue, Will the Lord stand with me for small things ? will he deny inferior mercies ? will he who has granted greater things deny less ? will not infinite love vouchsafe small favours ? will he who has given me Christ deny any thing, any small thing ? will not he who has delivered your souls from death deliver your feet from falling ? If of great consequence, faith may argue, Though it be great, yet the Lord has granted greater to me, to others. Is anything greater than Christ ? any of more importance than pardon of sin ? is any more precious than the blood of Christ ? I can ask nothing so great but the Lord has already granted greater ; or, suppose it



be the greatest thing that ever was granted to or desired by you, the greater it is the more encouragement to ask it, the more hopes God will grant it. It becomes the great God to grant great things, 'To him alone who does great wonders,' Ps. cxxxvi. 4. When you ask great things, you ask such as becomes God to give, 'whose mercy is great above the heavens,' Ps. lvii. 10. Nothing under heaven can be too great for him to give. The greater things he bestows, the greater glory redounds to his name. Great and wondrous works speak the glorious honour of his majesty, Ps. cxlv. 5. Great personages shew their magnificence by great presents; it is their delight, their honour. God shews his infinite greatness by doing such things, bestowing such favours, as are above the creature's power. Jehohsaphat argues, 2 Chron. xx. 6, 'Art thou not God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathens? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that not none is able to withstand thee?' But suppose the greatness of what you desire does discourage, consider it is great only in your apprehension. Nothing is great to God. See how he is described, Isa. xl. 15, 17, 22. What greater than this vast fabric of heaven and earth? How did the Lord make this only with a word? Let there be, and it was so, Ps. xxxiii. 6. It is true the Lord speaks not, but this manner of expression tells us the effecting of the greatest things is no more to him than the speaking of a word is to us, 2 Chron. xiv. 11, so 1 Sam. xiv. 6. It is all one with God to save by few or many; to do that which seems great to us, as that which seems small.

8. Consider the promises. The Lord has promised he will hear. If ye doubt he will hear, ye doubt he is not faithful. Consider how many, how universal, how engaging.

(1.) The *multitude*. No duty, no act, to which the Lord has made so many promises as to prayer. Now, why should the Lord multiply his promises, but that he will never fail to answer, but that he would have us to be confident we shall never fail?

(2.) *Universality*. He has promised again and again to hear whoever prays, and grant whatever is prayed for. Whoever prays, whatever they pray for, they shall be answered, it shall be granted. *Whosoever*: Joel ii. 32, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered;' repeated Acts ii. 21; 'plenteous in mercy to all that call upon him,' Ps. lxxxvi. 5; 'nigh to all,' Ps. cxlv. 16; 'rich unto all,' Rom. x. 12. *Whatsoever*: 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive,' Mat. xxi. 22; John xvi. 23, 'Ye shall ask me nothing; whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you;' 1 John iii. 22, 'Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him;' John xv. 7, 'Ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.'

(3.) The *obligement*. It is more engaging to him than an oath, he more values it than we our lives. It is more valuable to him than heaven and earth; he will suffer these to perish rather than a jot of his word shall fail: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away.' The Lord would lose more by failing to answer than you by failing of an answer. That is engaged for your security, which is more precious to God than anything you ask: his word, truth, faithfulness, his seal, his oath, the blood of his Son, all these are engaged in a promise.

9. Consider your relation to God. He is your Father; Christ teaches us to begin with this. This is a strong support to faith, and Christ makes this use of it, to encourage us to pray, and pray in faith: Mat. vii. 7, 8, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it

shall be opened to you,' &c. There is the promise." The argument whereby he would persuade us to believe the promise in praying, see ver. 9-11. The Lord is ready to give to them that ask, as the most indulgent father to the best beloved child; nay, more ready, much more ready: 'How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him!' ver. 11. He is much more ready to give the greatest favours, than earthly parents to give the least. That which is *good things* in Matthew, is the *Spirit* in Luke xi. 13. And what greater gift than the Spirit? There are many things may hinder earthly parents, poverty, or covetousness, but nothing to hinder God, he has infinite treasures and a large heart; he can give whatever we ask, 'The earth is the Lord's,' &c.; and he is more willing, as much more as heaven is above earth.

10. He gets glory by hearing prayer. We do not only glorify him by praying, as I shewed before, but he glorifies himself by answering prayer, Ps. 1. The Lord gets by giving, gets that which is of more account with him than what he gives. It is his interest to grant as well as ours to receive. If the Lord should reject our prayers, he would reject his own honour.

11. Consider the success of others, how effectual the prayers of God's ancient people have been; this affords great encouragement.

(1.) You never find any prayer wholly denied. In all the Scripture, not one example of a faithful prayer without a gracious return. 'He never said to the house of Jacob, Seek my face in vain.' Those instances which seem to contradict this do confirm it. David prayed for the life of his child and prevailed not, but his prayer was answered in that the Lord gave him another child, honourably born, and rarely endowed. Moses prays that he might take possession of Canaan, he was not heard as to that particular, but the Lord gratifies his prayer with a miracle, shews him what he desired in a miraculous way, commits the conduct of the Israelites to a dear relation of his, his servant Joshua, and, instead of the earthly, translates him into the heavenly Canaan, where Moses will acknowledge it was the sweetest return of prayer he ever had experience of. Though on earth he complained the Lord would not hear him, yet there he does praise the Lord for so answering his prayer. And if the Lord did never deny prayer, will he begin now?

(2.) He usually gave more than was prayed for: Ps. xxi. 4, 'He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever.' So to Solomon, 1 Kings iii. 9-13. Abraham prays for one, God gives many, by Hagar, Gen. xvii., Sarah, Keturah, Gen. xxv. David desired one thing, Ps. xxvii.; he gives that, and withal a kingdom, dominion, glory. Jacob seems to desire nothing but for safety and necessity, bread and raiment, and to return in peace; but the Lord adds plenty to safety, brings him back with great substance and a numerous issue: Gen. xxviii. 20, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on.' There is his vow, his desire. See his return, chap. xxxii. 10, 'I went over this Jordan with this staff, and now I am become two bands.' And if the Lord will give more than is prayed for, sure, may faith say, he will give as much. The Lord is not less bountiful now than in former times; his ear is not straitened nor his hand shortened, his ear is as open to hear, and his hand as open to reward.

(3.) Prayer procured greater things in former times than any you have now occasion to ask. It wrought miracles, and that may be ascribed to it which the apostle attributes to faith, Heb. xi. 88-86; faith in prayer,

faithful prayer. This, as handled by Elias, was the key of heaven, which he thereby opened when and how he pleased, James v. 17, 18. Prayer preserved Daniel in the midst of devouring lions; the opening of his mouth did shut theirs. This brought Jonah out of the midst of the sea, out of the belly of a whale, safe on shore. This revoked the sentence of death passed on Hezekiah, caused the sun to go backward, and brought an angel from heaven to destroy Sennacherib's host. This ruined an army of ten hundred thousand, and made them fly and fall before Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 12. It drew out the Lord's hand, destroys Jehoshaphat's enemies by their own hands, arms them against themselves, and ruins them without his help, chap. xx. This brings light into a dungeon, an angel from heaven into a prison, breaks off chains, and opens iron gates, Acts xii. 5-7, &c. Did it work miracles in former times, and will it not procure ordinary mercies now? Is it less effectual? Does the Lord less regard it, or love us?

(4.) He heard his ancient people not only for themselves, but for others; for those whom he would not hear praying for themselves; for unbelievers, for the most abominable of sinners; and that not only for one, or few, but for whole cities, whole nations; Abraham for Abimelech, a heathen, a prince in whose territories there was no fear of God. The Lord tells him this, Gen. xx. 7, and he was as good as his word, ver. 17. How often did he hear Moses for a whole nation in high rebellion against God! Even in the height of his fury he appeased him. Nay, he hears Abraham for five cities, the most abominable that were to be found on the earth, Gen. xviii. 23-33. He makes six motions for the Sodomites, and the Lord rejects not one. He condescends, even to astonishment. We may think it had been wonderful if the Lord had but yielded to the first, to save five whole cities destined to destruction, if there had been in them but fifty righteous persons; but so prevalent is prayer, as the Lord yields to save five cities for ten men, verse 32. Now if the Lord will hear his people for others, will he not hear me for myself? If he would hear them for heathens, rebels, idolaters, Sodomites, will he not hear me in covenant with him, justified by him, obedient to him, approved of him?

*Obj.* But does not the church complain: Ps. lxxx. 4, 'O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?' Lam. iii. 8, 'When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.'

*Ans.* This may be misapprehension; think the Lord angry when he is not; or when not at their prayers, but at their sins. Zion complains, 'The Lord had forsaken,' &c., but the Lord convinces her it was a mistake, Isaiah xlix. 14-16. They thought the Lord denies because he delayed; think him angry, because he did not answer presently; whereas delay itself is sometimes a gracious answer, a sign of love rather than anger. To bestow mercies when petitioners are unfit for them, is to answer prayer in anger; to defer till then is love. Their eyes may be so fixed on the particular desired, as to take no notice of whatever other is returned.

12. Consider your own experiences, how many times God has answered your prayers formerly; that will be a great encouragement to trust him for time to come. Those that have tried God, are inexcusable if they will not trust him. His word is a sufficient ground for faith in prayer; but experience, withal, should exclude all doubting. This should both encourage to pray and believe. David made this use of it: Ps. cxvi. 2, 'Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.' Those who know what it is to enjoy communion with God in prayer,

and make conscience to pray frequently and fervently, must needs have many experiences of sweet returns. It may be you have been afflicted in conscience, and by crying to God, found comfort, as David, Psalm cxvi. ; or in doubts and perplexities, 'I cried to God, he resolved me;' or in wants and necessities, and 'he supplied me;' or in fear and dangers, and 'he delivered me;' or in trouble and affliction, and 'he supported and relieved me,' and sanctified it to me; or under temptation, buffeted by Satan, and 'his grace was sufficient for me;' or assaulted with some strong lusts, and 'he subdued them, and strengthened me;' or very desirous of some blessing, and 'he bestowed it on me.' Now faith should argue from these experiences, The Lord has heard me formerly, and why should I doubt but he will hear me now? He is the same God still, and prayer is as prevalent, as acceptable. My person and services were unworthy then, and this did not hinder, therefore it will not now, Ps. vi. 9. Paul's faith grows confident from former experiences: 2 Tim. iv. 17, 'The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me,' &c. There is his experience. See what inference his faith makes, verse 18, 'The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work,' &c. So David, 1 Sam. xvii. 84-87. In like manner we should conclude, because the Lord has heard me so frequently, so freely, so graciously, notwithstanding all my failings, weaknesses, unworthiness, therefore I will believe he will hear me still, he will answer me for time to come.

18. Limit not yourselves, nor the Lord, to the particular desired. You may pray in faith, though you be not confident that the very thing desired shall be granted; for if you apprehend that this is the only way to pray in faith, you will neglect other ways. And since this particular confidence is but required sometimes, you will but pray sometimes in faith, whereas this is always required. To prevent this, consider there are divers acts which faith may put forth in prayer, any of which, in its season, will make the duty a prayer of faith.

(1.) Sometimes determinately; or, if the word be not too bold, peremptorily. Faith may so act when you pray, being in covenant, for things absolutely necessary for God's glory and your salvation, those things which have a necessary connection with these. So you may ask in faith so much of temporal or spiritual blessings, as without which you cannot honour God, or be serviceable in your callings, and be confident of receiving them.

Or, when the Lord promises peremptorily and absolutely, faith is to keep proportion with the promise. If he promise absolutely, we may believe absolutely that we shall receive: so Heb. xiii. 5, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' He promises peremptorily; so we desire he would not forsake us, and believe we shall be heard in this determinately: so John xiii. 1, he says absolutely, 'Having loved his own, he loved them to the end.' So we may pray he would love us with an everlasting love, and believe that he will hear us in this particular: so Rom. vi. 14, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you.'

Or when he promises conditionally, but has made you partakers of the condition; for then it is equivalent to an absolute promise: so Mark xvi. 16, 'He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.' If he have given faith, you may pray for salvation, and believe that he will hear, *i. e.*, he will save: Prov. xxviii. 13, 'He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins, shall have mercy.' If he have enabled you to confess and forsake your sins, in judgment, affection, and practice, you may pray for and expect to

find mercy. So Mat. v., if you mourn, you may pray for comfort, and believe you shall receive it.

(2.) Sometimes indefinitely. That is, when you believe your prayer shall be heard, though faith define not, *i. e.*, pitch not upon any particular way, how, or when, or in what kind. He may be sometimes said to pray in faith who believes his person and prayer shall be accepted, though faith expect not a particular answer. This has place when the promise is indefinite, when a mercy is promised under a general notion, without defining the way, time, manner, kind, when, and how, or in what it shall prove a mercy to me: so Rom. viii. 28, 'All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' If you pray that such an occurrence or dispensation may work for good, and believe that it shall in general, though you be not confident that it shall do it in such a manner, time, way, degree, yet you may pray in faith: so Isaiah iii. 10, 'Say to the righteous that it shall be well with him.' If you pray it may go well in every condition, and believe it shall, and you shall receive a suitable answer: so Joel ii. 32, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be delivered.' Though ye believe not ye shall be delivered at such a time, in such a manner, by such means; yet if in general ye be confident of deliverance, ye shall have it.

(8.) Sometimes disjunctively. Believe not precisely that you shall receive this you pray for; but either this, or some other; something as good or better in reference to God's glory and your happiness; this is sufficient when you are not certain whether that you pray for be best for you; I say not, whether it seem, but whether it be. In this case, it is not required you should believe determinately that you shall receive what you pray for, but disjunctively, either this, or some other. In such a condition was Paul: Philip. i. 23, 24, 'I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.' When you are in such a strait you may pray for what you apprehend to be best, but not believe you shall be heard in that precisely; but either in that, or some other thing better or equivalent; so in praying for riches, posterity, deliverance, and indeed all things that are in their own nature, or to you, indifferent; you may desire riches, &c., but it is not necessary you should be confident that God will make you rich; but either do this or something as good.

(4.) Sometimes conditionally. We are to pray for nothing but what is commanded or promised; and the things we are to pray for are held forth in the word with two sorts of conditions, some annexed to the promise, some to the thing promised. Spiritual blessings are conditional, because sometimes conditions are annexed to the promises, whereby God engages himself to give them. Now when he has already wrought the conditions, we may pray in faith for them absolutely, as before. When the conditions are not wrought, then we should for the conditions themselves, not for the blessings conditionally: as Mat. v. 6, that we may hunger and thirst after righteousness; and Rev. ii. 10, that we may be faithful unto death. Temporal blessings are conditional, because conditions are annexed to the things themselves, and they are such as these: if it seem good, if it be thy will, if it be for thy glory, if it be for my soul's good. Temporal favours are to be asked in faith, but faith must act conditionally. The like is to be observed about the removal of afflictions, and vouchsafing of spiritual favours that tend to our well-being: faith in asking these must be acted, but acted conditionally, and with submission. An example we have in

David, a man strong in faith and much in prayer : 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26, ' If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it and his habitation. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee ; behold, here I am, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.' And in Christ himself, his faith acted conditionally : Mat. xxvi. 89, ' If it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.'

14. Labour to remove those discouragements which hinder the exercise of faith in prayer, or weaken it in its actings.

(1.) Great discouragement is, jealousy that the Lord has not heard you formerly. If you entertain such conceits that God has denied, rejected your petitions formerly, you may be apt to fear he will, or may do so for time to come. Such fears and jealousies are as worms at the root, or as a palsy in the hand of faith, deprives it of strength and stedfastness ; they are as storms, which unsettle, shock faith, and make it waver as a wave of the sea, ver. 7. This must be removed, as inconsistent with that confidence which the Lord expects in all that approach to him. To remove it, consider, the Lord may answer your prayers when you take no notice of it. He has many ways to answer our petitions, whenas we ordinarily take notice but of one ; and if the return come not that way, we conclude there is none, and thereby both wrong the Lord and ourselves. We may think he does not hear, we are not answered, when he both hears and answers us. Take notice how many ways God may answer your prayer, and you will see much more reason to conclude that he granted all, though you did not observe how, than that he ever denied any.

[1.] Prayer is answered when it is accepted, though there be no other effect of it visible. Prayer is not in vain, if the person be accepted, and the service approved. Do you think it is nothing to please God, to do that wherein his soul delights, to offer that which ascends to him as the odour of a sweet smell ? Is it nothing to obey God, to honour him, to give a testimony to his glorious perfections ? Is it nothing, to be admitted to such sweet intimate communion with God in such a familiar way, to speak to him as a man to his friend, as a child to his father ? Suppose you should reap no other benefit by prayer, is not here as much as will amount to an answer ? If you will not measure the return of your prayers by lower inferior advantages, these are the most blessed returns. It should be more desirable in your account to please him, than to be happy yourselves. His glory should be more valuable than your salvation, or all the means that tend to it. And such society with him should be esteemed the first-fruits of heaven. Yet these are the privileges of every accepted prayer ; and therefore, if it be accepted, though it obtain nothing more, it is abundantly answered.

[2.] He sometimes makes prayer an answer to itself, answers when you are praying : Isa. lrv. 24, ' While they are yet speaking, I will hear ;' not only hears, but answers, answers the prayer by enabling us to pray, Dan. ix. 20, 21. While Daniel was speaking in prayer, an angel was sent in answer to his desires. You will judge this is a sweet return. But how much more is it for the Holy Ghost to be sent into the heart, and thereby to have powerful assistance, comfortable enlargements, heavenly affections, and vigorous exercise of graces ; to have the soul winged with holy affections, to fly into the bosom of Christ ; to have heaven as it were opened, and the veil withdrawn, that the light of God's countenance may break out and shine upon the soul ! These are the greatest, the sweetest of spiritual

blessings, and infinitely transcend all outward enjoyments, Ps. iv. 6-8. Well then may they be accounted most blessed answers.

[3.] He sometimes answers prayers by discovering the defects of prayer, convincing his people of those failings which might make them fail of being answered; discovers the defects of prayers, and the sinfulness of them, formality, lukewarmness, unbelief, carelessness, sloth, irreverence, hypocrisy, self-seeking, or what else may render their prayer offensive. If prayer obtain this, to have such sins, and the evil of them discovered, it is a great advantage, a great mercy; and if it obtain so much, sure it is not unanswered.

[4.] It is a gracious answer sometimes to be denied. You account it a good answer to a petition when you have that which is better than the things desired; but when you desire that which is not good, the denial is better than the grant. The denial is a mercy, the grant would be a judgment. So it was with David: he was importunate for the life of his child; but was it not better for him that the Lord granted not its life, since it would have been a living monument of his ignominy, wherein every beholder might have read both his shame and heinous sin? The Lord is merciful oftentimes in denying outward blessings, worldly enjoyments, to his children; denies them plenty of temporals, lest it should bring leanness into their souls; denies them health, that their souls may prosper; denies comfort in dearest relations, by making them cross and uncomfortable, lest they should steal away the heart from himself. These denials are great mercies, and therefore sweet returns of prayer.

[5.] He sometimes answers, by bestowing only some degree of the thing desired, not the whole. The Lord answers Moses's prayer, by giving him a view of Canaan, not the full possession. Those who pray for increase of grace are answered, when the Lord draws out the heart in stronger desires after it. Desires after grace are a degree of grace. If the messenger of Satan, against which Paul prays, were some corruption, his prayer was answered, not totally, so as to be freed from assaults, but in some degree, so as to have power sufficient to resist. The prayers of God's people for the destruction of antichrist are answered in some degree, in that the impostures of that man of sin are discovered, and so many nations fallen off; many hate her, though make her not desolate.

[6.] He may hear the prayer, though he do not answer it presently. Delay is no denial: prayer is sure to be heard, though the Lord sometimes seems slow in granting what is prayed for. Delay is sometimes a mercy. He never defers, when it is seasonable to grant: 2 Pet. iii. 9, 'The Lord is not slack, as some men count slackness;' *i. e.*, as though he had altered his purpose, forgot his promise, or careless to accomplish either. He deferred in mercy, in long-suffering. He is not slack, though he may seem so to us, ver. 8. The promise was of the day of judgment, the coming of Christ, which is the prayer of the church, Rev. xx. 20. Quickly, because as soon as ever it is seasonable, he will come instantly, not defer one moment. As soon as it will be a mercy: Luke xviii. 17, 'Shall not God avenge his elect, though he bear long with them?' I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.' Stay long, and yet speedily. He stays that we may exercise faith in prayer, Heb. x. 35, &c. Christ prayed for his enemies, and was answered after his resurrection. Stephen prayed for his persecutors, and answered after his death in Saul's conversion. How long did God's ancient people pray for the coming of the Messiah, and the primitive Christians for good magistrates, all the faithful for the ruin of anti-

christ, and the primitive martyrs for vengeance against their persecutors? Rev. vi. 10. Prayers are seed, though they as it were lie under ground; talents laid up in heaven for improvement. One talent in prayer will be improved to ten in its return. Though the answer be as a cloud in your days, it may cover the heavens for your posterity, and rain showers of blessings. The last times will be times of greatest mercies, because the times of so many prayers, many answers are reserved for them. There is therefore no reason to conclude you are denied, because not presently answered.

[7.] He may grant the mercy desired, though not to the person for whom it is desired. He may answer your prayers by bestowing that on another which you desire for yourselves. So Moses was answered; he desired himself might conduct the Israelites into Canaan; the Lord appoints a dear relation of his, Joshua his servant, to be their conductor, and provides better for Moses; or he may bestow that upon yourselves which you desire for others; so he answered David, Ps. xxxv. 18; his prayer returned into his own bosom. The Lord will not suffer prayer to be in vain for hypocrites, for such were these, ver. 11, 12; or by bestowing it upon one as dear to thee as he that is prayed for. Abraham desired the promise might be accomplished in Ishmael, the Lord fulfils it to Isaac. Isaac intended and desired the blessing might fall upon Esau, the Lord bestows it on Jacob; and what David desires for his first child by Bathsheba, he grants to the second, to Solomon; the apostles desired the benefits of the Messiah might principally be the portion of the Jews, the Lord vouchsafes them to the Gentiles. There is no reason to conclude he denies, because he answers not as to the individual.

[8.] He answers by granting something else in lieu of what is desired, though he bestow not the same thing. He answers if he grant something as good, something better: Jer. xlv. 5, 'Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord; but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey.' It was better for Baruch to have his life where he went, than to enjoy a plentiful estate where he would have no security of his life. God seldom or never denies the particular desired, but he gives something as good or better, in one or all these four respects.

1st, In kind. When we pray for temporals, he gives spirituals. The apostles desired Christ would rule as a temporal king; he uses them as his instruments to erect a spiritual kingdom. They desire outward preferment, to sit at his right hand or left in worldly pomp; he assures them of spiritual and eternal glory, they should sit upon twelve thrones.

2d, In reference to the rule of goodness, his own will; which being *summè bona*, that which is agreeable must needs be best. That is ἀριστον, which is Τὸ Θεῷ ἀριστον. That is best for us which pleases him best. If he make not a return according to our wills, yet always according to his will; and that being the rule of goodness, that which is conformable to it is best for us.

3d, In reference to the great end of all we pray for, God's glory. If he give not the very thing desired, yet he will give something that will tend more to his glory; and that which most conduces to it is best; not only in respect of God, but us, for our chief happiness consists in his glory; the more we honour him the more is our happiness, and that is best, sure, which makes us most happy. That is a sweet answer to prayer, when he gives that which is better than what we desire.



4th, In reference to the particular end of your desire. If he give not the mercy desired, yet something that will as much advance the end for which you desire it. And if you have your end for which, what you aimed at, you have your desires, for the means is not otherwise desirable. As if you desire a blessing that you may live contentedly; if he bestow not that, but another mercy that will afford as much or more contentment. You desire an alteration of your condition, that you may live more contentedly; if the Lord do not alter your condition, but change your heart, so as to make it contented with your present state, though he do not raise your condition in respect of riches, credit, as high as your desires, yet if he bring down your heart and desires to your condition, so as to be therewith fully satisfied and contented, he gives that which is as good or better than what you desire, and so returns a sweet answer to your prayers. Or if your desires pitch upon some particular means to subdue a lust, though he grant not, yet if he offer another, which is as or more effectual to subdue that lust, he grants what is as good or better. Or if you desire the removal of some affliction, that you might with more liberty and cheerfulness serve the Lord, though he remove it not, yet if he enable you under that affliction to serve him with as much cheerfulness and enlargement of heart, he grants your request, and answers your prayers.

2. Discouragement is sense of unworthiness. A humble soul will be apt to say, How can I believe the Lord will hear me who am so vile, not only in respect of the common condition of mankind, being but dust and ashes, a worm, less, worse, but also being more than ordinary sinful, having often profaned this ordinance, and abused former comfortable returns; and in respect of my condition in the world, being so mean and contemptible, as I cannot be confident of access to men of any extraordinary note in the world; how much less can I be confident of acceptance or audience with the great and holy God?

To remove this, consider,

(1.) The Lord never heard any that either were really worthy, or did account themselves so. All that ever had access to, and audience with God, have been really, and in their own esteem, unworthy. The Lord requires not that his people should bring any worth with them to commend their prayers to him. The want of personal worth did never hinder the Lord from answering prayer. Therefore no reason to be discouraged for want of that which is neither necessary nor ever was present. No flesh is justified in his sight.

(2.) The more unworthy, and withal the more sensible of it, the more hopes of answer and acceptance. This is so far from being any just impediment to faith, as it should rather encourage it; for Scripture and experience tell us it is both the Lord's gracious disposition and practice to do most for them who are, or seem to themselves to be, most unworthy: 'He fills the hungry,' Luke i. 53, 48, but 'casts down the mighty,' ver. 52. He pronounces them blessed who are poor, Mat. v.; calls not many wise and noble, 1 Cor. i. 26-28; seeks that which is lost, Luke vi. 19, 20; saves sinners, the chief of them, 1 Tim. i. 15; invites beggars, sends out his servants to fetch them, Luke xiv. 21, 23; those who have no money, no worth, worth nothing, Isa. lv.; pities those whom no eye pities, Ezek. xvi. 6; condescends lowest to those who are lowest. He takes pleasure in it, he gets honour by it. Hereby is the freeness, the riches of grace made more conspicuous, infinite mercy appears more merciful.

Consider but the different demeanour and success of the Pharisee and

publican as to this duty, and it will put it past doubt. Consider what self-confidence and conceitedness in the one, what humility and sense of unworthiness in the other: Luke xviii. 10 to the 15th, 'This man went away justified, rather than the other.' Justified, *i. e.*, pardoned, accepted, answered. *Rather, i. e.*, exclusively; he was justified, and *not* the other. The reason is observable: ver. 14, 'For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.' Sense of unworthiness should rather strengthen than discourage.

(3.) Prayer and praying in faith is not only a privilege, but a duty; and is any one unworthy to do his duty? If it was only a privilege, unworthiness might be some plea to keep off sinners from meddling with prayer or acting faith, but since it is a duty, you cannot with any reason, cannot without absurdity make use of it to discourage you. What, are you unworthy to obey God, to do what he commands, to do as he requires? The very conceit of this is absurd; men would laugh at such a plea; God will be far from accepting it. Would you take it well from your servant, if he should neglect to do what you command under pretence that he is unworthy to obey you? Yes, you would count it a jeer, you will think him idle, and foolish too in finding no better excuse for his idleness. The case is alike in reference to God; we are unworthy to receive, but not to obey. There is no show of reason why this should be a discouragement.

(4.) Though you be unworthy to be heard, yet Christ is worthy; it is he that undertakes to present your petition, and procure an answer. Believers, when they are found praying, they are found as Paul, Philip. iii. 9, 'not having their own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, that which is of God by faith.' Faith makes Christ yours, and so his righteousness yours. It unites to Christ as to your head: *Caput et membra sunt quasi una mystica persona*. When the Lord looks on you he finds you having Christ's righteousness, and that is enough to make both persons and prayers righteous, to cover all unworthiness in either that might hinder acceptance. Though Christ communicates not his merits, so as we can deserve anything, yet he communicates the efficacy and benefits of interest in his merits, so as if they be not ours they are for us; he deserves, he is worthy that we should be heard.

8. Discouragement is weakness of prayers. A humble soul will be apt to say, I am not only unworthy, but my prayers are weak; much unlike to the prayers of God's people formerly, accompanied with many infirmities, deadness of heart, straitness of spirit, formality, distractions.

To remove this, consider,

(1.) You may mistake, and think your prayers weak, when they are strong. The strength of prayer consists not in anything outward, not in expressions either by word or tears, not in outward gestures or enlargements. It is a hidden, an inward strength. Those may be sometimes the signs, but never the sinews. Men may judge of its strength by multitude, vehemency, or patheticalness of expression; but 'the Lord seeth not as man seeth; man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart,' 1 Sam. xvi. 7. Man's judgment differs far from his; man may judge that weak which he judges strong. The strength of prayer lies in the heart, in the motion of the affections, and the exercise of graces; and above all affections, in zeal; above all graces, in faith. Faith and fervency is the strength of prayer; faith principally, and fervency but as it springs from faith. All affectionateness without this is not prevalent, not powerful. Cut out of faith, and you cut out of the strength of prayer; for

though it be the most prevalent exercise on earth, and has power both with God and men, yet without faith, it is like Samson deprived of his locks, Judges xvi. 17. The great champion of Israel, his strength went from him, and he became weak, and like another man. So prayer when without faith it becomes weak, and like those bodily exercises which profit not. You should not be discouraged from believing, because your prayers are weak, but rather be hereby persuaded to exercise faith that your prayers may be strong.

(2.) Examine whether those weaknesses be voluntary or involuntary, whether through unavoidable infirmity, or carelessness, sloth, and negligence. If they be voluntary, prayer is weak, and you willing and content it should be so; if slothful, and will not stir up yourselves to lay hold on God; want strength, because you will not exercise it, will not summon up spiritual forces of affection and graces to follow after God, then I confess your condition is sad, and full of sin and discouragements. So long as you continue thus slothful, the word affords little encouragement. You must pray, if you would be heard, not pray as though you prayed not. You must cry, if you would be answered; offer up strong cries. You must follow hard after God, if you would find him; lay hold on him, and stir up all your strength to do it, if you would enjoy him. But if these weaknesses be involuntary, *i. e.*, if you bewail, mourn for them; if they be your burden and affliction; if you long, thirst, breathe after more strength; if you earnestly endeavour to shake off these distempers, and be diligent in the use of all appointed means to gather more strength to your prayers; this mourning, longing, endeavouring are signs the Lord will not take notice of your infirmities, will not charge your weaknesses upon you, nor impute them to you; they shall not hinder the Lord from hearing and answering, nor should not hinder you from believing. In these cases, the Lord accepts the will for the deed, 2 Cor. viii. 12, answers and rewards weak prayers as though they were strong. He stands not so much upon the quantity of your strength, but that he will accept the sincerity of your endeavours. He will look upon you and reward you, not according to what you are, but would be. He that has but a little strength, and puts it all out in prayer, shall more prevail than he that prays with much strength comparatively, if he do not pray with all. This is plain from Christ's testimony of the widow, Luke xxi. 8. Her two mites was more than twenty talents cast in by one that had an hundred. The Lord is so gracious, he will accept of a little from those who cannot do much, better than of much from them who can do more. He despises not the day of small things, takes special notice of a little strength in Philadelphia, Rev. iii. 8. There is no reason, therefore, to be discouraged from weaknesses, if not voluntary.

(3.) If you be weak, labour to pray in faith, that you may be strong. This should rather be a motive, than a discouragement. Would you think him reasonable who, being weak, would neglect or refuse nourishment, because he is weak? He should rather receive it, and has more need to do it, that he may be strong. So here. To act faith in prayer, is the best way to get ability and strength to pray powerfully. Faith draws together both domestic and auxiliary forces, stirs up the strength of the soul, and withal engages the strength of Christ; and they that wrestle with that strength shall surely prevail. The efficacy of the head is divided into the body, by means of the union betwixt head and members. Now it is faith that unites to Christ; he who has all power in heaven and earth dwells in our hearts by faith, it makes his strength ours. The ancients, through

faith, 'out of weakness were made strong,' Heb. xi. 34; not only strong in battle, to prevail against the armies of the aliens, but strong in prayer, to prevail with God. If you would be strong in prayer, you must pray in faith, that your weaknesses may be hereby scattered, infirmities put to flight. These should not drive you from your confidence, but engage you to be confident, since this is the only way to grow strong.

4. Discouragement. My prayers are not only weak, but sinful. The weakness is too voluntary; slothful, and too willing to be so, loth to stir up myself; lukewarm, and shake it not off; pray as though grace were asleep, and my soul in a slumber.

*Ans.* I must suppose that, though there be much sinfulness and weakness in your prayers, yet there is something gracious, else there can be nothing spoken that will afford the least encouragement; though much corruption, yet something spiritual; though much of the flesh, yet some workings of the Spirit; some actings of grace, though in a low degree; some desires after God that are sincere, though weak; some motions toward Christ, though slow and feeble; some apprehensions of the Lord, though distracted and hindered with other impertinencies; some heat, so much as argues the soul alive to God, though in a slumber; though much of sin, yet something of holiness. This supposed, take what I have to say in this case in two propositions.

(1.) So far as your prayers are sinful, you can expect no answer; God will not reward, cannot approve the sinfulness of prayer.

[1.] Sinful prayers, as sinful, are all one in God's account as other sinful acts. And the wages of these are death; no other reward can be expected for these but this; expect rather he should punish than answer. It is true these or other sins are pardoned, through the satisfaction of Christ, to those that repent and believe. You must repent for the sins of those prayers, and pray that the Lord would pardon them, and then believe he will pardon; and this is all faith is to expect in this case. Christ never purchased anything, nor did the Lord ever promise anything, to prayers as they are sinful. You cannot expect God should answer or reward them as such; it is infinite mercy that he will pardon them. Gracious acts, as such, will be rewarded; but as sinful, it is well if they be pardoned.

[2.] Though the Lord pardon, yet he may, and usually does, correct his people for them. They will not be rewarded; all that Christ procured for them is pardon, nor such a pardon as will exempt them from smarting sufferings. He does visit sinful prayers with stripes. Though he pardon, yet he may chastise severely, Ps. xcix. 8. It is madness, a hellish imposture, to think God is as well pleased with us acting sinfully, as graciously. He rewards this, he will not pardon that without satisfaction of infinite value; nor so, but he will manifest his displeasure by afflicting.

[3.] Though these afflictions tend to good, yet the way is grievous. They tend to good to believers, as it is promised, Rom. viii. It is good for them that are afflicted. So it is good for one in a lethargy to be cupped, for one whose wounds are gangrened to be cut, lanced, cauterised. These are good in these cases, but grievous in themselves. Were it not better to be in health, to want wounds, than to need such cures, to be in such a condition, when nothing will be so good as that which is so grievous? It is madness to think it is not better to shake off sloth, than to pray so as we can expect no answer, so as we must pray for pardon of prayers and bring afflictions. Prayers as sinful must not be answered, may be pardoned, will be chastised for the good of believers, but in a way that is

grievous, and in itself no way desirable. You see what we must expect from prayers as sinful.

(2.) So far as the prayer is gracious, there is encouragement. For,

[1.] The Lord will accept, and in some way or other answer, a prayer in any degree gracious, though there be much corruption or weakness in it. That prayer where grace is acted, though weakly, and in which the Spirit assists, though less powerfully, is more or less acceptable. For, 1, grace is the work, the gift of God, *Deus coronat dona sua*. He accepts, rewards his own gift, wherever it is. And the work of the Spirit is well pleasing to him, though its attendants be offensive; he can discern and separate wheat from chaff, gold from dross. 2. He will not quench the smoking flax. Heavenly, spiritual heat is pleasing to him, though it flame not, though nothing but smoke be visible. He takes notice of a little strength in Philadelphia, Rev. iii. 7, 8, and promises much to that little. 3. If the mixtures of corruption and weakness be bewailed and repented of, they are pardoned. If the righteousness of Christ be applied by faith, this will be a satisfaction for those offences; and if the Lord be satisfied, what can hinder him from answering? Offences not imputed, are in effect no offences; and the Lord, satisfied, will be as gracious as though he had not been offended.

[2.] When there is much of corruption and little of grace in a prayer, though the Lord may answer, yet ordinarily, if not always, the answer is not so full, speedy, comfortable, satisfying, nor perceivable. Though the Lord pardons the sins and failings of weak prayers, yet he may, and often does, afflict for them; and part of the affliction may consist in the quality of the answer. The Lord often proportions his answer to our prayers; slothful prayers have slow answers, &c. Experience bears witness to this, and David observed it, Ps. xviii. He tells us the Lord answered him: ver. 6, 'He heard my voice, my cry came before him.' He tells us how he answered him: ver. 20, 'The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me.' Though he answer not *propter*, yet *secundum preces*: though not for the holiness, fervency, affectionateness of our prayers, yet according to the holiness, &c., of them. Though they be not causes why he answers, either meriting, as papists, or moving, as ignorants conceive, yet they may be qualifications to fit us for, or presages or signs of, gracious answers. They may qualify, *aliud est de causa agere*, &c., *aliud de quantitate*, as Gregory. Though they do not procure, yet they may prepare, dispose, and fit, the soul for receipt of an answer. When the Lord will open his hand to bestow a bountiful answer, he enlarges the heart to seek it, and withal to receive it: see it in Dan. ix. A dead, lukewarm heart would not prize spiritual mercies, could not make good use of temporal blessings. When the Lord will give an answer of a better nature, he puts the heart into a better temper. They are signs of a gracious answer. Bernard says of works, they are *futura responsionis prasagia*, comfortable signs of a comfortable answer; *occulta predestinationis judicia*, arguments that the Lord intends, and is resolved to deal bountifully. When the heart is shut, it is a sign the Lord intends to shut his hand, Mat. vii. 2. According to the measure of our prayers, the degrees of grace and affection exercised in them, God measures out his blessings in answer to them. So it is ordinarily. He that sows sparingly must reap accordingly. He that prays but little, and prays not well, has no reason to expect large or gracious returns.

[3.] Since the Lord is so gracious as to accept, and in some degree or

other answer weak and sinful prayers, and to own that which proceeds from grace and his Spirit in them, though accompanied with such corruptions as might provoke him to reject them, and punish you for them, hence you have encouragement to believe the Lord will answer them, and to expect the returns thereof; and you will have good warrant to do this, if you do that first which he requires. If you exercise repentance, *i. e.*, bewail the sins and weakness of your prayers, abhor yourself for giving so much way thereto, and resolve to endeavour, with all your strength, in the use of all appointed means, to avoid them for time to come; if you exercise faith, *i. e.*, rest upon Christ for pardon of those provocations, apply those promises which offer pardon, and lay hold on that righteousness of Christ whereby he has satisfied the Lord for those offences; this done, you may, nay, you ought, to believe that the Lord will not only answer your prayers for time to come, but to expect returns of prayers past.

8. *Use.* For examination. Try whether we pray in faith. It is a work of great importance; for if ye pray not in faith at all, it is a sign ye have no faith; and then ye are under the law, cut off from Christ, exposed to the curse, liable to eternal wrath. What is hell but abiding wrath? If ye have faith, but act it not in prayer, you deprive yourselves of the benefit of this ordinance, ver. 7; prayer is the conduit-pipe appointed by God to convey all the blessings of the upper and lower springs to the children of men; but if the passage be obstructed, it will be useless, of no advantage to you. Want of faith is a dangerous obstruction; this will hinder the passage of all mercy; not a drop of the water of life will be conveyed by prayer without faith. Therefore there is great reason to examine; and to help you, take some characters.

(1.) Backwardness to pray is a sign you pray not in faith. He that believes he shall have whatever he asks, freely, without upbraiding, will be ready and forward to ask upon all occasions. If you did believe, you would omit no opportunity to address yourselves to God this way; you would not neglect it in your families, in secret, in public: those who omit it, undervalue it, make no great account of it, spend whole days without it, count it a burden, say, What a weariness is it! take no pleasure, no delight, come to it as a task, cannot be said to pray in faith.

(2.) Carelessness in praying. Prayer is a blessed engine, which, being carefully managed by faith, will procure all mercies that you need, for time or eternity; never made use of it in vain; if you did believe this, you would not be so negligent in prayer, but would stir up yourselves and diligently improve all your might in prayer. Those who pray only with their lips, draw near only with their mouths, make it only an exercise of the body, and suffer their hearts and thoughts to wander without control, pray as if they prayed not, do not pray in faith; if you prayed in faith, you would observe the condition of such a prayer, one of which is fervency. Where lukewarmness, indifferency, formality, distractions are tolerated, faith is not exercised.

(3.) Perplexity and solicitousness after prayer. This was a sign Hannah prayed in faith, 1 Sam. i., because, though she spake out of the abundance of her complaint and grief; yet, after, her countenance was no more sad. Faith is expressed by casting our burden upon the Lord; he that groans and is oppressed under a burden, when it is laid on another is at ease; he that acts faith in prayer casts his burden upon God; therefore, after such a prayer, the oppressed soul will be at ease, 'return to its rest;' no heart-dividing cares molest it: 'Be careful for nothing.'

(4.) Is the promise your encouragement in prayer? Does this draw you to pray? does this quicken you in praying? does this encourage to expect a return after prayer? do you plead the word? do you urge the promise? Then it is faith. Thus the people of God have done in their prayers of faith; so Moses, Num. xiv. 17, 18; and Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 23-26; Neh. i. 8; so David, Ps. cxix. 25, 28, 58, 65, 76, 116. Do you plead the word of promise, Though I be unworthy to be heard, yet the Lord is worthy to be honoured; and it is not for thy honour to neglect thy word; though I can do nothing to engage thee, yet thou hast engaged thyself, and the Lord will be true to his engagements; though nothing be due to me but wrath, yet the Lord hath made this mercy due to me by his promise, therefore I will expect it; the Lord will not detain what himself has made due; though I forget my promises and resolutions for God, yet the Lord will not forget his covenant; it is his attribute, 'a God keeping covenant;' and though the Lord may deny me, yet he will not deny himself? Does the faithfulness and righteousness of God encourage you to ask and to expect an answer? Do you plead these, as David frequently, 'Deliver me in thy righteousness,' Ps. cxix. 40; Ps. cxliii. 1; though my unrighteousnesses do testify against me, yet the Lord is righteous from everlasting to everlasting; and is it not a righteous thing with the Lord to do what he has said? Though I am unfaithful, and have dealt falsely in the covenant, yet my unfaithfulness cannot make the faithfulness of God of no effect. The Lord has promised, and faithful is he who has promised, who also will do it; thus to conclude, thus to act upon the promises, and upon the righteousness and faithfulness of God engaged in the promise, is the work of faith; and the prayer where such actings are found, is of faith; where the promise raises the heart to hope, and hope quickens it to more frequency, more fervency in prayer.

(5.) Can you submit to the Lord's time for an answer, believing that your prayer shall either be answered now or hereafter, when it is best for you? This is enough to denominate your prayers. Faith is a submissive grace; it will not prescribe to the Lord, nor limit the Holy One; it will acknowledge him to be both *κύριος τοῦ δοῦναι καὶ τοῦ πότε δοῦναι*, as Chrysostom, both Lord of what he gives, and of the time when he will give it; sometimes the Lord answers presently, Gen. xxiv. 12-15, Dan. ix.; sometimes 'the vision is for an appointed time,' Hab. ii. 8; and then, 'though it tarry, we must wait for it;' so do those who live (who pray) by faith, ver. 4. It is uncertain to us when the appointed time is, whether now or hereafter: 'It is not for us to know the times and the seasons,' Acts i. 7; so Christ told his disciples when they were a little too peremptory as to a present answer: 'Wilt thou at this time?' &c., 'It is not for you to know,' &c., and withal commands them to wait, ver. 4. Faith will be content to act upon what God has revealed; it is unbelief that pries into God's secrets: faith will be content with God's time; it is unbelief would confine the Lord to our time: 'He that believes makes not haste;' he will stay God's leisure, refer himself for the time to him who knows what time is best; it is unbelief that is so hasty, must have it now, or not at all, as that wretch, 2 Kings vi. 33. It is sufficient, ordinarily, to constitute a prayer of faith, to believe the Lord will answer, either in our time or his, either now or hereafter; either at present, or when it will be more seasonable, more a mercy; and to rest satisfied with this; if faith act thus in prayer, you pray in faith.

(6.) Are you persuaded the Lord will give either what you desire, or

what is better? Do you rest in this, that you shall have what you ask, either in kind or in an equivalency; that the Lord will satisfy your desires, either as to the letter of your petition, or as to the intention of it? Do you acquiesce in this, that the Lord will answer you, either according to your will, or according to his will; that he will give either what you think best or what he thinks best? Do you believe you shall be heard, either *ad voluntatem*, or *ad salutem*? as Augustine; that he will give either what you desire, or what is better than the thing you desire? if so, you pray in faith.

It is a great mistake to think you pray not in faith, unless you believe the very particular shall be granted which you ask. Faith acts in a greater latitude, hath a larger sphere, it reaches as far as that providence which orders the returns of prayer; faith acts for an answer, according as the Lord is wont to make answers. Now this is clear in Scripture and experience, that the Lord doth answer, not only by giving the thing desired, but by vouchsafing something else, as much, or more desirable: Acts i., 'Wilt thou restore the kingdom?' &c., ver. 6; this was it they desired, a temporal kingdom. He gratifies them not in this, yet grants that which was much better: ver. 8, 'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me,' &c.; and as faith is not confined in such narrow bounds, so it will not confine the Lord to them, it will not limit the Holy One of Israel. To limit the Lord is to tempt him; and to tempt God is an act of unbelief, that unbelief whereby the Israelites provoked God in the wilderness, Ps. lxxviii. 41; this is censured under the notion of unbelief, ver. 22; it was from their unbelief that they limited God. They were not contented with manna, though angels' food, that which the Lord thought best for them; they must have flesh too; they must have flesh or nothing, ver. 18; their lusting was a peremptory desire, an issue of unbelief. We may judge of the nature of this desire by the quality of the answer; if it had been a desire of faith, it had been answered in mercy; but the Lord answers them in wrath, ver. 29-31. *Ad voluntatem auditi sunt Israelitæ*. He gave them their own desire; since they would not be satisfied, unless they had that very thing which they desired, they had it indeed, but they had the wrath of God with it. The Lord does not answer the desires of faith in this manner; they are of another strain; they will be satisfied either with what is desired, or with what the Lord counts better. It is unbelief that must have that which is desired, or nothing; faith is not so peremptory. When we pray for things not absolutely necessary, or not comparatively necessary, *i. e.*, not so necessary, but something else may be more necessary, we may pray in faith, though we believe not that the particular we desire shall be granted; it is sufficient in these cases, if we believe the Lord will either vouchsafe that, or something else which he knows to be more convenient: and therefore if your faith act accordingly in prayer, it may be called a prayer of faith.

(7.) Can you suspend your hopes of an answer upon a condition, upon such conditions as have warrant and approbation in Scripture? Faith acted conditionally is enough, in some cases, to constitute a prayer of faith. Abraham prayed in faith, yet his prayer runs in a conditional strain, Gen. xviii. 29, 30, 32; so Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 35, 44, 47; so Christ himself, Luke xxii. 42. The apostle mentions a conditional confidence, 1 John v. 14. The confidence is, that he will hear when we ask; the condition is, if we ask according to his will; or, which comes to the same issue, if we ask what is good for us, all things considered, for what is good for us is according to his will.



In case, then, you are uncertain what is according to his will, if he have not absolutely manifested, by command, promise, or other equivalent that what you desire is that which he wills, either in substance or circumstance, or in case you are uncertain whether that you pray for be absolutely good for you, or so good, but something else may be better, in these cases, when you believe that what you pray for shall be granted, if it be according to his will, or if it be best for you, you pray in faith; no more is required.

Augustine gives this rule for regulating our prayers as to temporals, and it holds in spirituals, when there is that uncertainty now spoken of: *Quando petitis temporalia, petite cum modo*, ask them with restriction, *i. e.*, conditionally, *illi committite, ut si profuit, det; si scit obesse, non det*, refer it to him to give if it be good, to deny if it be hurtful, *quid autem obest, quid prosit, novit medicus, non ægrotus*; submit will and wisdom to him.

Before we conclude, it is requisite to resolve some cases.

1. Since it is necessary that those who would receive must pray in faith, *i. e.*, must be confident and assured that their prayers shall be answered, what can they expect who want assurance, who (as to their own apprehensions) have not the grounds of this confidence? How can they be confident of this privilege, who are full of fears and doubts that they are not in that state on which this privilege is entailed? How can they pray in faith, who fear they have not faith? How can they believe their prayers will be accepted, who see no ground to believe that their persons are accepted? This is the case of those who, being in or newly past the pangs of the new birth, have the seeds of faith, but not the evidence. Faith is in its infancy, not grown up to that maturity as to know itself. Such walk in darkness, and see no light; have no light to discover that God is their Father, that the promise is their portion, that Christ intercedes for them, or that the Spirit intercedes in them. What support can these have in reference to the success of their prayers? This may be the case also of such who have had assurance, but have now lost it; who are in that sad condition as they have occasion to invert the apostle's expression, that they were sometimes light in the Lord, but now they are darkness; their former evidence is blotted, former light clouded, the Spirit of God suspending his assuring and evidencing testimony, either for trial or upon some provocation. The question here will be, What encouragement and support such may have as to the issue of their prayers? can such pray in faith? or can they pray so as their prayers shall be granted?

*Ans.* A faith of dependence may constitute a prayer of faith, where assurance is wanting; and therefore those who, through the weakness of faith, or through the withdrawals of God in time of desertion, are destitute of assurance, may yet pray in faith, if so be they exercise this faith of dependence. To open this a little, a faith of dependence, as but a *may be*, God *may* answer; a faith of assurance has a *will be*, says, God *will* answer. That says, Probably the Lord will hear; this says, Certainly the Lord will hear. Jonathan went out against the Philistines in the strength of that faith we express by depending or relying upon God, and it rose no higher than thus, 'It may be,' 1 Sam. xiv. 6. Now, faith thus acted in prayer makes it a prayer of faith. But to resolve this case more fully and clearly, I shall endeavour four things.

(1.) To shew that this relying on God for answer is sufficient to make a prayer of faith, that this faith of dependence is enough in some cases. And thus I proceed. It is this faith which justifies a sinner. The person being justified is accepted; the person being accepted, the prayer is

accepted, and so will be answered. A sinner is not justified by assurance, but by an act of dependence or relying on Christ; for he is justified by the first act of faith, when he first believes. But assurance is after the first act of believing, Eph. i. 13. The Spirit's sealing, which causes assurance, is after believing; upon which he is justified, person and prayers accepted. A faith of dependence, without assurance, is sufficient to render the prayer acceptable and capable of an answer. And therefore this relying, acted in prayer, makes it a prayer of faith. Besides, this faith is sometimes all that is required, and all that is expressed, in those prayers which have been graciously answered, Joel ii. 12-14. The prophet directs them how to address themselves to the Lord. Faith is necessary in all such addresses, yet all the faith whereby they made this address is in those words, 'Who knoweth?' &c., which amounts to no more than this faith of dependence. It is no more than this, It may be the Lord will return and repent, &c., Jonah iii. 9. That faith, in the strength of which they were to send up those mighty cries, goes no farther than a *may be*, *Who can tell?* &c.; yet this prayer prevailed, ver. 10. So that it is clear from hence, that a faith of dependence, acted in prayer, will prevail with God for an answer, and make it a prayer of faith.

(2.) I will shew the objects upon which this faith is acted, and by which it is supported, and how it is to be exercised on them in the cases propounded. The objects to which I will be confined at this time are three.

[1.] The name of God. The Lord directs those that are in darkness to this object, Isa. l. 10; and there is enough in this name to encourage and support the weakest, and to silence all his fears and doubts as to the success of his prayers. See it declared, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Here is firm footing for that faith which is so weak and small as it cannot be discerned by him that hath it. It is said of Abraham, that he 'staggered not through unbelief,' Rom. iv. 20; and the reason is, because he had firm footing for both feet. He that stands but upon one leg may easily stagger; he that is persuaded that God is able, but not willing, or willing, but not able, his faith stands but upon one leg. But Abraham was persuaded of both: the promise, that persuaded him God was willing; his power, that persuaded him he was able; both expressed, ver. 21. Therefore his faith having ground for both feet, stood sure and steadfast; it staggered not. Now the name of God affords as good ground for faith; there is that in it which may persuade a doubting soul that God is both able and willing. 'The Lord, the Lord God;' *Heb.*, 'Jehovah, Jehovah El.' The strong God; he that has his being of himself, and gives a being to things that are not. This shews he is able, able to give a being to all you want or desire, though they are to be brought out of nothing; able to make thee pray, and able to make all desirable returns to thy prayers, nay, 'above what you can ask or think.' And that he is willing, the rest of his name shews, 'merciful, gracious,' &c. He is merciful, and misery is a proper plea for mercy, and am I not miserable? He is gracious, and grace expects no motive from without; free grace will move itself; nor will it be stopped by any hindrance within me. Unworthiness cannot hinder, for then it is most grace when it rests in the most unworthy; and am not I such? Long continuance in sin cannot hinder, if broken off by repentance, for he is long-suffering; no, nor the abounding sinfulness of sin, for he is abundant in goodness; no, nor the infinite multitude and variety of sins, for he forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; nor the huge number of peti-

tioners, he keeps mercy for thousands. And though the doubting soul cannot in prayer plead his truth (another letter of his name) in reference to the covenant, as not knowing his interest in the covenant, yet he may plead it in reference to the declaration of his name ; as sure as God is true, so sure he is merciful and gracious, &c.

[2.] The free offers of Christ. The Scripture abounds with them ; I will but instance in one : John vi. 37, ' All that the Father giveth me shall come to me ; and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.' That which faith principally eyes in Christ for the success of prayer, is his intercession, his office as advocate. Now, though a doubting soul dare not rely upon Christ as one that is his advocate, yet may it rely on him as one that *offers* to be its advocate. He professes that he will in no wise refuse any that will retain him. Christ, may the soul say, prayed for his enemies, for those that were murdering him, and may he not then intercede for me ? It is true I have been an enemy, but oh how do I hate myself for that enmity ! I have now laid down arms, and now, though I can do little for him, yet I resolve never more to oppose him, though I perish. And since he was so gracious, as to pray for his murderers, who knows but he may intercede for me ? And further, Christ prayed not only for those who did actually believe, but for those who should afterwards believe, John xvii. 20. He prayed for those who then had no faith when he prayed. And is not this thy case, poor doubting or deserted soul ? Is not this the worst thou canst make of it ? Canst thou say anything worse of thyself than this, I do not believe, I have no faith ? Well, then, seek to Christ, rely on him, as one that prayed, as one that intercedes for unbelievers ; and hereby thou wilt shew thou hast faith, and thy prayers will be answered, as the Lord useth to answer prayers of faith.

[3.] The general promise ; such as are not restrained to those qualifications and conditions, which the dark soul apprehends to be out of its reach ; such as that, Heb. xi. 6, ' He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him ;' Joel ii. 32, ' Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be delivered.' The doubting soul may thus reason. There was nothing in man could move the Lord to make these promises, and there is nothing in man can hinder him from performing them when and where he pleases. And who knows but he may perform them to me ? It is true I have neglected Christ formerly, oh but now I resolve to seek him indeed. And though I be not certain that he will be found of me, yet I will seek him early, seek him first, before all others, seek him principally, above all others ; who knows but I may at last find him ? He has been found of those that sought him formerly ; he has been found of those that sought him not ; and will he not be found of me that seek him ?

(3.) The acts of this faith, in which it is exercised, and by which it may be discerned.

[1.] A renouncing of all supports and refuges, but Christ. See it in returning Ephraim : Hosea xiv. 8, ' We will no more rely on Assyria, nor trust in our armies of horse.' So the soul will no more rely on its own wisdom and righteousness, on his own works and performances. When he comes to pray, he will not ground his confidence on what he doth, or what he is, or what he is not, as the Pharisee ; he perceives these to be but a refuge of lies. And though he become hereby destitute and helpless, and has not thus much to comfort him, that God is his Father, yet here is his support in this orphan state, ' In thee the fatherless find mercy.'

[2.] Submission. A depending soul will be content with anything, if

the Lord will but own him, if Christ will but smile, entertain him. This is visible in the returning prodigal, Luke xv. 18, 19. To my father; there is faith. Though thou hast dealt with me as a Father, yet I am unworthy to be called a son, unworthy to be entertained and employed as a son. Lord, let me be anything, so as I may have a being in thy house; let me but come under thy roof, and I will be content though I have no other usage, respect, reward; the meanest office in thy house is too good, only let me not be shut out of doors.

The woman of Canaan, though she followed Christ with such strength of faith and importunity of prayer, as he admires her, yet so submissive, she will be content with crumbs, anything that has relation to children, though not the relation itself, yea, though it be but the crumbs that fall from the table, Mat. xv. 22. So 2 Sam. xv. 25.

[3.] Acceptation. He will yield to any terms, so as the Lord will but grant his chief desires. Tell him, if he will have Christ, and follow him, he must forsake all; he embraces the motion, he says, This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation. He says with Mephibosheth, Nay, let him take all, if my Lord will return to my soul in peace. Tell him, if he will inherit the land of promise, he must come out of Egypt, he is content, he will not leave a hoof behind. All his lusts shall go, if Christ will but come, small and great, secret and open, pleasant and profitable; his Zoars, his little ones, shall be turned into ashes; his Herodias, his pleasant beloved sins shall be divorced. The best and fattest of the cattle, his profitable and gainful sins, shall be put to the sword, with the rest of the children of Amalek; his secret idols, those that are hid in the stuff, shall not only be buried, but, as Moses with the calf, ground to powder. Tell him, if he will be joined to Christ, he must forget his kindred and father's house, his former old acquaintance and conversation; he is satisfied, so as the King will delight in his beauty, so as Christ will but take pleasure in him. Tell him, if he will have Christ as an intercessor, he must submit to him as a king; Oh, says he, if the golden sceptre may be but holden forth, I will submit to it for ever. Tell him, if he will have the Spirit of Christ, he must have him as a Spirit of grace, as well as a Spirit of supplication: he yields with cheerfulness; he looks upon holiness as garments of wrought gold, that which will both enrich and beautify him; the sanctifying work of the Spirit is acceptable to him, as well as the sealing work. Tell him, he that will name the name of the Lord with acceptance, must depart from iniquity: he answers presently, 'What have I any more to do with idols?' This accepting Christ, and the Spirit of Christ, upon gospel terms, is called faith, John i. 12.

[4.] Appropriation. Coming unto Christ, stretching out his soul to lay hold on him, opening his heart to embrace him, flying upon the wing of desire to draw near him. Thus faith is expressed by 'drawing near,' Heb. x. 22. Though he cannot draw near with full assurance of faith, yet with a full sail of affection. By 'embracing the promise,' Heb. xi. 13; though he cannot embrace the promise, as having received it for his present portion, yet he embraces it as seen afar off. By laying hold, Heb. vi. 18; though he cannot lay hold of Christ as his treasure and possession, yet on the hope set before him. By 'coming to Christ,' John vi. 35; I am unworthy to come near him, yet he is worthy to be obeyed, and he commands me to come. Though I be not sure he will entertain me, yet there is no way but ruin if I come not. He invites me, and who knows but he may receive me? I have none else to come to, the world I have

renounced, and to come to it is to run upon the sword of an enemy; my lusts I have forsaken, and to return to them is to run back into ruin. There is none but Christ, none but Christ, my soul can come to for refuge. And lo he calls me, why, 'Behold I come unto thee, for thou art the Lord.'

[5.] Resolution. Being come, he resolves to continue there. If he die, he will die at his feet. If he perish, he will perish with Christ in his arms. If justice seizes on him, it shall slay him at the horns of the altar. Nothing shall fright him from his hold. Come death, come hell, I will not let thee go. Nay, the more he is afraid, the faster he clings. 'What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.' 'Though he kill me' (as he may justly), 'yet will I trust in him,' yet will I hold him fast; and those that find me dead, shall find my heart, my hands fastened upon Christ. And as nothing shall fright, so nothing shall persuade him to leave his hold. He answers all, as Ruth did Naomi: Ruth i. 16, 17, 'Whither thou goest, I will go,' &c.

[6.] Expectation. Being thus resolved to cleave to Christ, he expects something from him. Though his hopes be weak, his hold is strong. There is a hope before him, though he apprehend it not in him, which he lays hold of. Although he cannot come to the throne of grace with that full assurance of hope which the apostle mentions, though he arrive not there with full sail, yet he has a sweet breeze of probability, enough to keep him in motion, and hold his head above water, and this may support him in the mean time: Ps. ix. 18, 'The expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever.' Though it may stick upon the flats, and dash now and then against the rock, yet it shall not perish; or though it may seem to perish for a time, yet it shall not perish for ever.

(4.) The special encouragements which this faith may have, in reference to the success of prayer.

[1.] This relying upon God, engages him to answer, and the Lord will not fail his engagements. If one rely upon a great person for a favour, and have encouragement from him so to do, it will not stand with his credit and honour to disappoint him; much less will the Lord fail those whom he has encouraged to depend on him. He is tender of his honour. If such a soul come to him, and tell him, Thou hast invited me to fly to thee for refuge; I have none else to defend me, I have renounced all other dependencies; if thou fail me, I perish; he that thus flies to the Lord for refuge, shall find in due time strong consolation. Christ will not deliver those up to justice, who fly to him for sanctuary.

[2.] Christ highly commends this faith of dependence, seems to admire it, and to be extraordinarily taken with it: Mat. viii. 8, 'Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.' Here is no more expressed than a faith of dependence; if there be any assurance, it is but a half assurance, that which respected the power of Christ, not his willingness, no intimation of that. So Mat. xv., of the woman of Canaan. Christ beats her off there from all assurance; that which she asked was not proper for her: 'It is not meet to cast the children's bread to dogs.' Nor was he sent for this purpose. He leaves her no ground for assurance, yet by this faith of dependence she clings to him, pleads with him, urges him so far till he yields, till she prevails, and she prevails as far as she will. See here the power of this faith put forth in prayer, it can prevail with Christ for the obtaining of all we desire.

[3.] The obedience of one that has but a faith of dependence in seeking

God is in some respect more excellent than theirs who have assurance. For a child that has his father's smile and love to be affectionate and obsequious is no great matter; but for one whom his father does not own, who knows not that he shall have any share in the inheritance, [to] be obedient and affectionate, this is excellent and rarely ingenuous; so for one that is assured of the love of God, that walks in the light of his countenance, and knows heaven is his portion, to be much in seeking God, and waiting on him, is not so much, but for him who sees nothing but frowns in the face of God, and has no assurance of any reward for his attendance on him, to be much in prayer, eager in following him, diligent in waiting on him, this is obedience of a rare ingenuous temper, and cannot but be highly acceptable in the sight of God. For one to say as the martyr, Though I know not that Christ loves me, yet will I die, be burned for him. Will not the Lord value such an affection? will he not reward such? will he not make sweet returns to such prayers?

[4.] He that has this faith of dependence has really interest in all the privileges that attend assurance, though not in his own apprehension. This faith justifies the person, and the person being justified, the prayer is accepted. This gives an interest in the covenant, and he that is in covenant has right to all promises. This gives interest in Christ, and he that has that has interest in his intercession, his Father's love, his Spirit's assistance; and what more is required to make prayer successful? If prayer be accepted, it will be answered, though he apprehends it not, if the Lord be engaged by promise, if Christ intercede, if the Spirit assist.

2. Case. There is a confidence to be found in unregenerate men in their addresses to God. We see too many are confident as to their state that they shall be saved, and they may be as confident as to their duties that they shall be accepted, as to their prayers that they shall be heard when they pray for salvation. As nothing is more dangerous, so nothing more common than such presumptions. And they are so high and strong, as it is one of the most difficult works of gospel ministers to demolish and level these confidences, to beat sinners out of them. This is one of Satan's strongholds, wherein he secures natural men against the assaults of law and gospel tending to reduce them, and bring them to surrender and yield themselves to Christ upon gospel terms. Such confidence we see in the Pharisee, Luke xviii. And the prophet declares against it in the degenerate and profane Israelites, Amos iii. 9-11. Here the question will be, how the confidence of faith may be known and distinguished from this presumptuous confidence, how a true believer may discern that his confidence in approaching to God is not the presumption of hypocrites, and how presumptuous sinners may be convinced that their carnal boldness is not the confidence of faith? that so the prayers of faith may be distinguished from the prayers of presumption and carnal confidence.

*Ans.* The confidence of faith in prayer differs from this presumptuous confidence in its rise, grounds, attendants, and effects.

(1.) In its *rise*. The carnal man arrives at this confidence he knows not how. If we should say to it, as the master of the feast to him that wanted the wedding garment, 'How camest thou hither?' he can give no satisfying answer, he can give no rational account how he came by it, he has had it ever since he can remember, ever since he was accustomed to pray. He attained it with ease, it cost him nothing; it sprang up in him as a mushroom, on a sudden, without his care or industry. Whereas the confidence of faith is not in an ordinary way so soon, nor so easily, nor so

insensibly attained. Believers can many times remember their carnal confidence was cast down by the spirit of bondage, and that their spiritual confidence was not raised but with difficulty, and by degrees; it was a work of time and labour, like the casting down of mountains and the filling of valleys. The work of law and gospel too were little enough to effect it. After the convictions of sin and wrath, their own vileness and unworthiness had made a valley in their spirits, had undermined their mountain of presumption which stood so fast, and had laid them low and vile in their own apprehensions, it was a work of difficulty to raise their souls to this confidence. They found fearfulness and confidence struggle in their souls, as the twins in Rebecca's womb, Gen. xxv. 22; a strife as betwixt Pharez and Zara, Gen. xxxviii., which would get out first; doubtings and fearfulness putting out the hand before this confidence could break forth, and the soul in the mean time, as it were, in travail.

(2.) In the *grounds*. Presumption has either no ground at all, or else it is raised upon nothing but the sand; in some it springs from their natural temper, they can be bold and confident with men, and they will be so with God; he may complain of them as of those, Ps. l. 21, 'Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself.' Their apprehensions of God differ little from those they have of men, and so they make as bold with him as they do with their familiars. They sometimes ground it upon their prayers, especially if they be long and often in this duty, they think they oblige God thereby, and conclude something is due to them from God upon this account, and accordingly they expect it. Hence it is that when the returns do not answer their expectations, they are ready to expostulate with God, as though he did them wrong, like those, Isa. lviii. 2, 8. Sometimes they raise it upon the same foundation with the Pharisee, Luke xviii. They are not so bad as some, and they do more good than others, and therefore are confident they shall fare well at God's hands. But now the confidence of faith is to be found in those who are most bashful and modest as to their natural constitutions, when once they are renewed and fortified by the power of grace. Christ and the promise is the ground of this confidence. They rest not in their prayers, nor any part of their own righteousness; they know that all their shreds put together will make no more than a menstruous cloth, a garment both ragged and loathsomely bespotted. This is occasion of shame and blushing, they can have no confidence to be seen in such a woful habit. They count all their prayers, abstinences from sin, and actual righteousness but loss, look on them all as lost, and have no confidence to be found anywhere, in anything, but in Christ, Phil. iii. But what the grounds of it are I have given a large account before.

(3.) In the *attendants*. Confidence of faith is accompanied with,

[1.] *Reverence*; a filial and a holy fear of God. The apostle, who so often exhorts the faithful Hebrews to draw near with boldness, with confidence, with full assurance of faith, brings it attendant with it: Heb. xii. 28, 'Being confident we shall receive,' &c. Let us hold fast this confidence, and thereby we shall be enabled to serve God with reverence. Hope (often put for faith and confidence) is joined with fear: Ps. cxlvii. 11, Ps. v. 7, 'In the multitude of thy mercy, there is confidence,' &c. A believer is sensible of his own vileness, and apprehensive of the majesty and holiness of God, low thoughts of himself, and high thoughts of God. These thoughts impress upon the soul an awful respect of God, fill it with reverence, and an ingenuous dread lest any action or word should pass him in this duty not beseeeming such a majesty, that might be in the least offensive or dis-

honourable to him, as we see a child is then most afraid to offend his father when he is nearest him. The presumptuous have a good conceit of themselves, but low thoughts of God. The Pharisee was an emblem of such. In his prayer, he is more in praising himself than praising God. Or if upon any occasion their thoughts of God be raised, yet so slight and powerless, as they leave little or no impression upon the heart. The higher they rise in these speculations, the weaker is their influence; as the stars, we see, they are so high they give little light. Their apprehensions leave no awe or dread of God upon their hearts \* Or if there be any impressions of fear, yet it is a fear of smarting and suffering from him rather than of displeasing or dishonouring him; as slaves, that would not dread the displeasure or disparagement of their master, but that they are afraid of stripes and blows.

[2.] Resignation of his will and wisdom to the will and wisdom of God. He will be content with God's time, his way, his measure, his will, as to the answer of his prayers, and all the circumstances thereof. But presumptuous confidence must have what he desires, or nothing; when he expects it, or not at all; in that way and degree he looks for it, or else it is not worth the having. It is a proud stiffness of spirit, his will must be the rule to measure his receipts, his wisdom must be judge what is best; these must not veil nor lower to the will and wisdom of God. He is like a sturdy beggar, that must have what he asks, or else you must look for ill language from him. If the Lord will not punctually gratify his desires, he has hard thoughts of him, murmurs and repines against him, as you see in the Israelites all along under their conduct by Moses. True confidence is like the ground of it, Christ; a tender plant will bow and bend to the will and at the pleasure of God, but counterfeit confidence is like a sturdy oak, or a dry stick, that will break rather than bend.

(4.) In the *effects*. Confidence begets,

[1.] Fervency. We see by experience, where there are hopes of attaining, they will quicken up to eagerness in pursuing. A due confidence of receiving will make a believer vehement and fervent in asking. The apostle makes a prayer of faith to be a fervent prayer; James v., that which is a prayer of faith, ver. 15, is described to be a fervent prayer, ver. 16. And Elias, who is given as an instance of one praying in faith, and his prayer is there expressed by this character of fervency, verse 17, *προσευχῇ προσήζατο*; according to the letter it is, 'he prayed in his prayer,'—a form of speech, it is usual with the Hebrews, to express vehemency; he prayed vehemently. True confidants *pray* their prayers, others do but *say* their prayers.

If a man desire a thing above him, and have hopes that he may reach it, he will stretch out himself to do it. This hope, this confidence of attaining what we desire of God, will make our prayers to be a stretching out of our souls to God, according to the import of that expression, Acts xii. 5, *προσευχῇ ἐκτεταγμένη*, an extended prayer was made, a prayer wherein the soul was extended and stretched out to God.

That prayer which springs from this confidence is a soul-labour, the travail of the soul; the heart is in labour while it is in prayer. But that of the presumptuous is but lip-labour, a labour of the outward man, a bodily exercise; the heart and affections are cold, dead, without lively motion. Or if there be any heat, life, fervency, in them, it is but at some times, and for some things. There may be some eagerness at some times, as when they are under some strong convictions, in some imminent danger,



or under some sharp affliction ; ‘ in their affliction they will seek me early.’ Then diligently, at other times carelessly.

Or they may be eager for some things, for temporal blessings, for outward deliverance. They may howl upon their beds for corn and wine, but not for holiness, not for power against endeared lusts ; they pray for these, like Augustine before his conversion, as if they were afraid to be heard. Or they may be affectionate in some parts of prayer. There may be some heat and importunity in petition when their necessities of outward things are pressing, Isa. xxvi. 16. They poured out a prayer ; their hearts, as though they were dissolved by the ardency of desires for deliverance, ran out in their petitions. Oh but what melting was there in their confessing and bewailing sin ! what heat and affectionateness in their praises of God ! No ; when such are to offer a sacrifice of praise, there is no fire on the altar, no heat nor ardour of affection ; no fire from heaven, at least nothing but strange fire, such as their own interests and concerns kindle.

\*.\* This Sermon appears to be unfinished.—Ed.